

FOOD & DRINK
EATING OUT

An orgy of bad taste in Mayfair

Joseph Connolly tastes disappointment, and fills up on bread, at Le Chabanais, London W1

Dear God, what a place. OK: let us be calm, and start at the beginning. In the wacky and wilfully demented world of restaurants, Le Chabanais has been “long and eagerly awaited”. This is, of course, unfathomable to anyone sane – rather like when you are told that there is a “waiting list” for a £3,000 handbag, and you think they must just be horsing around.

The reason Le Chabanais has been “long and eagerly awaited” is that it comes with form: set up by one Inaki Aizpirtarte, chef-proprietor of a rather fine restaurant in Paris called Le Chateaubriand, currently rated as 21st best in the world in the ludicrous San Pellegrino list, which some people will still insist upon taking seriously.

Now, we know what Le Chateaubriand means... but how about Le Chabanais? Well it is the name of one of Paris's most famous luxurious brothels – what else did you think it could be? It closed just after the war, but not before notching up a glittering clientele, among whom there numbered Toulouse-Lautrec (well of course), Humphrey Bogart, Cary Grant and, um, Mae West. Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, had installed

there, I hesitate to tell you, his personal *siège d'amour*, a “love seat”, with room for three.

So why would a new restaurant at the epicentre of Mayfair be named after a house of ill repute? These days Mount Street isn't noted for its orgiastic tendencies (although nearby Shepherd's Market has a certain amount of form). These days it's Designer Central: Balenciaga, Céline, Louboutin, Loewe... Dior is excitedly billed as “coming soon”. Can you wait? Because I know I can't.

The best things here are Allen's, a very superior butcher, and Scott's restaurant – but alas, we are not going to Scott's; we are going to Le Chabanais.

Its beginning was rocky: it opened briefly in May, and almost immediately closed again. Now, it's back... and oh, dear God – what a place.

The interior has been dealt with at colossal expense by an architect, so I hardly have to tell you how unutterably foul it is. You can just about glimpse a trace of the room's original charming capitals and panelling, now obliterated by sheets of tarnished brass over all the walls and floor. There are ugly rusted girders – the sort of thing a cowpoke might fling a rope over, should the mood come upon him for an impromptu lynching. A black marble bar, pink marble half wall, green marble tables – all extremely cold, hard



Bordell! Le Chabanais is named after a legendary Parisian brothel

crab with gloopy noodles, all ice-cold. I ordered the absolutely cheapest red at £30 – an unremarkable bordeaux – and that was dumped on the table with water, all pouring left to the punter: the service here is laid back to the point of virtual collapse.

Then came lobster with paimpol beans (haricots, rather Heinzish in execution) and redcurrants. Now when you order lobster, you might reasonably expect a lobster, no? Here was half a very small and chewy little devil – which, at £30, was nothing short of scandalous. Once the bisque was added, we had no more here than a lumpy broth.

The blue vitelotte potatoes which the menu promised would accompany my guinea fowl were described as crushed, while the “ivy” (ivy?) was ground – so I found myself idly wondering whether the bird itself would be pulverised into atoms. No: just three mean undercooked strips of breast atop a mauvish mulch. And here, in full, are the sides on offer: “Mash. Spinach. Leaves”. That's it.

We had been eating bread to keep the wolf from the door – very ordinary sourdough with half-melted butter, overlaid with what looked like the fallout from an eager but none too fastidious digestive biscuit eater. Puddings were urgently required: two were ordered, neither was eaten. “Chocolate mousse” was just a barely set sauce – what at school we used to call “chocolate splash” – and quietly disgusting; while buttermilk ice cream was quite vociferously repellent: a wrenchingly sour sorbet drizzled with lemon.

Our dishes were removed virtually untouched, no comment was forthcoming... and of course both were charged for. We ate little, and poorly: the bill was £150. Oh, dear God in heaven: what a place.

8 Mount Street, London W1K 3NF (020 7491 7078; lechabanaislondon.com)

THREE OF A KIND NAUGHTY

Kitty Fisher's
Intimate, meaty, ultra-fashionable
Read Zoe Williams's review at telegraph.co.uk/food/10/ShepherdMarket, London W1J 7QF: 020 3302 1661; kittyfishers.com

La Bodega Negra
Mexican food behind the curatorially restored facade of an old-school Soho sex shop.
9 Old Compton St, London W1 5JF: 020 7758 4100; labodeganegra.com

The Courtesan
Retro-orientalist dim sum joint.
69-73 Atlantic Road, London SW9 8PU: 020 8127 8677; thecourtesan.co.uk

and corporate. After so many years of converting austere opulent banks into comfortable restaurants, it seems that the reverse is now the thing.

