

This'll make you feel like chicken tonight

The food scene in London is becoming not just more egalitarian, but also very much more specific in its intention. Street food vendors in places like Korea and Singapore (or Camden Lock) have always specialised: each of the stalls will serve you the one thing only, very often superb. American towns and cities still are littered with hot dog stands that sell just hot dogs: the only choice is whether or not you want them loaded with the yellow or the red (and why would you not?) For many decades, all you could buy in a fish and chip shop was fish and chips – with a gallon of Sarson's, guaranteed to turn the paper pungently soggy. Ice cream vans held to their brief, as did your local pizzeria and hamburger joint – though then came an expansion of all their menus, such diversification being generally dismal. They should have stuck to their lasts: as Clint Eastwood said so memorably (while squinting enigmatically into the sun): "A man's got to know his limitations."



Glittering offshoot
And now the wheel is turning back to all that: tiny dedicated menus are all over the place. Recently opened in Mayfair is Steak & Lobster: and that's all they sell. Just opened in Fitzrovia is Bubbledogs: champagne and hot dogs (geddit?) I have written before about Le Relais de Venise in Marylebone: salad, steak, special sauce – that's it. In east London Mark Hix has opened Tramshed, with only steak and chicken on the menu. Retro vans are parked all over the city, each of them selling just one thing – anything from sushi to a traditional English



■ **Chicken Shop in Highgate Road** is the brainchild of Nick Jones, of Soho House

cream tea. And now we have a glittering offshoot of the galloping trend on our very own doorstep: Chicken Shop, halfway between Kentish Town and Highgate, and very close to the Bull & Last and the Vine: this is quietly becoming a very cool and foodie stretch.

For cool is definitely what Chicken Shop is – as well as, believe it or not, the brainchild of Nick Jones (he of the members' club Soho House, and famously on record as having said that his last meal on earth would be one roast chicken). The eating house is situated beneath one of his very successful Pizza East restaurants, though there is no sign to tell you this. This could be because the place is very new, or just another indication of cooldom: if you don't know where we're at, then you ain't got no business being here, baby. In common with every single place I have mentioned above, no bookings are taken: what ...? Booking for an appointed hour ...? Tablecloths and waiters in black suits ...? The flapping out of snowy white napkins ...? Oh puh-leeeease ...! What do you think this is? The twentieth century?

So my wife, my son and myself duly rolled up at seven o'clock (they don't open till five, rather weirdly). All I had told them

was "It's chicken tonight!", and so indeed it proved. There is a great welcome from a selection of eager, young, good-looking and very smiley people, all tricked out in white T-shirts and long sky blue aprons. The ceiling is low and lined in strips of salvaged wood, still with its peeling paint. Thick iron girders hold the place up, there is a wall of handsome mahogany and mirrored old cold stores, the floor is red and white diamond pattern, chairs the same bright red, a stainless steel kitchen roaring and busy behind the bustling food bar, the lighting industrial bulkhead and twinkling tea lights ... the atmosphere just simply fantastic.

Obliging waitress

The menu – what there is of it – is on a blackboard: chicken. It is marinaded overnight (not the blackboard, silly), steamed, and then finished on a rotisserie. You order a quarter, half or whole. Three sides: avocado and lettuce salad, corn cob, crinkle cut chips (oh joy – remember those?) So we had one-and-a-quarter chickens between us, and all the sides. The waitress said "Anything else?" and I pointed out to her that I had just ordered the menu in its entirety. Red wine is classified as follows:

the most succulent roast chicken ever; but it wasn't that: just a tinge overdone. The legs were juicy, the breasts were not. Flavour wonderful, though, and, of course, we ate the lot.

Deep pudding basin

"Are you guys having the apple pie?" asked the waitress, excitedly. "I just adore it when people order the apple pie ...!". And then she demonstrated why: it comes, beautifully golden, in an enormous deep pudding basin, and is generously ladled on to your plate. And our waitress, see, she just loves to dish it out. It was first rate: chunky apple, chives, cinnamon, pretty fab pastry. My son said that it was the best he'd ever had, and he's eaten all the pies. I asked the manager what they do when people die of overeating and he said that it's quite okay because they've got a lift which makes it a doddle to get the bodies out. I don't know how the chefs and waiting staff truly feel about cooking and serving the same bloody thing night in, night out, but they seem like the happiest crew I have ever seen. And there you have it: a one-trick chicken, to be sure – but believe me, it's a damned good trick.

■ All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk. Joseph Connolly's latest novel *England's Lane* is published by Quercus as a hardback and an ebook.

FACTFILE

- **Chicken Shop**
79 Highgate Road, NW5
Tel: 020 3310 2020
■ Open Tue-Thu, 5pm-12pm; Fri-Sat, 5pm-1am.
- Food: ★★★★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★★★★★☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★★★★★★
- Cost: Truly good value: whole chicken £14.50, sides £3, wine a snip.



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Hazara is an Authentic Indian Restaurant using the freshest of ingredients with only the finest of herbs and spices.

Due to the varied dietary backgrounds of all our patrons we use separate cooking utensils for all our white fish, seafood, game, poultry, meat and vegetables with individual labelling and storage.

We have carefully brought together a selection of indigenous dishes from all the culinary regions of India, so whether you prefer the pungent aromas of the Northwest Frontier, the luxur blends of Awad, the cuisine befitting the Maharajas of Rajasthan or the sweet and spicy flavours of Goa we are sure you'll find your taste.