

Restaurant of the week: Scott's

Great Scott's

Joseph Connolly thoroughly shakes down the menu at the legendary Mayfair restaurant and finds it to his liking - but not cheap

At the wonderful exhibition of Rembrandt's late work at the National Gallery, people were holding up their tablets in front of their faces, touching the screen and capturing a masterpiece forever, without actually glancing at the original for so much as a nanosecond. On the one hand, it is always encouraging to see these mobs of people who have paid to be there (even if the younger ones are blind to gallery etiquette and simply stand in front of you) ... but they will keep taking the tablets. Just think: if such a device had existed in Rembrandt's day, he needn't even have bothered: hold the Apple gizmo in front of his face and bingo! One selfie-portrait in no time flat. And nor would all those lucrative commissions from stern and fur-clad bearded men have rolled in. These are invariably captioned 'wealthy merchant' - the Philip Greens of their day - and if there are lurking any women or children within a nearby frame, you can bet that they are 'wife and son of wealthy merchant': daughters just don't get a look in.

The star of the show was undoubtedly the Kenwood (i.e. 'our') portrait - generally regarded as the finest - though its temporary presence in Trafalgar Square will miff a few visitors to Kenwood House, I imagine. And so suffused with fine art, my wife and I sloped off to a legendary Mayfair

“If tablets existed in Rembrandt's day he needn't have bothered with self-portraits - just taken a selfie

restaurant - which also has artistic connections, of a rather curious nature. For it is at a pavement table outside Scott's that the twenty-first century's most renowned connoisseur of art, Charles Saatchi, apparently tampered with the lovely nostrils of our most fragrant television cook, his then wife Nigella, before - allegedly - he more or less throttled her. Why would he do such a thing on a public street outside one of London's most famous restaurants, when everyone around is armed with a tablet ...? Simple: you can smoke out there.

I don't suppose that Richard Caring's group of restaurants (Ivy, Le Caprice, J. Sheekey) much relishes the eternal regurgitation of these muzzy photographs - the location made plain by the distinctive swirls on the lower windows ... and on the other side of which I now was comfortably seated in a red leather tub chair. The central feature of Scott's, an unaggressively art deco sort of a space, is an ample seafood bar: you perch on a stool and order from the display of claws

and pinkness glistening on ice. This bar is surrounded by buzzy semi-formally laid tables, with the quieter dining area around the corner - this maybe better for dinner than lunch. We were given pink champagne on the house - not, I am sure, because I am a restaurant critic, but rather for the reason that I am wise, warm, lovable and all-round tremendously fabulous human being. The menu is divided into sections entitled oysters, raw, caviar, crustacean and molluscs, smoked fish, starters, fish on the bone, sole, lobster ... and for those few determined to be perverse, a small selection of meat, poultry and game.

There are few joys more acute than sipping bubbles and perusing an alluring menu in a comfortable and professionally run restaurant, where you just know that food and service are destined to be superb. So we wallowed in that for a bit, and then after much deliberation plumped for a twice-baked smoked haddock and Keen's cheddar soufflé for my wife, while I was having good old potted shrimps ... followed by a simple yet magnificent classic: grilled Dover sole - only ever to be ordered in a place where you know the sourcing and exposition will be of the very finest (even if it's blindingly expensive: £42, sans veg ... or a tenner more for an even bigger one). My wife ordered fillet of Cornish brill and Falmouth Bay prawns and capers, and we were sharing heritage potatoes, chips and creamed spinach.

At the table next door was an oldish chap, no Adonis, with a beautiful young girl: in Mayfair, I have noticed, uncles and godfathers are nothing if not indulgent with their pulchritudinous nieces and

wards. They had lobster and crab and giant prawns and champagne and a clementine bombe, dripping with warm chocolate sauce: how fond. The haddock soufflé, meanwhile, was sublime: a golden dome, around which the creamy sauce was poured - and within, a flavoursome lightness of smoky fish and the hit of cheese: both separate, yet blended. My potted shrimps were nice and gooey, though might have been less cold: a common problem. Our bottle of Petit Chablis was elsewhere, chillingly ... but the service here is spot-on: both wine and water glasses regularly charged. The brill was a sweet and smallish tranche, beautifully presented atop the nuggety prawns, and much enjoyed. While my Dover sole was ... oh my God, just absolutely perfect, actually: one of the finest I have had, and savoured with enormous pleasure. The Bearnaise sauce, spinach and chips were excellent, the heritage potatoes truly potatoey: oh what bliss.

The atmosphere here is properly pleasing: it's a sort of a posh canteen for those in the know, with regulars regularly saying hello to lots of other regulars - all of whom are known by name by Sean, the most famous doorman on earth. And so to pudding: a sorbet for my wife, and then free and luscious chocolates simply because I am a wise, warm, lovable etc etc. Outside the loo downstairs is an ugly, scratchily scrawled and evidently quite cretinous platitude: 'I swear to God I will eat my fish fingers and go to bed tonight'. Even the most indulgent parents would deem it undeserving of a fridge magnet, let alone mounting and framing ... ah, but this is by Tracy Emin, you see, and at once

FACTFILE

- Scott's, 20 Mount Street W1. Tel 020 7495 7309
- Open Mon-Sat 12 - 10.30pm. Sun 12 - 10pm.
- FOOD
★★★★★★★
- SERVICE
★★★★★★★
- THE FEELING
★★★★★★★

COST Well yeah ... it ain't cheap - but you wouldn't expect it to be. Not too much change from £200 for a three course meal for two with wine.

this professor of drawing at the Royal Academy made me see so clearly that the entire catalogue of Rembrandt's late works was no more than a bundle of irresolute daubs, the work of a preening dilettante.

HAVE LUNCH WITH JOSEPH CONNOLLY

Would you like to have lunch with me ...? Is that a lovely thought, or the most perfectly loathsome prospect?

If the former - here is your chance! Soon I shall be publishing my 300th restaurant review for the Ham & High, and I want one of you witty and discerning readers to be a part of it. Email me, via the website below, and tell me a little bit about yourself. A buckshee lunch is the prize and your picture in the paper alongside the review! You can even suggest a restaurant. So what are you waiting for? Bonne chance! And bon appetit!