“We have you at the bar,” the girl said. “No you don't – I booked a table for two.” Well there wasn't one, so I was reluctantly shown to a table for four – which was just as well as the tables for two are ranked against a wall, six inches apart. Because there is no hint of softness anywhere, the noise levels are catastrophic – as is almost everything else. There is no set lunch, and every dish is madly overpriced.

My guest – who had to ask someone to take his umbrella, and did not at all care for being patted on the back by a waiter – kicked-off with Basque squid stew. It looked good and inky, but was actually just OK, and tepid at best. My Cornish crab with glass noodles was a truly sorry affair: tiny shreds of

OUR RATING
2/10

There is no set lunch, and every dish is madly overpriced



Pint to pint

Our guide to the UK's best pubs pays a visit to *The Village Inn, Norfolk*

If you'd gone for a pint at The Village Inn, West Runton in the Seventies or Eighties, you might have rubbed elbows at the bar with some wide-eyed young hobbledehoy en route to catch Black Sabbath or the Sex Pistols. A blue plaque on the pub commemorates the notorious West Runton Pavilion which once stood behind it, now demolished. If accounts of the Pistols' performance there are correct, though, I'd wager your trip to West Runton today will be more enjoyable, if less weighed down with pop-cultural significance.

In good weather the pub's enormous garden is a relaxing place to enjoy the sunshine, with enough space that it doesn't feel crowded even when full. The only drawback seems to be that on my visit, not all the pub's parasols were up. So put on sun cream and wear a hat – or, like me, you'll end up engaged in a game of non-musical chairs as you change tables every five minutes trying to find the best spot to avoid the sun.

Fortunately the pub is as roomy as the garden and it's no hardship to be inside even on a warm day. The front of the bar is adorned with the same flint that covers the outside of the building. Well-worn parquet floor makes the place feel lived-in and loved rather than tatty. We baggy the curved window seat with faded brocade cushions and frosted glass which cleverly avoids the goldfish bowl effect. A few pints of Grain Brewery's hoppy session beer Oak (3.8%) provide perfectly served hydration (there's no sloppy, beer dripping down the outside of the

glass here) but there are also three or four other beers to choose from including other Norfolk offerings from the likes of Woodforde's and Lacons – both good breweries making a range of fine ales.

Being right on the north Norfolk coast, between the seaside summer holiday hotspots of Sheringham and Cromer, The Village Inn does an extraordinarily good job of getting the balance between locals and visitors right, although you can easily spot the regulars clustered on stools chatting to staff from the end of the bar. Doubtless they also make the most of the pub's food which can be partaken of in garden, restaurant or bar.

The menu isn't cheap, but you get what you pay for: my mariner's pie at £12 felt worth the money, and my husband declared himself satisfied with his scampi and chips. Other options are Cromer crab dishes from £7 and Sunday roasts from £11.50 (best book for these as they regularly sell out).

While waiting for our food we pass the time with the pub's endearingly battered board games, substituting a bottle cap for a missing rook so we can play chess. When I was a child a trip to the pub with my parents often seemed like a day out in itself: food, drink, games to play and the run of a huge garden. The Village Inn perfectly captures that feeling. Be sure to allow yourself enough time to enjoy it.

Sophie Atherton

The Village Inn, West Runton, Cromer, Norfolk, NR27 9QP: 01263 838000; villageinnwestrunton.co.uk

IN ASSOCIATION WITH YORKSHIRE TEA

LEMON DRIZZLE CAKE

Each finalist bakes a cake for former England captain Michael Vaughan. This triple-layered



lemon drizzle cake was made by Angie Chandler, mum of leg-spinner and batsman Josh.



“It was very, very tasty and there was plenty of it. That's exactly what you want for a cricket tea.”

Victoria sponge helps spur on a victorious team

A Yorkshire Tea Great Cricket Tea Challenge finalist wins a hard-fought Twenty20, says **Gareth A Davies**

The cows in the fields around the cricket ground in Bishop Thornton, a small village in the Yorkshire Dales, is one reason why the club is one of the six finalists in the Yorkshire Tea Great Cricket Tea Challenge. Some of that milk is put to very good use when the cricketers stop for tea. The club's dedicated and hard-working players brought a lot of other wonderful ingredients to the table as well when Telegraph food writer Xanthe Clay and I came to judge their cricket tea.

