

## Restaurant of the week: The Colony Grill Room

# Connollising The Colony

Joseph Connolly eats far too much at the newest King and Corbin restaurant in The Beaumont hotel but thankfully nearly all of it is exemplary

Picture: Polly Hancock

Connolly at The Colony: a phrase best dealt with before one takes a drink. Here is not what used to be quaintly referred to as a nudist colony (and it isn't only you and the photographer who is mighty relieved to hear it) and nor the Colony Room, of murky Soho renown. This biliously green upper floor on Dean Street closed a couple of years ago, this spawning a collective and fondly alcoholic tide of memory encompassing a million tales of lubricious behaviour, joyful profanity, high jinks, low gossip and famous artists and writers falling not just over, but also very deeply into debt.

No no: The Colony Grill Room is just about as different as could be imaginable: a very cool, classy and instantly fashionable new restaurant situated in a newly

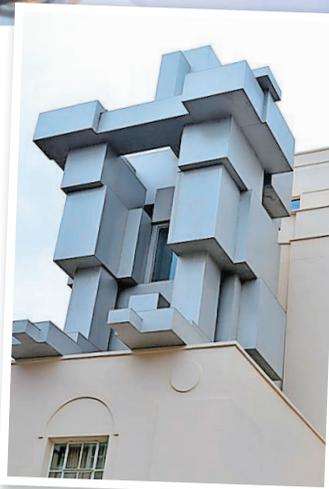
created hotel, The Beaumont. These don't occur very often – there was The Corinthian a couple of years back: very glitzy, though hardly memorable. The Beaumont has transformed a rather stylish 1930s block just a step away from Selfridges, to the façade of which has been added a stone and cubic new suite by the sculptor Antony Gormley. This, as you would expect from this artist, is in the form of a man ... or, at least, that's what it says here. Some would call it bleached and massive Lego, while others might say that it rips off Paolozzi. Either way, it is in fact accommodation that can be yours for countless thousands per night. (A brief digression: many decades ago, at St Anthony's prep school in Fitzjohn's Avenue, one of my class mates was Antony Gormley. I remember him as an affable fellow who demonstrated no artistic inclination whatever; and, inevitably, we called him Gormless).

Following hard on the heels of Fischer's, the brilliant recreation of a high society Austrian café in Marylebone High Street, here – from the same quite peerless stable of Jeremy King and Chris Corbin of Wolseley fame – is this brand new and swish New York grill room: so what better way to kick off a brand new year? My guest was my very good friend and publisher Jon Riley – and, unusually, I had been here before. A short while before Christmas I was invited to a 'soft opening'. Heard of these? It means that a

week or so prior to opening, the restaurateur invites a motley

of bods to graze the menu, eager for feedback. Its chief intention though is to train the staff on the job (not to say terrify them witless, because everyone they serve is either off the telly or a restaurant critic). On the day I was there, Ruthie Rogers of the great River Café was ordering an omelette, saying to her host that "it is always a good test of a kitchen" ... her host actually being joint proprietor, the aforementioned Jeremy King, who later said something to me that should be anthologised forever: "great chefs need great restaurateurs ... and vice versa".

The room is moody and glossily intimate. Burgundy leather booths, parquet floor, rosewood panelling, brilliant white nappy and perfect stemware: more clubby than the brasseries. In the superb and ultra art deco adjoining American Bar, the walls are closely covered in photographs of faces: everywhere you glance, you are being looked at in black-and-white. The menu is perfectly dazzling: everything a sensible person of taste could ever want to eat, with lots of NY brunchy things like meatloaf, together with classics such as Omelette Arnold Bennett (invented at the Savoy, though no good there now) and kedgeree. On my first trip I kicked off with dressed Weymouth crab, which was perfect: finely chopped white meat with grated egg, the dark meat made into a sort of puree. And then I had chicken pot pie.



Antony Gormley's hotel suite: a man or "bleached Lego"?

Second time around I was eating potted Morecambe Bay shrimps ... and then I had chicken pot pie – because in this, I feel, the Colony has found its signature dish. At the Ivy, it is still the shepherd's pie. J. Sheekey? Fish pie. Wolseley? Schnitzel, hands down. And now this splendid golden pastry giving way to a deep bowl of the most delicately seasoned, almost floral, nuggets of tender creamy chicken with tiny onionettes. I said "it's enough for two people" and Jon said "but only one Joseph Connolly". He knows me to be a pig.

He was meanwhile chowing down on clam chowder with smoked haddock, deeply creamy and very flavoursome. And then the veal chop. The veal chop

is already something of a legend, being not just the size of half a calf, but also the most expensive dish on the menu at £38, not to include veg. So how is it ...? "It's really, really good," Jon enthused. "And look at the green of the spinach! You could play cricket on it". My potted shrimps looked rather like an uncooked burger – a little cold, and served with very floppy crustless buttered bread ... so impossible to heap the one on top of the other: hot toast would have been much preferred. We'd had champagne, to toast the new year. Now we were glugging Le Cigare Volant – which translates as the flying cigar; and so is therefore

Californian: big on syrah and rather great, like a meaty Crozes Hermitages. Then London's best front-of-house Robert Holland wanted us to have a glass of something else, so we did that. Then he was eager for us to sample the herring roes on toast ... and the Welsh rarebit (superb) ... and then of course, with some luscious pudding wine, the banana fritters ... and did I mention the Colony Club Bespoke Sundae ...? With a perfectly sharpened pencil, you tick off on a pad your choice of ice cream, sorbet, toppings and sauces ... and I was feeling as full as Mr Cressote. Following which, to show willing, on top of all that drink ... a liqueur. Yes. So enough: this is now the end of my colon. No, sorry – my column, I mean. About Colony at The Connolly No, hang on ... oh look: I blame the ice cream.

## FACTFILE

- The Colony Grill Room, The Beaumont, 8 Balderton Street W1. Tel 020 7499 9499
- Open Mon-Sat 7am – 12pm. Sun 7am – 11pm. Which is just brilliant, and very New York.
- FOOD ★★★★★★☆☆
- SERVICE ★★★★★★☆☆
- THE FEELING ★★★★★★☆☆
- COST About £135 for three courses for two with wine. Joseph Connolly's The A-Z of Eating Out is published by Thames & Hudson. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk)