

'MADE it, Ma! Top of the world!" So screams Cody Jarrett – that deranged and oedipal psychopath – as so memorably played by James Cagney at the climax of Raoul Walsh's classic 1949 film, *White Heat*. To the top of the world is where his villainous Ma always said he was destined, though possibly she didn't intend such exaltation to incur his being blown to smithereens in a billowing ball of sheer white flame at the summit of a distillery, one black night. Well do you know, just the other day – though in a thoroughly different way – I was feeling that's just where I was too: on top of the world. And why so elated? Because today, dear reader, I have achieved my century. Not, despite what my photograph might suggest to the contrary, in human years – no, not quite – but in the sense that this is my 100th restaurant review for the Ham&High. And so to a background of a grateful nation breaking out the bunting and making busy with the vuvuzelas, how can I fittingly mark the occasion ...? I have it! Where else but the top of the world? Because Galvin at Windows is on the top (28th) floor of the Park Lane Hilton, for the past five years the concern of the estimable restaurateurs Chris and Jeff Galvin. The head chef here is Andre Garrett (never to be confused with Cody Jarrett) and in 2010 he won an overdue and much deserved Michelin star.

Since the Hilton broke into the clouds in 1963, it is fair to say that its history has been chequered. Whereas now it is a bit declassé, a bit run-down, a bit not-quite, when first it opened, it was seen to be very fab indeed. The timing was perfect: here was a luxury hotel and meeting place which, unlike the nearby Dorchester and Grosvenor House, was both groovy and cool. The Beatles first met the (so unworldly) Maharishi here: they loved it. The Queen, however, didn't. She opposed it from the start – and during its construction, one can only imagine her depression increasing in accord with each successive storey. Not only did it ruin the view from Buckingham Palace, but in turn it made her London home very seriously overlooked. Last summer I attended a party at the Palace, and beyond the trees, the Hilton was all you could see. Her Majesty – nearly 50 years on – reputedly has consistently refused to attend any function at the hotel. And from my table at Windows, I so saw her point: the whole of the rear of the building, the great terrace and swathes of garden are almost embarrassingly visible. With the aid of high-powered binoculars, the level of

Celebration calls for a royal balcony wave

It's **Joseph Connolly's** 100th restaurant review for the Ham&High – so where better to go when emotions are running high than Galvin at Windows on the 28th floor of the Hilton where you can look down on the Queen



Head for heights ... Joseph at Galvin at Windows.

intrusion would be truly alarming.

But ...from a more selfish point of view, there can be no finer vista from a restaurant table in London – though I had to fight for it, a bit. When I phoned for a booking, I said I of course wanted a window table (otherwise what's the point?). The rather bored receptionist – who must have to say this a thousand times a week – replied thus: "It is not our policy to allocate tables, but I shall make a note of your request". I said that it wasn't a request, but a requirement. Whereupon (of course) she repeated the above. And lo, when I rolled up there with my wife, we were (of course) shown to an inside table with a view of nothing but a metal balustrade. I remonstrated (mildly and politely) whereupon the highly professional maitre d' immediately gave us possibly the best table in the restaurant, directly (and guiltily) overlooking the Palace. So that's okay, then.

The service here, it has to be said at the outset, is so far beyond good as to be almost literally

incredible – the finest service outside of Paris that I have ever encountered: they know what you want before it's even so much as crossed your mind. And if you saw the recent BBC series 'Service', fronted by Michel Roux, you will know a little bit about this, because the manager here – the very able and affable Frenchman Fred Sirieux – was, God have pity on him, responsible for turning a bunch of sullen and ill-spoken youngsters into front of house staff (when all they wanted was to be on telly). But for Fred, service is an absolute vocation. As he is quoted on the website: "This is not just service. This is about being looked after". Which, if you eat out a lot, is akin to hearing a heavenly choir.

As is often true of London's better places, the set lunch is a bargain: £29 for three courses – or, for £45, the same, but with the addition of a half-bottle of wine, water and coffee. Very good. Sometimes they have an additional offer going, whereby they chuck in a buckshee glass

of champagne: even better. Steer clear of the (almost irresistible) blandishments of the first rate sommelier, and you will be fine: if, though, you choose to go down the fine wine and digestif route, then you will be washing up in Park Lane for the rest of your natural life; or maybe they make you clean the windows.

The set lunch is a pared-down three choices per course. I was going to go for a terrine of confit chicken, though at a little after half-past-one, there was no more. The substitute was a ballotine of pork, which – although a trifle too chilled – was meaty, finely textured and very flavoursome. Pretty too – like a disc of mosaic in a medley of browns on slices of apple so very thin as to be translucent, and surrounded by blobs of truffle mayonnaise. My wife had mackerel escabeche, globe artichoke and salted brandade – which at first she thought too salted, but then the flavours came together; it was, she decided, very well made. Cleaving to the fishy theme,

FACTFILE

□ GALVIN AT WINDOWS

22 Park Lane, W1
Tel: 020-7208 4021

□ Open for lunch: Monday to Friday noon-2.30pm, Sunday 11.45am-3pm. Dinner: Monday to Wednesday 6pm-10.30pm, Thursday to Saturday 6pm-11pm

□ Food: ★★★★★★☆☆

□ Service: ★★★★★★★★

□ The Feeling: ★★★★★★★★☆☆

□ Cost: Set lunch £29 for three courses. Three courses with a half bottle of wine, water and coffee £45. Tasting menu £55.

she followed this with fillet of plaice, crispy potatoes, baby turnip, quinoa and Puy lentils. The presentation was superb: perfectly fresh and silky white fish in a sandwich of superior crisps, the quinoa seeds and wine-tinted lentils marrying very well. The turnip she initially judged to be "too earthy" – though then she grew quiet, as she tends to when intensely appreciating a dish.

