



A Memorable Mayfair Meal

Text: Fransje van Riel
Image © John Carey

Lunch at Murano should be on anyone's gastronomical bucket list. Angela Hartnett, who received an MBE in 2007 for her services to the hospitality industry, opened the doors of the restaurant in 2008, and within just four short months it was awarded a Michelin Star and four AA rosettes.

The cuisine is modern European, heavily influenced by the Italian dishes Hartnett grew up appreciating and cooking under the guidance of her mother and Italian grandmother. For years Hartnett was the protégé of Gordon Ramsay, working with him at such dazzling restaurants as Aubergine, Zaffranos and l'Oranger. She was also the first ever female head chef at the restaurant at the Connaught Hotel. She is one of only a handful of female British chefs to have been awarded such accolades.

Nestled at 22 Queen Street, in the heart of London's charming Mayfair district, Murano is perfectly poised to cater to the well-heeled connoisseur of fine food.

Huddled beneath an umbrella, shielding ourselves from the pouring rain, we almost miss the unassuming entrance that leads to the restaurant's spacious dining room, with its modern, subtle décor.

A basket of freshly baked gourmet bread and extra-virgin olive oil is presented, along with shavings of cured meat, which we waive owing to our vegetarian lifestyle. Our waiter, Alessio, is unfazed, and elegantly swoops it away in order to quickly return with the most

divine smoked aubergine puree, topped with a swerve of olive oil and a sprinkling of pine nuts.

Matteo Ramazzina, Murano's head sommelier, makes knowledgeable recommendations with regards to white wine and, choosing a bottle of Fattorie Sono Montenedoli 2011 from Tuscany, we savour the tasting before studying the menu.

As befits a restaurant of this calibre, a great deal of attention is given to details of both food quality and service. Whatever needs doing - be it clearing tables or responding to a subtle wave of a patron's hand - gets done by whomever is first at hand, regardless of whether it is a waiter or the general manager. It's quite impressive to observe the level of teamwork between the staff at opposite ends of the restaurant's hierarchy.

Flexibility, we discover, is also part of Murano's immaculate service. My request to handpick certain dishes from both the set lunch menu and the more extensive à la carte offerings is immediately obliged.

My leek and potato tart starter is beautifully presented, accompanied by a small scattering of poached quail eggs. Signature dishes such as risotto with wild garlic and broad beans; burrata, Sicilian tomatoes with Puglian olives and focaccia; or beef anolini with black truffle and Parmesan are some of the offerings on the à la carte menu. There are plenty of vegetarian options too: cauliflower,

cumin, chickpeas, and raisins; beetroot, radicchio and sweet potato with spiced yogurt; or polenta, kale, Taleggio cheese, and trompette mushrooms.

It makes for difficult choosing, but eventually I opt for the tortellini of homemade ricotta, which can be served with the wild mushroom and garlic cream sauce instead of the sage butter as mentioned on the menu.

Although portions are not huge, our tummies are more than satisfied owing to the richness and texture of the food.

Still, there is the business of dessert.

Scrumptious as it all sounds, I have had my eye on the cheese trolley from the moment it was wheeled towards two businessmen at a nearby table. Having spent most of my teenage years in the British countryside, I know the sweet trolley to be an institution, the traditional stalwart of a fine restaurant. But never before have I seen cheeses presented in the same way.

A generous selection of no fewer than five cheeses is offered, each more heavenly than the last. Foregoing coffees or digestifs, we are nevertheless presented with an artfully designed chocolate spread before we leave.

To me, it is the perfect ending to a truly gastronomic meal.

For more information visit www.muranolondon.com. ■