

FOOD & DRINK

MARTIN WILLIAMS
EAT, DRINK, SLEEP, REPEAT

Our top columnist's guide to the best epicurean spots in London



Last week began with a wonderfully long lunch in Bluebird Chelsea with Mirabeau founder Stephen Cronk and his chief exec Richard Larkin. Everyone in the drinks business loves these guys, but I take credit for introducing the Batman and Robin of Provençal rose to each other back in 2017.

In Bluebird, the restaurant atmosphere was beyond buzzing as the royalty of Kings Road dined on seared tuna sashimi, crispy duck salad, memorable baked hake mornay and miso marinated salmon. We washed ours down with Mirabeau Risole 2021 (£70): life left balm at the hangout of the late Sir Donald Campbell (the restaurant once housed the record-breaking racing driver's London headquarters).

Next was a quick trip to Dukes Bar for martinis with the retail sector visionary William Kim, who has led Burberry, All Saints, Rag & Bone and John Varvatos (no name but a few) to great success (sadly this innovative genius is based in South Korea - London's loss).

William was a big M regular and he became a friend and mentor. We have travelled with our wives around Europe together on cosmopolitan culinary adventures. I first visited Florence two years ago, staying at his Palazzo, where, under the tutelage of the late, great, Russell Norman, my wife and I visited almost all of Russell's recommended hotspots.

Thus last weekend, before I begin my role as chief exec of D&D in April, we jetted off to Firenze for some spring sun. Alas, as we landed, we walked straight into a 'code red' thunderstorm. I abandoned my optimistic belief that the hotel pool would be open for a few morning laps, instead settling for some more epicurean pleasures.

The Villa Fiesole Hotel, a charming 19th century villa on the outskirts of the city, offers a pleasantly detached 'best of both worlds' situation: you are minutes from (yet overlook) the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella and the Ponte Vecchio, but are far enough away from the backpack wearing tourists. Importantly, the hotel is home to Serrae, a newly crowned Michelin starred beauty of a restaurant.



SERRAE

Chef Antonello Sardi gained a Michelin star in October. On days without lightning storms, the view is to die for - not that I could see it. What was outstanding was lunch, a 165 three course menu of the chef's choosing, which was kickstarted with a pre-amuse bouche that was like a one bite piece of art. Next was the real amuse bouche - a divine whipped mousse of potato with a sprig (that's foam to you and I, folks) of white chocolate and vanilla, finished with truffle oil. Punta di Petto followed: layers of succulent veal breast covered in a

sangiovese glaze, marinated apple, horseradish cream and beads of citrus caviar. The main course was a basil infused tagliatelle with gorgonzola with marinated pear, all sitting on a roasted hazelnut crème. Dessert was an epic interpretation of black forest gâteau (the best 'sweet course' I have eaten this year), which I greedily wished was four times as large. Petit-fours followed.

All in all a great value special lunch, with outstanding service, complimented by head sommelier Filippo's matched wine, which pivoted from a Barolo to Franciacorta Rose '61' (£95), into the

world of Brunello di Montalcino, Canalicchio di Sopra 2018 (£174), back to a new white grape for me in timoroso, which matched the pasta perfectly, followed by a splendid sauternes to finish. It was refreshing to have a sommelier happy to choose wines by flavour rather than traditional colour matches.

GUCCI OSTERIA DA MASSIMO BOTTURA

When Jamie Oliver was opening a restaurant a week, visiting his terrible chain felt like you were living in an advert for his personal brand. Massimo Bottura's Gucci restaurant is a bit like that, only much better and more expensive. This fantastically opulent dining room is clad in Gucci-branded bling: from the ice buckets to the cake stands, the floor to the uniforms. Even the guests dress in the fashion brand like extras at the Oscars. It's a magnificent Michelin starred Gucci tea party, to which you are invited for only £250. The food is a triumph, too - Mrs Williams and I (stubbornly dressed in Vanessa Bruno and Etro, respectively) loved the pig shoulder with artichokes, the apple and mustard fennel salad and Bottura's signature veal stuffed mini tortellini with a rich, vel