

SUPPER

HOTEL FOOD & DRINK



Allegra The Stratford

LONDON

Continuing the legacy of St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel and Chiltern Firehouse, developer Harry Handelsman has created a new culinary destination in London's East End.

Words: Ben Thomas • Photography: © Sam A Harris (unless otherwise stated)

Since hosting the Olympics in 2012, Stratford has often been dismissed by city dwellers and travellers alike as merely home to an interchange station on the DLR, a shopping centre and – somewhat controversially – West Ham United. In more recent times, however, plans for a host of new openings have placed the district back on the capital's up-and-coming list. Kicking off its latest phase of regeneration from industrial suburb to cultural powerhouse is The Stratford – a 42-storey skyscraper designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, which combines a 142-room hotel and 248 fully furnished loft apartments with bars, restaurants and sky gardens.

The unique vertical community is the vision of Harry Handelsman, the developer behind St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel and Chiltern Firehouse, who in creating the complex drew inspiration from the timeless glamour and communal spirit of 1950s New York's legendary long-stay hotels. Though he did add his own personal touches too, naming its restaurant after his youngest daughter, Allegra.

“This is my most ambitious project to date and I wanted to put Stratford on the map,” he explains. “I felt that the project needed a truly wonderful restaurant to make it a destination, and I was looking for a chef that would understand that vision and make Allegra their own.” That chef is Patrick Powell, who Handelsman encountered at Chiltern Firehouse, working alongside renowned Portuguese

cook Nuno Mendes. “I thought that Patrick, who I knew well from Chiltern Firehouse, would fit the bill,” he confirms. “And having collaborated with him over the past 18 months, that impression is fully justified.”

Powell's training in French cooking, together with his culinary experience garnered at Dublin's Michelin-starred L'Ecrivain under Derry Clarke and Wild Honey St James with Anthony Demetre, stood him in good stead for the role of Head Chef at Allegra, while his emphasis on provenance also led Handelsman to acquire land at Pale Green Dot farm in Sussex – which now supplies many of the restaurant's ingredients. For Powell, the farm is integral to the menu. “When I first began working with Harry on the plans for Allegra, we both agreed we wanted the restaurant to be more than a place to eat,” he reveals. “Being lucky enough to source ingredients from our own farm is every chef's dream, and the whole team is excited to work in a farm-to-fork style. We'll be evolving with the seasons, and I'm really thrilled about the food we've opened the restaurant with as it showcases the flair, hard work and creativity of our kitchen.”

Locally sourced produce is prominent throughout the menu, on show in starters such as hand-dived scallops with cucumber, pickled strawberry and elderflower; tomato and gordal olive tart; and smoked eel pithivier with parsley sauce and pickled chilli vinegar; as well as in mains like suckling pig accompanied by turnip, Bramley apple and mint; Welsh





© Jan Baldwin

lamb with sweet pepper romesco and pickled walnut; and baked celeriac with mizuna, jalapeno and celeriac ramen broth. And in case that wasn't enough, larger dishes to share, such as grass-fed beef, are cooked over an outdoor grill and served with a smoked bone marrow and beetroot tart, while a whole roast chicken to share is stuffed with a cep sausage and arrives at the table in two servings. Powell has also created a seven-course tasting menu that changes daily, featuring a selection of highlights from the kitchen.

"We've been working with the farm for over a year now and are really beginning to see the fruits of our labour with pumpkins, squashes, aubergines, different varieties of potato, kale, carrots and beetroot," he continues. "We're also particularly excited about next spring and summer, as there will be an abundance of amazing produce for us to work with."

Guests can choose to dine either à la carte or from a more informal terrace menu, while those looking to indulge in an evening nightcap can take a seat at the bar and enjoy the views with a glass of wine, selected from the venue's glass-encased walk-in wine room by Head Sommelier Luigi Coco. "Our wine list features small independent producers from around the world, which our sommelier Luigi has discovered through his career," says Powell. "We work with producers that might usually get overlooked in favour of the more conventional estates, and small importers in London as opposed to larger corporate suppliers, which gives us exclusivity on lots of interesting wines."

Aside from this striking room, the seventh-floor restaurant – designed by Space Copenhagen, the team behind Noma and 11 Howard in New York – features a 22-cover lounge and bar counter where guests are encouraged to savour cocktails, snacks, oysters or an assortment of charcuterie from the in-house curing room. Here and throughout the wider 72-cover dining area, mild tones of green and warm grey are illuminated by floor-to-ceiling windows and framed by a natural stone Montpellier floor, while across the venue, bespoke booth seating overlooks an open montage kitchen to create greater interaction between chef and guest. Glassware



and cutlery from premium suppliers, including Riedel and Studio William, further elevate the overall sense of luxury.

In developing the interior scheme, the Danish design studio took cues from the locale before layering the space with what it describes as ‘poetic modernism’. “We have a love for organic materials that age beautifully, so we put a lot of energy into trying to humanise the building,” explains co-founder Signe Bindslev Henriksen. Such materials complement a muted colour palette featuring rich, tactile surfaces like natural woods and warm metals, together with clean-lined, softly curved upholstered shapes in the form of furniture from Gubi, Roda and Benchmark.

To maximise the views of London’s rooftops, meanwhile, the firm created the Highline Sky Garden, a large outdoor terrace accessed through retracting glass walls, where herbs used in the restaurant grow alongside seasonal plants – the latter reminiscent of those found in the nearby Hackney marshes. Seating up to 50 guests, the outdoor area is sheltered by a triple-height, cedar cantilevered roof and illuminated pergola, while a separate terrace menu is cooked on

an outdoor wood-burning grill, which acts as a large fireplace come evening.

Allegra may form part of a wider vertical community, but Powell insists that the restaurant maintains a feeling of independence. “Excellent hospitality, in every sense of the word, has always been at the core of what I love and it’s certainly at the heart of this building,” he reflects. “The space truly comes alive when we welcome our guests – and that’s the most rewarding part for me.”

Though Stratford may not be the first destination that springs to mind when deciding where to dine out in London, there’s no question that the district is on the rise – the £1.1 billion East Bank development at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park a clear indicator of the city’s ambition to revitalise the area over the coming years, bringing with it Sadler’s Wells Theatre, the BBC and the Victoria & Albert Museum, not to mention around 600 new homes within a complex centred around a 27-storey landmark tower. And with restaurants like Allegra promising exceptional cuisine too, locals and travellers may soon start seeing that short ride on the DLR as a trip worth making.



IN A BITE

Covers: 94 (inside), 68 (outside)
Owner: Manhattan Loft Corporation
Operator: The Stratford
Developer: Harry Handelsman
Architecture: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Interior Design: Space Copenhagen
Head Chef: Patrick Powell
F&B Director: Ben Hesketh
Head Sommelier: Luigi Coco
www.allegra-restaurant.com