

Russian towards the steak house

IN THOSE grim and ribless far-off days when Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy was looming large in the doom-laden media, you might have thought twice about opening a restaurant dedicated to the glory of beef in Maddox Street. It is akin, in these Swine Flu ridden times, to setting up an all-you-can-eat hog roast on Pigsneeze Lane (a little-known thoroughfare of my recent invention).

There was a gag at the time: two Friesians in a field, one of them saying "No of course I'm not worried about mad cow disease - I'm a teapot". Now, though, as the threat of contracting derangement or death from a steak and chips is seemingly behind us, Maddox Street is as good a place as any for Goodman to have fetched up.

Goodman: sounds quintessentially English, doesn't it? Not, though. This is a Russian operation - the words 'good' and 'man' arbitrarily conjoined - specialising in American beef, Australian beef and something called 'UK beef'. "Scots, is it?" I asked the manager. "Or English?" "Irish, actually," he replied. "Uh-huh. Which part?" "County Cork." Oh right - not UK at all, then.

It's a mish-mash of posh and grotty, Maddox Street. Goodman is two doors down from a Tanning Clinic (for those eager to die a perfectly lovely colour) and a 'Golf Sale'. Have you ever been into one of these shops? I have: I once haggled hard for 18 holes (got them for a song, and so beautifully packaged. I had this madcap plan, inspired by who knows what, of steadily acquiring more and more sets - then I'd know how many holes it takes to fill the Albert Hall).

But moving on... I was here to lunch with the literary editor of a national newspaper - a lady I have known for so many years, and who is always first with London bookish lowdown and

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Joseph Connolly finds that wherever the beef at Goodman in Maddox Street is from, it's all good



Our reviewer encounters a very New York atmosphere, but the Russians are in charge.

gen. As she herself is the very reverse of low-down, I think I shall call her Gen.

Goodman is large, rather dark, pretty stylish and very New York. The ceiling is charcoal and covered in vast interconnecting pipework and ducts. Looking up, you could be in a sewer - but tastefully converted by Kelly Hoppen during one of her very rare taupe-free moments. The panelling is rich mahogany, and so is the long and welcoming bar, banks of lit-up bottles sparkling in front of a mirrored wall. The waiters are highly attentive and polite. Goodmen. The wine goblets could accommodate a very fair aquarium and are marked on the bases 'GG': goodglass? The tables are solid and gleaming. Goodwood. The music is Sinatra - and when it isn't, it might just as well be. In the Gents, though, it's four times as loud and I fled in a dither when it appeared that what with the volume and crescendo, Judy Garland seemed to be coming just this close to losing her mind.

The set lunch is a bargain £13 for two courses, £15 for three, with Australian steak (no other choice) carrying a £4

supplement.

But the real stuff - the steak they are truly proud of - this does not come cheap. "You seen meat display?" asked the jolly waiter. "No," said Gen. He smiled. "No," I confirmed. "We haven't." He nodded with quiet satisfaction. "So-o ..." Gen now ventured, "do we go to it, or does it come to us?". He beamed with unsuppressed delight. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "Oh yes yes yes!". Goodgod.

Some other fellow then carted over a great wooden slab bearing a hefty rib-eye, a T-bone (the most expensive at pennies shy of £40) as well as a strip steak (all of these American) and an impeccable fillet from the Emerald Isle. Goodbreeding.

I wanted the strip steak, because you don't often see it in London, and Gen wanted the supplemented Australian number from the set lunch option because I think she was being polite.

Before that, she enjoyed an excellent chicken liver pate (i.e. not liver) with onion marmalade and warm brioche, and I bolted down a creamy cakelet of shrimp and horseradish (not quite potted shrimps, but heading in that

direction) on gossamer slices of cucumber, served with hot toast - very nice indeed, and might have been magnificent had it not been icy cold. Talking of which - I asked for the bottle of Brouilly to be slightly chilled. "How much you want chilled?" "Slightly". "Slightly? You want slightly?" "Mmm". "OK: we do it slightly". Goodintentions. Three or four waiters must have come to our table three or four times each, ever more anxious for us to assure them that everything was all right, such attentions resulting in three or four anecdotes and punchlines being very soundly buggered. Here's something: the side plates, I noticed, were placed on one's right hand side - but it didn't at all matter because the moment the bread arrived, they were quickly whipped away.

My strip steak - eaten with the aid of a serrated machete which, out of context, would easily secure for you three-to-five years - was a fine and massive piece of meat, like the White Cliffs of Dover. Except that it wasn't white. Or chalky. OK, it wasn't at all like the White Cliffs of Dover - but sheer and crag-like, is what I'm driving at here, nearly three

inches thick, yet as narrow as a rasber. Creamy texture, and damn fine flavour - real and chunky hand-cut chips, though rather too much accent on the white wine vinegar in the accompanying Bearnaise. Gen had been pretty pleased with her Australian sirloin until she tasted mine, but she didn't bear a grudge. Goodgrace. The strawberry sundae we shared was sublime, and I ate most of it. There were these little cubes of madeira cake amid the red and gorgeous goo - no nuts, though. More like a trifle, sans sherry. Goodpud. "This place," Gen opined, "is expensive and cool on the one hand, approachable and affordable on the other: schizophrenic." Mmm - I know what she means, though I'm still rather in two minds about it.

The manager proved to be a jolly fellow, though. He said that the restaurant differed from its antecedents in Mother Russia in that in London you got good food. And that he was sick to death of steak. And that he'd had a Cabinet Minister in the other day who had been shown up severely in the expenses scandal: at bill time, he

FACTFILE

- GOODMAN**
26 Maddox Street, W1
020-7499 3776
- Open Mon - Sat noon-11pm. Closed Sunday
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Cost: Set lunch £13 - £19.
More realistically, £100+ for two with wine

asked the MP how many receipts he would be requiring.

And then he wondered if we would care to view the 'ageing room' ...? Gen and I regarded one another, and sombrely shook our heads. It happens anyway, one has found, without having to slope off to a special place for the purpose.

So - Goodman? Goodfood. And plenty of it. I was stacked - but now I had to concentrate hard on working up another appetite for the evening, when I was due to sample this much talked-about omelette and soufflé place just newly opened on Eggpong Avenue. Goodgrief.

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