Club chairman Julian Potter explained that it is very much a team effort when it comes to making teas. He says: “Every week each player is responsible for making enough food for two people. That way there is enough for everyone. “It is lovely to see all the home-made sandwiches, pies and cakes together to make one big delicious tea. The one thing that never changes and brings it all together is a batch of strong Yorkshire Tea, made with milk from local cows.” On Saturdays, John Atkinson, the groundsman known as Baldrick, and his brother Martin bring milk from those cows to the ground.

The club's two teams comprise farmers, farmhands, students and schoolboys who work all week to play on a Saturday and in a midweek league. “We don't have matching kits,” says Potter. “Lads turn up in overalls covered in cow pat, we get laughed at, but they are strong Yorkshire lads and pull off amazing victories over huge clubs.” Bishop Thornton CC had an

unusual beginning 199 years ago, when a team of four took on nearby Knaresborough in November. Not surprisingly, only 45 runs were scored. The grass was so long there was an all-run six just off the square as players searched for the ball.

On the day we visited, history was being repeated with a Twenty20 match against Knaresborough.

The facilities are sparse: there are no covers, no practice nets and the sightscreens are falling apart. But the spirit – like the tea – is strong.

Jake Atkinson, a member of the XI, whose family runs the Elite Meat shop, arrived armed with a bag of pork pies. “We don't have a huge amount of money, or facilities,” says Potter.

The T20 match was a thriller. Knaresborough posted a competitive 164 for seven, and Bishop Thornton CC got there (168 for seven) with eight balls to spare.

“So many of us are so busy on the farms that to be committed to cricket for a day and a half a week means you are giving time up at work,” explains Paul Sowray, a former club captain. “But we all do it because we are Yorkshiremen, we love cricket, and we are part of a great community.”

Beccie Deighton, assistant brand manager at Yorkshire Tea, says: “Bishop Thornton CC stood out when selecting the final six clubs for this year's Great Cricket Tea Challenge because of the players' commitment to the game and to the tea, heading straight from the farm armed with milk fresh from the local cows. The team spirit involved is a proper way to do tea.”



Eat for victory The delicious tea (with Victoria sponge) no doubt egged Bishop Thornton CC on to beat old rivals Knaresborough

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Gareth A Davies
Telegraph Sport writer A tea fit for cricketers kings. There was so much variety. It was wonderful that the cricketers all have a hand in producing much of the food: eggs from the farms, milk from cows we could see from the clubhouse, meat and the most delicious pork pies from the butcher, who is the club treasurer and whose son plays in the first team, home-grown asparagus, raspberries, tomatoes and cucumbers. A match-winner.



Xanthe Clay
Telegraph Weekend food and cookery writer The quiches are a beautiful yellow, from the eggs from the Stobbs farm, and some of their cakes, too. The local Wensleydale cream created an unctuous mix in the cakes. Will Stobbs, the team's scorer, made fantastic fairy cakes with butterflies of icing and, inside each one, a fresh raspberry. The pork pies had crispy pastry, lovely savoury jelly and a good bit of meat. The asparagus quiche was delicious.

THE TEA

The tea, laid out in front of us, formed a huge banquet. There was: cheese and home-made apple chutney sandwiches; locally cured ham sandwiches; free-range egg sandwiches; Elite Meat of Harrogate's award-winning pork pies; sausage rolls using Elite Meat sausages; salmon and asparagus, and leek and bacon quiches; cheese and bacon, and cheese and onion pastry straws; home-made



scones with cream, jam and strawberries; Victoria sponge; chocolate brownies; mini-meringues; flapjacks; mini lemon drizzle cakes; fruit cake; butterfly buns; tea loaf; and a cheese board overflowing with locally made cheeses from the Wensleydale Creamery. To drink, there was home-made traditional lemonade and, of course, Yorkshire Tea, with milk straight from the farm next door.

THE COMPETITION

Yorkshire Tea, the Official Brew of England Cricket, is running the Great Cricket Tea Challenge. It is down to the final six and the winner will receive a £5,000 grant and a game against the PCA England Masters – a star-studded team of former Test players. Visit telegraph.co.uk/yorkshiretea

