



Welcome to the latest issue of the Dining Club e-magazine.

In this issue we discover why Wagyu beef is so sought-after, how it can be utilised successfully in both Asian and Western cuisine, and that Wagyu produced in the UK should be on sale within a couple of years.

Bar Boulud is our New in Town pick. The venue has been über-popular since opening in a space at the Mandarin Oriental once used for storage. We find out why Daniel Boulud chose London for this venture.

Giorgio Locatelli is synonymous with Italian food at its best, and our Icon section explores why Locanda Locatelli is so successful, whether for a celebration or a casual lunch next to Madonna and Stella McCartney.

Nuno Mendes has been in the news this year as a driving force of the pop-up restaurant fever gripping London. Now he has a new restaurant, we were keen to know his plans, which he shares in our Chef's CV.

Many of us enjoy a good wine as much as a good meal, so we ask Erica Laler, nominated as a sommelier of the year, for advice on Champagne and why it's so easy to drink on many different occasions, with all sorts of dishes.

We've arranged entry to the Gherkin for all members, so you can enjoy the summer weather in style at this exclusive venue overlooking London. To take advantage of this offer please see the circle on page three for details. And, anyone who decides to become a member at the Gherkin will receive a bonus.

As always we love to hear your comments about the service and your feedback on places you visit so we can share them. I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

Hernan



Our top five most booked

1. The Ivy
2. Zuma
3. Fat Duck
4. Hakkasan
5. Nobu Berkeley

Focus on: Wagyu beef

Why is Wagyu the most expensive beef in the world? We find out from Maze executive chef James Durrant and Nicholas Taylor-Guy, a director at Dinings Japanese restaurant.



It's the most expensive beef in the world, the result of a delicate process in which specially-bred cattle – first introduced to Japan during the second century, to work in rice fields – are fed on beer and sake or wine, and given massages. This promotes the development of marbled meat, which enriches its own taste and succulence when the fat melts into it under intense heat.

Once only gracing the tables of the very rich, London diners now have many options when it comes to sampling Wagyu. These are set to expand in the next couple of years, following the establishment of a Wagyu-style farm in Yorkshire.

Members' feedback: Maze

The best value for money meal I've ever had, as it was delicious with great service and a small price tag: £60 for six courses, with drinks, including service. All exceptionally made. Simply brilliant.

James Durrant, executive chef of Maze, features Wagyu on his grill menu, as one of a number of international beef options. At Maze Grill, Wagyu beef is sourced not from Japan but in Australia from an estate near Melbourne. 'It's extortionately expensive to buy Kobe [Japanese Wagyu] beef,' he says. The shipments from Australia don't come cheap, either, because of the labour-intensive farming process – but according to Durrant, it's worth it. 'The cattle are fed on beer, they are massaged. This gives the meat such a different, unique flavour,' he says. 'It's a lot more mellow.'

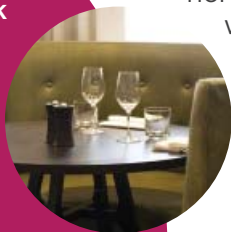
Meanwhile, at Japanese restaurant Dinings, Wagyu beef is also sourced from Australia, as well as Chile. 'We would like to get Wagyu from Japan,

Exclusive offer: Maze Grill

A glass of vintage Les Pagodes de Cos when ordering a Wagyu steak

Exclusive to the Maze Grill menu, Australian Wagyu steak is a true delicacy and should be savoured with a glass of the finest red wine. Les Pagodes de Cos, St-Estèphe, Bordeaux 2001, is a rich, accomplished second wine made by Château Cos d'Estournel, that compliments this outstanding flavour perfectly. The property is consistently one of the very best estates in the Médoc: poise and style with sumptuous blackcurrant fruit and spice, making this an excellent accompaniment to the finest steak.

but it's very restricted,' says Nicholas Taylor-Guy, one of the restaurant's directors. 'There's an imperial herd, that's not cross-bred with other herds any more, and they won't let it out of the country, to keep the beef pure, which I understand.'



Wagyu offerings are popular at both restaurants, albeit in different forms. At Maze Grill, simple preparation is key. 'We charcoal it, then finish it under the broiler,' Durrant explains. Because of the expense, diners often share Wagyu as part of their meal. 'People tend to have one on the table and take bits,' Durrant says. 'They are quite intrigued by it.'

