

LONDON'S BEST KEPT SECRETS...

By Devanshi Mody

The London summer is a contradiction in terms. Hot or not, it's the "hot" favourite over July/August. This time, avoiding loud luxury, we bring you instead London's discreet diamonds.

Tom's Terrace: This sizzling new river-side number with views over the London Eye is the place for early evening lounging followed by celeb chef Tom Aikens' "sharing" dishes like Tom's Kitchen Tasting Board, salads, sandwiches, truffle chips and light summary fare. The intoxicating ambiance leaves you light in the head.



The Rocco Forte Browns Hotel



The Knightsbridge Hotel



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Home-Away-from-Home

The Rocco Forte Browns Hotel: "Would you require a wakeup call? I hope not!" the receptionist says at check-in. Here, the subtly sophisticated come to repose amidst Mayfair's madness. Concierge oversees everything (including shipping 25 deer for an Arabian prince) elaborating, "We reserve hotels, restaurants and private jets. We try to make the impossible possible. Miracles take a bit longer." That's probably why my royal Hellenic Suite, miracle of interior décor, took longer to dress. Designer Olga Polizzi convenes disparate eras with Roman-style vases, French finery, antiques, contemporary Peter Blake paintings

and quintessentially London elements. The suite is immense- you could throw a ball. King George II of Hellenes probably did. Exiled from Greece, he spent over 10 years at Brown's Hotel, which became the Greek royal family's official royal court... You would stay a decade too for the *Albermarle* breakfasts with great granola, Greek yoghurt and granary loaves. During massively popular *Afternoon Teas*, staff cannily gather hip youngsters in one room and the "distinguished" in another. Interestingly, half the spa guests are men: The lure of the exclusive new *NuBo Facial* including diamond scrub and loganberry & rose face oil. Brown's has the flair without the fanfare.

The Knightsbridge Hotel: This is home. So the young staff (London's most dynamic) even suggest "afternoon tea" at midnight, although receptionist Stephanie warns, "It might get addictive." And it would, what with a gorgeous terrace attached to adorable suites. Fortunately or unfortunately, the mattress as thick as an island claimed me in profoundest slumber. I did eventually make a homely afternoon tea with chunky cakes and unusual cucumber and balsamic vinegar sandwiches (nice) at the rather more civilised hour of 7 pm...



The Arch



51 Buckingham Gate

The Arch: Brand new, the ultimate James Bond hotel. Think gadgets and state-of-the-art contraptions. For Bond Girls, suites with private courtyards and Jacuzzis with TVs and bath cushions. Relax... Contemporary art cavalcades across 7 Georgian town houses fused into a hotel. The Martini Library (Bond theme continued) effuses residential warmth. However, the butler is a button-press away. Although, do exert yourself if you intend availing of the culinary delights at Hunter 486, amongst the yummiest of London hotel restaurant. This slick space with young South African chef offers spectacular soups, salads, London's best ciabatta and perhaps the only good cannelloni I've had outside Italy.

51 Buckingham Gate: Everyone knows that the Taj does the world's best hotels and spas. They perhaps also do the raciest residences for long-term guests. Some stay 10 years, so if you only stay all summer (highly recommended), you probably count as "short-term". But plenty of time to be pampered by endearingly efficient staff, to pleasure in the spa exclusively offering Anne Sémonin bespoke treatments and to enjoy elegant interiors and charming exteriors. Their hush-hush Italian-style courtyard hosts Oriental BBQs. But it ain't over till the fat woman sings- don't miss their summer opera nights!



47 Park Lane



47 Park Lane

47 Park Lane: This ultra exclusive member's club is poised discreetly upon the most enviable of London addresses. Fully-equipped, grandly serviced apartment suites are available to members from 21 days/year. For a price, the convenience of a "portable home" comes with an excellence of breakfast croissants and coffee and the multifarious talents of inimitable concierge Peter (who has only worked there 26 years...). If you can afford to make a home of your hotel or vice versa and add the glamour of a member's only club, why not!



Umu



L'Oranger



Sketch, The Lecture Room & Library

Sketch, The Lecture Room & Library: Perhaps better known for its pulsating club but the extremely elegant Michelin-starred restaurant, newly headed by Jean-Denis Le Bras, under the legendary Pierre Gagnaire's auspices, offers an intriguing summer menu. A veritable London must-do for those with a penchant for French class. Call it a gastronomic adventure or food for thought, in keeping with all else at Sketch, it's a sensation.

Hungry?

