

**S**UMMER this year occurred on Wednesday August 19 – and due to its singularity and some very strange little quirk and warp of my fevered misunderstanding it now will be etched forever in what little memory is left to me as a brand newly-minted, groovy and gorgeous Summer of Love. So what that it lasted but a day? Never mind the width, my dears: just you feel the quality.

And so as the day dawned bright, my wife and I found ourselves hoisted high on the horns of a not too unpleasing dilemma: how best to wring all the goodness from this weird and wondrous thing: a beckoning vision of deep blue sky and a far from ersatz and watery sun; here was the whole real deal, a true bobby dazzler, and chucking down upon us beams of unaccustomed heat. So shall we sit and swelter on the M25? Or placidly broil in a Service Station just off the M4? Simmer and quickly become deranged, perhaps, in Terminal 5? Or spend hours and a fortune on a Virgin train to somewhere sandy – paddle briefly, wipe ineffectually at one's gritty toes with the screwed up Kleenex found at the foot of the Old Dutch's handbag, while juggling with a dribbling 99? No no no – none of these things; what we did was board the Silver Link, a little overland trainlet that in less than twenty minutes trundles you from Hampstead Heath Station or Finchley Road or West Hampstead to the endless peace and glory of Kew Gardens (this year being its 250th anniversary).

The area around the station is dated in a good way: old benches and an abundance of huge and crammed hanging baskets, a real butcher, cafes, newly baked bread and cakes being sold from a stall, a Victorian pub and even – breathless hush – an independent bookshop. Amidst the more than 300 acres of the Gardens, the bits they seem particularly proud of include the Bamboo Garden, Rhododendron Dell, the Japanese Gateway, Redwood Grove, the Waterlily Pond and the Treetop Walkway, where way up high you walk among the treetops looking at, and occasionally being swiped by, further treetops. Oh and also the Compost Heap (not really worth a detour, this: you've smelt one, you've smelt them all). On a hot day, I recommend you also leave well alone the Temperate House (an immense sort of Crystal Palace affair which boasts all manner of rare and giant plants but is, believe me, far from temperate: you poach within seconds). And by way of this measliest suggestion of cooking ... let me now escort you to the grub side of things.

There are four places on offer, but when I tell you here and now that the favoured option would be to bring your own picnic, you will understand that each of them is very much a port in a storm. There's the Victoria Terrace Café near the entrance, for tea and a cake sort of thing, and White Peaks Café which caters to the burger and beans brigade (i.e. kiddie-widdies of all ages, up to and including senility). We were torn between the Pavilion Restaurant (the nearest) and The Orangery (the most handsome). When I say nearest ... well it took an age, but who could mind? It was a lovely day, and warm. It's a serviceable

# Take your Kew from my error – bring a picnic!

though ugly building, but it had lots of empty tables beneath a canopy of shady vines. I had a squint inside and of course on balance thought we'd do that much better at The Orangery, so we turned around and set off on the two mile trek. But who could mind? It was a lovely day, and warm. We got there, glazed and dehydrated – I loved the building, had a squint inside and was quickly appalled by its vast and clattery school refectory non-ambience and immediately decided that we would after all be so very much better off at the Pavilion. Which is why your cut-out-and-keep photo that accompanies this week's review (and don't be coy – I know that most of you frame them) is of the restaurant we didn't actually go to. Dear God, though – two miles back again. But who could mind? It was a lovely day ... yeh, and bleeding hot.

And during the amble it was no longer possible to blank out the only blight on this generous and beautiful Eden: aircraft. Fleets of them. And flying so low that you can not only make out the expressions on the passengers' faces but read and construe their every fleeting thought. I timed the planes' frequency, while my wife, boiling and hungry, for some reason was muttering darkly about Victor Meldrew. An average of one a minute, quite endlessly, for hours and hours and hours. And each and every time, you just can't stop yourself looking up at them, God blast it – that, and occasionally ducking.

All those empty tables under a canopy of shady vines? Taken, of course. So there we were, shuffling the brown plastic trays along a chromium grid, just like Hancock in the Economy Drive. A mushroom stroganoff with rice and courgettes for the wife – and she rather enjoyed it (well spiced, she said) despite the courgettes being raw. I, meanwhile, was still horsing around with my bloody little tray – I'm just so not used to all this sort of thing – with my bangers and bash threatening to jettison their cargo of gravy, and the bottled water had fallen over and my quarter bottle of Chilean red was rolling all over the place and I couldn't find any cutlery and Silver Service of a sudden seemed so very wonderful a thing.

It says on the wall: 'We want everything you taste at Kew to be bursting with flavour'. I want it too, but it wasn't. The food was okay, the wine – at £3.95 for a thimbleful – rather vile (the options had been less than overwhelming: Chilean red, Chilean white, take your pick, when what you need in so Sylvan a setting is something on the lines of a Fleurie, or bubbly). What else to say? The room is bland, the chairs are pale and, in common with Paul's grandfather in A Hard Day's Night ... it's very clean.



## FACTFILE

- THE PAVILION RESTAURANT**, Kew Gardens
- Gardens are open Mon – Fri 9.30 – 6.30 pm. Sat & Sun 9.30 – 7.30 pm. All restaurants open 10 – 5.30 pm, 6.30 at weekends.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆ (I served myself, and made a total balls of it)
- Entrance to Gardens £13, £11 concessions, £6 children. Food about £30 for two with a drink.

And Lord they're big on slogans: 'Plants. People. Possibilities'. Completely meaningless, of course – might as well say 'Potatoes. Peas. Pimples'. Here's another: 'Definitely Kew ... Just For You'. I know. They actually pay people for this sort of thing.

The famous Pagoda was a big disappointment: locked up, and still with all its red paint flaking and peeling and faded to pink, just as it was last year. You'd think they would have seen to it for their 250th birthday, wouldn't you? Oh but look – these are all little niggles, really: Kew Gardens is quite fabulous. So, should summer strike twice, go to Waitrose, pack your hamper and head on out there.

Just as we were leaving, I saw a parrot: poppy red, egg-yolk yellow, kingfisher blue, emerald green, and just a flash of blood orange. My wife said it wasn't a parrot; she maybe mistook it for a homosexual pigeon on its way to Marrakesh. Either way, it was flying high, psychedelically dizzying, and so very in tune with my brand newly-minted, groovy and gorgeous Summer of Love.

On the newly revamped website, you can click on to Restaurant Reviews and wallow in the whole damn lot of them, as they appeared in the paper. Lucky, or what? [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk)

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### HOME TIP OF THE WEEK

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