At Dinings, Wagyu is served three ways: the first is sliced thinly – tataki – and seared on the outside. It's sold in thicker slices, too – 'It's cooked a little bit further, but it's still very rare,' Taylor-Guy explains. 'We also sell it as sushi, two different ways: with a piece of pan-fried foie gras – it's very decadent – or a truffle salsa on top.'

Some London restaurants have taken Wagyu off their menus, citing the expense, but both Durrant and Taylor-Guy are pleased with how successful it's been. At Dinings, its popularity is due in part to keeping the prices relatively low. 'We sell the chargrilled Wagyu for £20 a plate,' Taylor-Guy says.

And Wagyu is set to become more accessible to British diners, when a herd in North Yorkshire reaches maturity. 'There are some farmers starting to rear it, but it will not be ready for a couple of years yet,' Taylor-Guy explains.

Members' feedback: Vanilla Black

Highly recommended if you want to impress a vegetarian!

New in town: Bar Boulud

General manager Stephen MacIntosh takes us behind the scenes at Daniel Boulud's newest venue, Bar Boulud at the Mandarin Oriental.

With his eponymous New York restaurant awarded a third Michelin star this year and his other American eateries going from strength to strength, renowned French chef Daniel Boulud has opened his first British kitchen and dining room at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Hyde Park, offering Londoners an opportunity to enjoy the signature Boulud experience without boarding a transatlantic flight.



Stephen MacIntosh, Bar Boulud's general manager, explains why Boulud chose London for this project. 'There's a long relationship between Daniel and David Nicholls [Corporate Director of Food and Beverage] – they felt it was the right time, a great opportunity and a great relationship.'

Designed by the American designer Adam Tihany, the restaurant's interior is loosely conceived to resemble a wine cellar. 'This is in keeping with Bar Boulud in New York,' Stephen says. 'Deconstructed chandeliers, curved ceilings, wood everywhere, no tablecloths, and wooden floors. The artwork is very much on a wine theme.' It incorporates framed tablecloths stained with drops of wine from very expensive bottles.

Unsurprisingly, the wine collection is extensive and impressive. 'We have 400 bins of wine,' Stephen says, 'and a large selection of wines by the glass. All of the wine comes from the Rhone in Burgundy, which is where Daniel is from; Lyon.' For non-wine drinkers, there is also a sizeable cocktail list and a range of hand-picked, specialist beers.

Equal care has been taken with the French bistro-style menu. 'The really important thing is that everything we do, we make on site,' Stephen explains. This includes the extensive charcuterie and wide range of sausages. There's no question that meat is a big draw here: 'We also have fantastic hamburgers – much like Daniel's restaurant in New York.' But lighter dishes are also catered for, as well as fish lovers. 'The menu incorporates some

real, classic bistro-style dishes, like coq au vin.’ And don’t forget about dessert – the cheese platter is a particular highlight, with ‘seven types of cheese on at any given time.’

In the run-up and first weeks of opening, Stephen says, ‘Daniel has been in the kitchen a huge amount,’ as well as on the restaurant floor to make sure diners are enjoying the experience. Executive chef Dean Yasharian transferred to London after working as chef de cuisine at Bar Boulud in New York.

Stephen and his team have been thrilled with the reception that Bar Boulud has enjoyed so far. ‘A lot of people are coming to see what Daniel is going to do here,’ he says. ‘There’s a relationship.’ And it’s a relationship that will continue to grow as Bar Boulud assumes its place as a new fixture on the London dining scene. ‘We want to keep the momentum going,’ says Stephen.

Icon: Locanda Locatelli

We look at what keeps celebrities and food lovers flocking to Giorgio Locatelli’s Italian restaurant in Mayfair.

Locanda Locatelli was the baby of Plaxy and Giorgio Locatelli when they opened it in 2002. Giorgio had already established himself as one of London’s premier Italian chefs, thanks to his work at Zafferano, Spighetta and Spiga – he was awarded his first Michelin star at the former in 1999.