Umu: Arguably London's best kept secret and the connoisseur's choice. Chef Ichiro Kubota blends the authentic cuisine of Kyoto (Japan's gastronomic capital) with finesse acquired in France's Michelin-starred restaurants and received a Michelin star within only 4 months of opening in London. Kubota's food is refreshingly different, freshly sourced from Japan- fish, vegetables and even water. For the perfectionist Chef, London water is uncondusive to Kyoto cuisine! Try the Kaiseki 7-course tasting menu. Otherwise, knowledgeable young headwaiter Lotfeh chooses perfectly for you. End with unbelievable Matcha Tea ice cream served with beans (it works).

L'Oranger: Young Chef Laurent Michel with experience in France's top Michelin-starred restaurants serves authentic Provencal cuisine exquisitely presented. When you see French guests filling a French restaurant, it bodes well. The mercifully French staff bring you French savoir vivre at its most gregarious. They also bring inspired spiced carrot amuse-bouche and one of London's finest cheese trolleys. Ask the entertaining Eve to help you choose. Couples dancing to live piano strains in St James' only secret terrace give the obliging staff sleepless night- guests don't leave until 2.00 am...



Angelus:



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Angelus: Resolutely French and quirky chef-owner Thierry Tomasin effaced an old English pub, transformed into a Parisian art deco "brasserie de luxe" with Paris-style terrace and menus in French. The seasonally changing menu nevertheless boasts specialties like Foie Gras Crème Brûlée "Angelus" amongst other tender-textured finery. But the chef could improvise a meal according to your or his humour, should you be game. Simply sumptuous or sumptuously simple, this is gastronomic cuisine at bistro prices. They disregard Michelin stars and rightly so!



Langtry's



Langtry's

Langtry's: Ravishingly romantic, this recently refurbished historic restaurant is the erstwhile home of legendary actress Lilly Langtry. The modern British menu plays many roles, dressed in tradition with innovative accessories. Suppers are super but there's nowhere better in London for weekend lunches with fancy options. If the Louis XIV fireplace doesn't set your palate ablaze the Sunday Roast will.



Martini Library at the Arch

Tea-tle Tattle

Martini Library at the Arch: London's most eclectic or, more appositely, éclair-tea-c afternoon tea. Handmade éclairs display edible prints- even prints of yourself, should you like to taste yourself laced over the "Flight of éclairs" including flavours like Foie gras and sauterne, Strawberry and Veuve Cliquot, Crab & crème fraiche, Coconut & kaffir lime leaf, Amalfi lemon and biscotti. Oooh... And then there's toasted crumpets with blueberry butter and artisan bread with gentleman's relish. Relish, relish, relish!



The Soho Hotel

Cocomaya: Courtesy of celebrated trio from London's world of fashion and lifestyle, including Walid Al Damirji. Their new artisan bakery with over 70 varieties of gorgeous breads, handmade cakes, Viennese-style pastries, fondues, savoury biscuits, sorbets etc also presents London's first afternoon tea picnic hamper to savour in the parks this summer. But me thinks Cocomaya's beauteous interiors make for a more scin-tea-lating experience.

The Soho Hotel: The just-launched Ruinart and Miller Harris Sensory Tea swirls bouquets of summer in a simmering cup of fragrant teas (Thé Pétales, Thé Violette...) which enliven cream cheese and black pepper sandwiches, melt-in-your-mouth lemon cupcakes, shortbread and raspberry tartlets. Be it cold outside, summer rages within the resplendent tea room where London's hottest crowd keep up temperatures.



The Knightsbridge Hotel



The Garden Room at the Lanesborough

Terrace Trends

The Garden Room at the Lanesborough: If you're not in St Tropez, this is where to be- the oh-so-luxurious hideaway of the glamorous elite who summer away in exclusivity amidst verdant exuberance and Parisian terrace trendiness. See and be seen sipping London's priciest beverages, nibbling steak ciabatta, lobster nachos and smoked chicken quesadillas, sampling Royal Beluga caviar, clinking sparkling glasses and blinding solitaires. Chin chin!



Number 16

Number 16: Possibly the sole central London hotel with gardens. This secret garden, with heady greenery, pretty landscaping and water bodies, is an oasis to laze in over home-style easy food including pastas, sandwiches, burgers and also exotica like Thai curry. If summer doesn't make you hot, this will!



Aqua Nueva

Aqua Nueva: A pushy concierge coerced me. With trepidation I went, expecting disaster. But their new rooftop terrace buzzes, the tapas table throbs, the Spanish head chef has worked at El Boulli. French staff supply panache and a death-by-chocolate dessert. Killer calories. But shhhh.....