My main too was really good: two decent chunks of pheasant breast, a single intensely flavoured ravioli of braised and shredded leg meat with chestnut, a hint of brussel sprout and five wonderfully creamy exclamation marks of parsley root puree which – when they melted into the perfectly glossy jus that was poured around the whole shebang – made for a gorgeous and tongue-tingling goo. And then Fred Sirieux came over to say hello: I know him a bit from restaurants gone by – but, true port that he is, he would have come over anyway. He is so very good at his job that you are unaware that he even has a job: this takes many, many years. And I got to thinking how the perfectionist in him must have suffered during the making of 'Service'. In the penultimate programme, the trainees – following two months

of patient instruction – forgot to chill the wine, and then forgot to pour it. The mains were ready to be served, but they had forgotten the plates. The dessert arrived, but they had forgotten to clear the table. And still they were saying to diners "Hi – how you doin'?" "Orright?". Whereupon people who ought to (and do) know better applauded and told us how brilliantly they'd done. I think if they were up here now in Galvin at Windows, they might be encouraged to make the 331 feet descent by the most rapid means available.

As we pondered dessert, I was glancing about the room – a tricky thing to accomplish here actually, because the second you turn your head a waiter appears in a puff of smoke in order to grant you three wishes. But I did manage to take in that it's still very Sixties – and certainly by design: dark wood accent, cream leather chairs and a twisted ribbon of brass the length of the ceiling: it all works well. Quite as well as the puds: my wife seriously enjoyed her coconut and lime mousse with wafer-thin curls of marinated pineapple, fennel chilli and frozen yoghurt. Sounds rather awful, but was actually very successful (although the sorbet was a bit mouth-twisting for me). I did prefer my deeply chocolatey isosceles triangle of tart with sorbet, muscat grape and verjus (a sourish sauce, also of grape): very grown-up. Then came more chocolate in the form of complimentary truffles and raspberry ganaches. And with the bill they put before you a large glass jar filled with strawberry and lime marshmallows: like not-quite-yielding pastel air.

And at the door, of course there was Fred to see us out. "I hope you are happy ...?" And I assured him that I was. Very. "How could I not be?" I said to him, "Look at me – I'm on top of the world ..."

□ Joseph Connolly has written a novel called *IT CAN'T GO ON* (Faber and Faber, £7.99) which is sometimes, but not this time, how a restaurant critic can feel. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

upper crust event with the right wine

hint of armagnac. The wine is hard to find here, but Corney & Barrow has Saint Albert 2008 from Producteurs Plaimont (50cl £13.80).

That particular evening came to mind last week when a much more deliberate food and wine matching was under way. British Pie Week runs from Monday to March 13 and, in anticipation, six pies and six suggested accompanying wines were sitting on my kitchen table, delivered by an enterprising wine public

relations company.

What proved interesting was that there is worthwhile mileage in trying decent wine alongside humble food. Though to describe Pieminister's offerings as humble is rather unfair – they've won a raft of awards, use good ingredients and have plenty of well-made pastry to soak up some of the alcohol as well as the pie juices (see www.pieminister.co.uk). Sainsbury's is the main stockist, plus the stalls at Islington and

Marylebone Farmers' Markets and Covent Garden piazza.

Friends and I were a bit overwhelmed by most of the beef ones, which for royalists is rather a shame because the limited-edition Kate & Wills pie is beef-based. Its suggested wine partner, Errazuriz Wild Ferment Pinot Noir (£12, Majestic and independents), has a rich oak and fruit appeal, however, so why not still sip it on April 29, but with a beef casserole.

The best experience came

with the Chicken of Aragon and Henny Penny (also chicken, both £3.50) pies and the white wines. Both come from New Zealand – crisply gooseberry Villa Maria Private Bin sauvignon blanc 2009 (£10, widely available) and softly tropical Vidal chardonnay 2009 (£10, Oddbins).

This is a good moment to slot in recommendations of two other red wines, currently discounted, which will be lovely alongside richly-red-meat, ideally home-made pies. Les Garrigues Grand

Reserve 2010 (£6.75 until March 23, then £9, Sainsbury's) is from the Face of Fitou co-operative, Mont Tauch, but the pure grenache noir grapes mean it is a vin de pays, the delightfully-named Vallee du Paradis. There's lots of dark, ripe, spicy and juicy fruit – thoroughly enjoyable.

And Chateau L'Hospitalet La Reserve La Clape Coteaux du Languedoc 2008 (£9 until April 5, then £11, Waitrose) is a very stylish, perfumed, fruit-rich but also savoury classic southern

French blend, syrah, grenache and mourvedre – splendid.

Before you rush to kitchen and cellar, one final matching, guaranteed to be a universal success: sweet red Maury from Roussillon – either Domaine Poudroux 2005 (50cl £11.50, Waitrose) or Els Pyreneus 2007 (50cl £11.25, www.bibendum-wine.co.uk) will be perfect – with dark chocolate. I finished off a tasting that way the other day and everyone there left smiling.