But it was Locanda Locatelli that would prove to be the place where Giorgio would really come into his own, with the great Italian cooking that has established the restaurant as the top choice for visiting A-list celebrities, from Madonna to Brad Pitt. The interior design is part of the draw for the glitterati – styled by David Collins with a vintage flavour, with parquet floors and old-fashioned banquettes. Walls are bedecked with important artworks by artists including Damien Hirst and Paul Simonon of The Clash.

The opportunity to rub shoulders with celebrities is but a secondary draw, however, after Giorgio’s impeccable food. He picked up his second Miche-



lin star, for Locanda Locatelli, in 2003, and the restaurant has maintained its ranking ever since. Celebrities and hoi polloi alike rank the food before the scene – the latter follows the former, resulting in a decidedly unpretentious experience. As a writer at the Telegraph declared, ‘Locanda Locatelli is a place to come and really enjoy yourself,’ while one critic wrote of the restaurant in the Evening Standard, ‘Despite being blisteringly fashionable, the food is very good indeed.’

And what food is that? The Northern Italian menu ranges from duck liver salami to roast pigeon; dessert might be a tasting plate of

chocolate and pine nut ice cream, or a blackberry confit with ice cream and yoghurt foam. Naturally, the menu – which changes frequently, according to the season – is backed up by an assured and wide-ranging wine list, drawn from 480 bins of predominantly Italian vintages.

Members’ feedback: Locanda Locatelli

I have been many times, so clearly I love it. Once I spent a day with the owner in the kitchen cooking, so it’s one of my favourite places.

That Locanda Locatelli has been open for only eight years is truly impressive – it has made its mark on the London dining scene so it’s already an assured classic. As critics in the Michelin Restaurant Guide have written, ‘In a few short years, Locanda Locatelli has become a London landmark,’ and that’s what will keep diners – starry and less-so – returning for years to come.

Exclusive offer: The Gherkin

Dining Club members can book the restaurant and visit the bar

We’ve negotiated access in August for Monday-Friday lunch and dinner, and in September for Monday-Thursday lunch and Friday lunch and dinner.

Contact us to book: exact names are needed for the guest list and security access to the building.

Gherkin membership costs £1,000 (+ VAT). Anyone joining via Dining Club will receive £150 food and drink credit.



Focus on: Champagne

Erica Laler, head sommelier at Texture Champagne Bar, tells us why the drink is not only for special occasions.

Champagne: it's at the centre of so many celebrations, but as we discovered through a conversation with Erica Laler, head sommelier at Texture Champagne Bar in Mayfair, it's a multi-faceted wine that works as well served throughout a three-course meal as it does being popped to mark a special occasion.



What is it that makes Champagne so special compared to other sparkling wines?

The key, Laler explains, lies not only in the grapes, but also in the strict procedures to which producers must adhere for their wine to qualify. 'There are very specific laws and rules about how to make Champagne,' Laler says. These range from ranking the quality of grapes to dictating production methods, which require the wine to be fermented twice – the second time, inside the bottle, after yeast and sugar are added before corking. For ageing, Laler says, 'You have a minimum requirement of 15 months for a non-vintage, and a vintage must be aged for at least three years. So you always know Champagne has been aged for a very long time.'

But why is it our favourite celebration drink?

'Because of the fizziness,' Laler says, confidently. 'There's something very fresh, crisp and lively about it; usually when you're going

to celebrate you want something that stands out, something that's a bit special.' However, she acknowledges that advertising has also had a hand, thanks to 19th-century promotions that spearheaded the idea of Champagne as a drink for celebrations.

The Champagne bar at Texture opened three years ago, and has received accolades for the past two years for being the top Champagne bar in London. 'We have around 115 Champagnes on our list,' Laler says. 'We have very classic and famous brands that people tend to go for, but also small growers. The staff are there to guide people.'

One direction they guide people in is towards pairing Champagne with all courses of a meal. Recommending pairings is all about what guests are eating. Normally, Laler recommends something fresh and crisp with a starter, something more full-bodied with a richer main course – 'If you go for meat, you can always go for a rosé or darker Champagne,' advises Laler – and a demi-sec – semi-dry – with dessert. 'Champagne is fantastic with food,' she says. 'I think it matches food as much as wine.'

