

## Restaurant of the week: Hook in Parkway



# New school fish 'n' chips? I'm not hooked

Joseph Connolly fowls up his order at a new restaurant specialising in a less greasy take on our national dish - by eating chicken

**L**ondon, in terms of restaurants, is still the reigning champion of the world, and evidently keen to retain the crown forever. It's not just the number, but the sheer diversity. London has always been good at diversity, of course – though some might argue that we have maybe rather overdone this one great melting pot idea, for at times it could seem that it is the very pot itself that might be melting – and what will we be left with then ...? Everyone neck-deep in a hot and uncontrollable soup that threatens to engulf us. But let us now tone down severely such vividly purple imagery, and focus simply upon the current restaurant scene. In 2014, there were 148 new openings, while just forty-seven closed down (all this excluding pubs and coffee places) so that means that we have a hundred more than before: you wouldn't really think there could be room, would you really? The opening that grabbed the hugest and most enduring headlines was, of course, The Chiltern Firehouse in Marylebone: still very cool and desirable, still very hard to get a table, and still a good restaurant (as opposed to great). The East End saw a lot of action – and Nine Elms is next on the list of happening foodie places, apparently. Wherever Nine Elms might be. A restaurant website called Zomato is predicting that this year's hotspots will be Bayswater, Surrey Quays, Battersea and – nearer to home – Wembley and St John's Wood. St John's Wood ...! Well I'll certainly be keeping an eye on that, because – with the glowing exception of the lovely retro fleecy comfort blanket that is Oslo Court – St

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John's Wood is a gastronomic Sahara.

One of last year's very late new openings was Hook in Parkway, Camden Town. It has an odd little history: in 2011, a couple of chaps were selling mackerel and chips in a Dublin market, and somehow found themselves running a restaurant in Brussels called Bia Mara. That was also going to be the name of this new Camden offshoot, but they have settled on Hook – as in fish hook, for fish is the thing here. And as with all new groovy places, there is a mission statement: they call what they do 'New School fish and chips' that is 'lighter and not so greasy'. Just greasy enough, then. This is

achieved, we are told, by 'fine dining methods with a comfort food outlook in an accessible, fun, friendly, quick turn-around environment'. Well yeah – these days, what else? Well I can tell you now that the aim for quick turn-around hits a resounding bullseye due to the fact that you have to sit upon either a plank of wood or else a chipped green metal chair that clearly has been salvaged from the sort of hardcore correctional institution where even sitting down was contrived to be yet another cruel and unusual punishment. The rest of the décor is made up of driftwood and industrial lighting, but of course, and the lavatories are dubbed 'Brothers' and 'Sisters'.

The Brussels achievement of '50 different styles of fish and chips and 30 home-made sauces' has, in Camden, shrunk alarmingly: three fish (cod, haddock whiting – why in God's name whiting?) in panko breadcrumbs (very now, they are) and two in tempura (sea bream and pollock – why in God's name pollock?). The 30 sauces become half a dozen

at a quid a throw. So my wife ordered lemon and basil tempura of sea bream with seaweed salted chips and garlic truffle dip (£12) ... and I was having the only dish they serve that isn't fish: free range chicken in panko breadcrumbs for a tenner, with the same accessories as above. We ordered sides of minty mushy peas and a celeriac, fennel and mustard seed slaw. No starters, because there aren't any. Nor are there puddings – though in the indeterminate future, home-made Guinness-flavoured ice cream is threatened. My wife had a Taras Boulba extra hoppy Belgian ale, which she loved, and I had a glass of Barbera d'Asti – usually a dependably easy and fruity red, though this one would shred the chrome from a bath tap. This was one of just two reds offered, along with two white; rather like a 1970s pub.

The service is wonderfully friendly, and the food comes in a wooden box: a mini fish crate with the word Hook on the side. Well – saves washing up, I suppose ... and plates, they are just so last century. Now how do you fill up a box? By shovelling in an enormous amount of potato – not chips as advertised, but thin slices: good flavour, but not at all crispy – and topping that with three meagre slices of crunchy chicken. The crunch was great, actually – and there was all the flavour: the fillets were so very thin as to have no succulence whatever. Could have been anything, frankly. My wife did much better: "wonderfully fresh fish, cooked just right – and the batter is nice and light". The minty mushy peas were excellent – and the waitress brought over two buckshoe sides (the power of the notebook) samphire citron



## FACTFILE

- Hook, 65 Parkway, NW1. Tel 020 7482 0475  
Open Tue-Thu 12-3pm, 5.30-10.30pm. Fri-Sun 12-10.30pm.
- FOOD ★★★★★★☆☆☆
- SERVICE ★★★★★★★★★★
- THE FEELING ★★★★★★★☆☆
- COST About £38 for one course (there is only one course) for two with a drink apiece.
- 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)

salad (very good) and wakabe and sprout pickle (very pickle). The garlic truffle dip was not notably either thing, and the potato soon descends into a salty clag. There is no hint whatever here of their self-proclaimed 'fine dining methods'. And here is the trouble: a lot of new places are specialising in just the one thing, and this is fine ... but it really does have to be supreme in its class, otherwise why bother? And why will people come to you? So Hook has a fair way to go.

Postscript: Afterwards, we went to the Camden High Street Lidl, because I'd never been to one before. Acres of look-alike branding ... and this: Hampstead gin ...! Oh yes: a beautiful chunky green bottle with the word Hampstead embossed on to the glass in three places, and a smart diamond-shaped label saying 'Hampstead London Dry Gin'. Shame, on the whole, that it's made in Germany.