

Petrol station pop-up is worth a stop-off

Here comes a further chapter in my intrepid exploration of the farther reaches of the newly trendy building site that they call King's Cross. Although it is but a few months old, you will probably have heard of Shrimpy's – not just because it is an amusing and memorable name, but because here we have the trendiest of them all: it achieved instant fame, cool and street cred on the day it opened, I know not why. It's like that sometimes with restaurants – usually because they come labelled as 'pop-ups'. Covent Garden and Soho are littered with pop-ups, and such as Selfridges is not averse either to accommodating the hotter ones. The appeal seems to lie in the fact that they tend to be small, the resident talent has provenance and form, and the implication is that they won't be around for too long. So if you are not going to be one of London's most pathetic losers – social debris – you must just rush to get there, before it is gone. There is a tapas bar in Soho with no name on the door (this is not seen to be stupid any more – it is now seen to be clever) and you approach it via a sex emporium, and then down a flight of stairs into a brick-lined cellar: one man's heaven, another man's Hades. The point is that they don't take bookings, you don't have a clue where it is, and the food is pricey and defiantly mediocre – so naturally it is packed every night, and queues are constantly obscuring the strip plastic curtain that flutters in front of the porn shop.

Shrimpy's is another. It came from nowhere into the old BP petrol station on Goods Way to the



■ The walls of Shrimpy's are decorated with cartoons *Picture: Ed Reeve*

far rear of the station, and every restaurant critic in the capital was clamouring for a table. Except me, because I hate being told where to go, so I held back a bit. Virtually all the critics reported that the food ranged all the way from so-so to inedible, and that the place was rammed, night and day. But such is the trajectory of fashion that already Shrimpy's moment in the sun might have come and gone. The slavering wild-eyed pack of fashionistas would appear to have moved on: no doubt they have by now truffled out some brand new pop-up on the roof of an old dildo factory in some slum or other that serves only stout and nettles and may be accessed solely by either a fireman's ladder or else a helicopter drop. For when I sloped into Shrimpy's for lunch, my guest and I were occupying one of only three tables taken. If further evidence were needed, one of the waitresses was whispering that she was 'excited' because tomorrow, Neil Tennant of The Pet Shop Boys was coming in ...

And when I say I 'sloped in' ...

well you can't, really. Because first you have to find the place. Eventually you do – on a busy slip road where there stands what resembles a titan's opaque and grimy shower curtain surmounted by the words 'The Filling Station' in apple green neon. And that's it. No door, or anything. So you wander round the side to the canal and you see a minute open air dance floor and a counter serving seemingly nothing but pizza and prosecco. How cool! Not to say nauseating! Anyway – that ain't Shrimpy's, no no. Shrimpy's is through a glass door. It says 'Shrimpy's' precisely nowhere. Inside you have a long diner-type space – a counter with bar stools surrounded by tables (pleasingly set with proper cloths and napkins in silver rings!) and a few cartoons painted on the wall. As you may see from the picture, I was beneath Popeye (who, famously, eats spinach) and conceivably an outraged Nigella (who, famously, eats everything). Also on the wall is a large oil painting of a dead giraffe. Of all the pictures

available to hang in a restaurant, they went with the dead giraffe. The banquettes are too low (obviously) the aircon wonderful, and on the menu there is depicted not a shrimp, but a pineapple. On the bar too – a pair of lamps in the form of pineapples. My guest was Jane Mays, fiction editor of the Daily Mail – who always likes something different, which is just as well. The menu says 'Please note that Shrimpy's does not accept cash' – which is more than may be said for the shivering women who nightly used to parade in this very alleyway.

Zingy

And no shrimps on the menu either. So disappointing for me – I had come dressed specially: shrimpy jacket, prawnly shirt, lobster face ... I was the sole crustacean in the whole of the place. There are lots of cocktails (including the Blue Rinse – always so fun to have a crack at stupid old people), seven starters, seven mains and five sides. Lots of fish: octopus, smoked trout, soft shell crab burger (Oh Dear God No) and I went for a fried calamari starter, Jane chiming in with raw monkfish in lime juice. Which she enjoyed very much: "utterly fresh and zingy", she said. My calamari did not have a crunchy enough breadcrumb coating – the oil remained on the lips – while the rings themselves were all chew chew chew: a bit like hoops of Bazooka. The black olive tapenade and hint of liquorice were good, though.

There was no French wine, and no Italian. So I ordered a bit of Spanish, which came in a penguin. A porcelain penguin, yes – which, when you attempted to pour, dribbled just everywhere: I think it was full of drink. Then I was pointedly not having veal heart with chorizo, but went for fried chicken with red peppers. This came as a chunkily chopped breast, surrounded prettily by dots

of red pepper; these contrasting wonderfully with the creamed sweetcorn we were sharing. The chicken, though, in common with the calamari, was not crisply fried enough, but the flavour was fine. While Jane very much enjoyed her scrapple, as you would. Here was pulled (shredded) pork served as a cylinder. "Mmm ..." she enthused. "Creamy, sage to the fore ... nice and peppery".

Our extremely charming waitress was American, very tall and slim with a Number One buzz cut: we might have been twins. And over a shared puddling of chocolate brownie and pistachio sundae, I asked her: "Why Shrimpy's ...?". Well it turns out that Shrimpy is the nickname of a lady who lives in Miami and is the 'muse' of the proprietors. The recurrent motif is explained by the fact that she made her fortune in tinned pineapple ("The woman from Del Monte – she say yes ...!"). Life, eh? It's an education. The sundae, by the way, was obscenely gorgeous. So: rather better than advertised, this place – and Jane and I, having popped in to the pop-up, then popped out again.

■ All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk. Joseph Connolly's latest novel is ENGLAND'S LANE published by Quercus in hardback and ebook.

FACTFILE

- **SHRIMPY'S**
- The Filling Station, Goods Way, N1
- Tel: 020-8880 6111
- Open Sun-Thu 11am-10.30pm. Fri-Sat 11am-11pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- Cost: People will graze here ... but a three course meal for two with drink, about £100.

FUNKY BROWNZ

BAR RESTAURANT & CLUB

Happy Hour in the bar everyday from 4pm – 8pm
£2.50 all pints • £3 large glass of wine

Funky Brownz is not only a club & a bar, try our Indian Cuisine, which is the best in the area.

TAKEAWAY AVAILABLE

WWW.FUNKYBROWNZ.CO.UK
info@funkybrownz.co.uk

020 8341 2900

HORNSEY

5 Tottenham Lane, Hornsey, London N8 9DJ

ZENSAI

**AUTHENTIC MALAYSIAN AND
INDONESIAN CUISINE SERVED IN
OUR MEZZANINE RESTAURANT**

HAPPY HOUR AT ZENSAI

Tuesday til Thursday 5-10pm • Friday 5-9pm
Saturday 12-8pm • Sunday 12-12pm
2 for 1 on cocktails, beer & wine

As featured on [worlds best bars.com](http://worldsbestbars.com) top 100 bars

world's best bars

**SPECIAL OFFER TO
HAM & HIGH READERS
50% off**

6 Course Tasting Menu + Tropical Bellini Cocktail

Normal Price £42 - Offer Price £21

Quote Ham & High when booking - Available until 6th December

Must be booked in advance - Subject to availability

Not to be used in conjunction with any other offers

**Christmas Bookings Now Being Taken
Special offers for Early Birds**

Express Menu £8.50

Sat - Sun 12 - 7pm | Mon - Fri 5 - 7pm

RESTAURANT OPEN

MONDAY TO FRIDAY 5.00 - 10.30

SATURDAY, SUNDAY 12.00 - 10.30

BAR OPEN TILL 2AM EVERY NIGHT

D.J nights from Wednesday to Sunday

ZENSAI

16 Inverness St, London NW1 7HJ

Tel +44 20742 49527

Email steve@zensai.com • www.zensai.com