Members' feedback: Marcus Wareing

We felt our menu was put together with vegetarians in mind. When we were taken on a tour of the kitchen afterwards, much to Ruth's delight, the head chef told us his wife's a vegetarian, which helps. We really enjoyed the night and the special tasting menu was sublime.

Members' feedback: Hélène Darroze

Exceptional service, in both the bar and the restaurant; personal and attentive; superb team. Loved not being rushed to the table or rushed out; really relaxed. Excellent wine list, so heavy it nearly stopped circulation when holding a place on the page with a finger! Food was good, especially the crispy rack, and the guests were happy with theirs. Super ambience.

Members' feedback: Babbo

Outstanding. Both food and service were exceptional. I look forward to supporting this restaurant in future.

Exclusive offer: 28°-50°

Sample wine at 28°-50° Wine Workshop and Kitchen

For Dining Club members, with lunch or dinner and any wine bought, the recently opened 28°-50° on Fetter Lane in the City will offer another glass of matching wine to compare, chosen by Xavier Rousset - sommelier at Texture and 28°-50°.

This offer is open until 31 August 2010 and not available in conjunction with any other offers.



Members' feedback: Koffman's

We loved it, thank you. The decor is much more modern and light than the preceding Boxwood Café. The menu is full of well-executed classics. Staff were efficient and friendly, although it was only their second night open. Should be a great success and become a favourite for anyone wanting a relaxing evening with classic comforting food in the best French traditions.

Members' feedback: Viajante

Good - fab bar and cocktails. We had the best table (2): the room is nice, in a low-key way. Service was efficient and charming. Some of the (12!) courses were excellent - notably the celeriac and the lardo - but some were markedly less successful, in particular the olive soup. The wine pairings were somewhat mixed. An interesting and enjoyable experience overall, not least since there's nothing else like it in London.

Members' feedback: Roux Parliament Square

Amazing. We met Michel Roux at the Taste of London festival, who recommended the asparagus starter, which we both enjoyed immensely. The food reminded me of Jean Georges in New York - French cuisine cooked to perfection using modern techniques (as opposed to the traditional techniques of Le Gavroche.) I can't wait to go back to try the tasting menu. We expect it to collect at least two stars. I also had the best mojito of my life in the bar!

Chef's CV: Nuno Mendes

Born: Lisbon, Portugal, 1974

Training: California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. I liked cooking school. After moving to the US I wanted to stay for a bit. In SF there's an eclectic point of view because there are such strong influences, from Iberian and LA to Asian and European. After SF I worked at Union Pacific and Jean Georges in New York, then New Mexico. I did 'stage' at El Bulli, spent time in Asia, then moved to London, where I opened Rama with Jean-Georges [Vongerichten], then Bacchus.

Philosophy: The Loft was a project I started on a year off. I was planning my new restaurant and waiting for it to open. I didn't want to stay away from the kitchen for that long, so I decided to open my house to the public. The idea was to create a creative 12-course tasting menu at a table in a home setting; breaking quite a few barriers. The Loft basically started as a test kitchen, but turned out to be a project on its own. Now it's a chefs' gallery; I'm no longer the chef in residence, we have chefs from all over the world, so it's quite interesting.

Current: I love Viajante's location. I've always liked East London and wanted to work here. I'm happy to stay in Bethnal Green - I think this is the place; I feel comfortable.



Town Hall was shut for close to 25 years; now the hotel's up and running.

It's going well. Some of the ideas I'm proposing are a little challenging, but the response has been

positive from the majority of guests. With the tasting menu, we create a bit of a voyage through my experiences. It's influenced by where I've cooked, where I've been, foods that I liked. I like it to be interesting, somewhat challenging, diverse and eclectic. I'm not afraid to break some of the rules - if I think it works, I put it on. I'm doing skate wing with a roasted yeast; the whole dish centres around the yeasty combination.

Future: As a whole we're living more focused on sustainability and seasonality, and the days of the molecular are done. Everything's tending to become more natural and pure.

Dining is becoming more informal at a fine dining level, and I'd like to think it's becoming a lot more interactive, between the chef and the guest. Front and back of house are blurring and it's all turning into one. I think these are moves forward. The restaurant's adapting to the structure of the kitchen, which is front stage; the energy of the restaurant works around it, which is quite nice.