

Eating Out... from fine dining to exquisite pub grub, we recommend the best



Champagne and Fromage, Covent Garden, London
I must admit I was slightly sceptical at first – a shop which also serves food in Covent Garden - can't... [read more](#)



The Rockwell Bar and Restaurant, Trafalgar Square
The Trafalgar Hotel provide a little oasis of calm in one of the busiest parts of London (just seven... [read more](#)



Osteria, East Lothian
Daniela Cocchia spent almost a year working alongside a Michelin-star chef in the kitchen. The 24-year-old proved to be a quick learner... [read more](#)



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Ru Herd looked at the milk pan in which my Pandan leaf had become unravelled and smiled... [read more](#)



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Al Dente, Edinburgh
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The Castle Terrace Restaurant, Edinburgh
Tom Kitchen formed a friendship with Dominic Jack when they were both young chefs working... [read more](#)



Cinnamon Restaurant - Hilton London Canary Wharf Hotel
Canary Wharf on a Sunday often reminds me of some futuristic sci-fi ghost town, yet its... [read more](#)



Goode & Wright - London
I've done Michelin-starred, frequented pop-ups and queued with the 'trendies' for average, yet 'on-trend' speakeasy fare – but whatever... [read more](#)



Bella Luce - Guernsey
When in Rome, do as the Romans do; when in Guernsey, eat seafood. This is what Mr P and I decide at Bella Luce hotel's Garden... [read more](#)

Michael Caines Restaurant - Chester

Abode, Grosvenor Road, Chester, CH1 2DJ
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Review by Emily Hirschmann

When one first begins a career as a restaurant critic everything is very exciting and everything is very new, all the meals that you sit down to with pen in hand are wonderful, wondrous culinary feats that you'd never be able to afford without your critics hat on, so despite your training, your benchmark is very low and the only trouble you face is that you soon run short of superlatives.



After a while in the trade one comes to learn that perhaps to begin with the superlatives were used too freely as after all, as long as it's cooked well, a crème brulee is really just a crème brulee and despite the occasional gastronomic hiatus in parmesan sorbet form (not unlike chilled vomit in flavour) one rarely comes across a meal which provokes an extreme reaction of any kind. Rarely, but not never.

In the foodie world the reputation of Michael Caines is well known; the protégé of Raymond Blanc, the holder of two Michelin stars and an MBE for services to the hospitality industry oh, and one of those chefs involved in the preparation of the Queens 80th birthday meal... One could say that he knows a little bit about cooking. However, when a chef franchises his name with a small hotel group – in this case Abode – one doesn't necessarily believe that he'll be participating in the food prep of every restaurant, more likely overseeing the menus from a distance, so it was with very great surprise that I shook hands with the man after eating one of the best meals of my culinary reviewing life.

To start with, the 76 seat restaurant, which is housed on the fifth floor of the shiny new Abode Hotel in Chester's gateway, is surprisingly young in appearance. The decor is stylish, bordering on funky, mixing the bling and glamour of 70's-style chandeliers with gritty life-sized photographic portraits of modern musicians (Pete Doherty was never meant to be seen in such detail!), warm lighting and staggering cross-country views from the floor-ceiling windows. Mood music of the non-annoying variety is pumped out at a volume perfect for obliterating your neighbours conversations, whilst enabling you to talk without raising your voice. The overall impression is very pleasing and when combined with friendly, funny and not at all pretentious staff it becomes very hard to find fault.

We arrived at Michael Caines tired and hungry after a busy lunch-skiping day and having dutifully ooh-ed and ah-ed over the various dishes cut to the chase and ordered the £65 Tasting Menu, with matched wine – if seven courses couldn't sate our appetites nothing could.

My problem now is that on paper my veggie meal sounds rather bland and uninspiring, while my carnivorous friend was presented with a menu of real variety and culinary verve, however that, for me, is where Michael Caines' genius really comes into play – to take a simple pantry staple such as mushroom soup and turn it into delicate more-ish fare topped with herb veloute and given bite and flavour with toasted almonds, takes real skill. My salad of marinated tomatoes with tomato foam and buffalo mozzarella, was as tasty a morsel as I've ever been served. I waited with some trepidation for my salad of baby beetroot with goats cheese and pinenuts, having been scarred by the memory of gag-inducing pulpy purple slabs always served in my grandmothers summer meals, to be pleasantly surprised and left with the belief that I could happily have eaten more. My fourth dish consisted of fresh pappardelle with morels and asparagus, which was delicately flavoured, perfectly cooked and free of all pasta-associated-stodge. So far so good, a very satisfied Emily sat back and waited for desert.



While I was thus engaged my companion's meal had begun with pan-fried scallops with Thai puree stir-fried bean sprouts, mange tout, shiitake mushrooms and lemongrass veloute. To me, this sounded impressive, but as a non-seafood eater my friend was experiencing the texture-related issues I'd had with the beetroot. That was, however, before it was served, at which point it was demolished with something akin to gusto. The following dishes held no such fear, with braised pork cheeks (not a part of the pig that would normally get mouths watering... unless the pig itself was contemplating something particularly tasty, of course) served with vanilla pomme puree, apple and green bean salad, being cooked to fall-apart perfection. Salted haddock with cock crab, chorizo, samphire, tarragon and lemon puree again wooed our seafood averse diner and the Goosnargh duck breast, confit leg with apricots and pistachio, sweet potatoes and sprouting broccoli opened up a new way of eating duck to someone who until this point had declared that they only liked it crispy-fried!

For me, the best part of having a tasting menu is the chance to indulge in two desserts and the final three courses for both of us consisted of a selection of local cheeses, condiments and biscuits, exotic fruit salad with passion fruit sorbet and chocolate orange confit mousse with confit orange sorbet,



all followed by coffee and petits fours. Both desserts were melt-in-the-mouth fantastic and brilliantly complimented by the matched dessert wine. Although £35 per person, the wine matching service is great value for money, enhancing every course and I would highly recommend it, particularly if you know very little about wine yourself. Whereas the opening Domaine Reserve de Gassac Blanc 2009 from Languedoc-Roussillon, France is the perfect quaffing wine and could easily be taken out into the garden on a hot summers day and so needs no introduction, the Crozes-Hermitage "Les Pierelles" 2007 from Rhone was all but unpalatable on its own when I had a sip, but I'm told that the flavours all flooded out with the duck and really made the meal.

Now, I'm not one to gush, but I'm feeling the need to here. I began my stay at the Abode, Chester, with little thought of being truly impressed; I expected a nice room and a nice meal, but nothing to really get excited about. It is really really lovely to have my preconceptions squashed and replaced by a stunning meal in a fabulous location. The Abode is a very nice hotel. Michael Caines at the Abode creates a reason to visit Chester, even if you have no other.

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