



Roll Over, Chiltern Firehouse: Kitty Fisher's Is London's New Hottest Restaurant

Chef Tomos Parry's Basque-inspired menu is worth the wait

by Richard Vines

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[Chiltern Firehouse](#) is no longer London's toughest table. The baton has passed to a tiny bistro in Mayfair that feels more like a country pub than a dining destination.

The ceilings are as low as the prices, and there's no outward swagger at [Kitty Fisher's](#), named after an 18th century courtesan. Red lights hang in the bar in her memory, and the establishment sits in [Shepherd Market](#), an area historically associated with prostitution. Other claims to fame include the fact that musicians Mama Cass Elliot and Keith Moon both died nearby, and the fictional "Jeeves" character lived on a neighboring street. As for gastronomy, there's a Polish-Mexican bistro, L'Autre, with blini and burritos.



■ The upstairs bar features red lights, commemorating the area's past association with courtesans, including Kitty Fisher. Source: Kitty Fisher's via Bloomberg

people to answer it.

The menu is short, and I would have called it Mediterranean had I not been told it was Basque-inspired. It's based around a wood grill in a cramped little kitchen where Tomos Parry works wonders. He's not a big name yet but did win best chef in the Young British Foodies awards last year, and he has Noma, the Ledbury, and most recently [Climpson's Arch](#) in Hackney on his résumé.

Grab a table downstairs, and you can watch him at work while seated in a small room with red-upholstered couches, a wooden floor, a gold-painted ceiling, and low-hanging lights that are almost as likely to deliver a bang on the head as they are to provide illumination.

So you might be forgiven for setting your expectations low. Until, of course, you attempt to get a table: Try calling, and you'll get a message saying the booking line is open just eight hours a week, no reservations are being taken for dinner, and lunch is served from Tuesday through Friday only.

(Prime Minister David Cameron has dined here. Celebrity chef Nigella Lawson is among those who have taken to Twitter to sing the restaurant's praise, saying she had "just eaten about everything on the menu.")

Yet there's no sign of arrogance once you enter the small bar, into which a few tables are jammed. The owners are charming former actors, and the waitresses are among the most engaging I've met. No one is picking up the phone, they say, because they hadn't expected many calls and so didn't hire



■ Creamy Burrata is served with beetroot and a splash of olive oil. The dishes are colorful at Kitty Fisher's. Source: Kitty Fisher's via Bloomberg

A meal might start with delicious crusty bread that's scorched on the grill and then served with whipped butter and a dusting of burnt onion, a black powder that adds a hint of extra char.

Snacks include a creamy taramasalata, or whipped cod's roe, served on thin strips of toast "soldiers" with fennel butter and micro-ress. These have a clean, lemony flavor. Or there are salt-cod croquettes, gooey beneath their crunchy coating. On another day, breaded Cornish mussels were offered with a vivid wild garlic mayonnaise. Each snack costs £6 (\$9), and the bread is £3.



■ The basement dining room at Kitty Fisher's is cozy, like a country pub. It features historical details, such as an old bread oven. Source: Kitty Fisher's via Bloomberg

Among my favorite dishes are lamb cutlets, rare beneath a beautiful char and topped with anchovy, mint, and parsley for a sharpness that plays with the sweetness of the meat.

Simple and equally flavorsome is grilled calves' liver, served rare with Roscoff onions and wild garlic. Here the rich, pink meat melts once you bite through the sear. The onions are sweet and soft, the garlic a surprisingly gentle taste of spring.

The dishes change daily, but one to be aware of whenever you go is the Galician beef sirloin, which may not be mentioned on the menu. This is a large serving cooked on the grill and served with onions, pickled walnut, pink fir potatoes, a bit of mustard, and Tunworth, a cow's-milk cheese with similarities to Camembert.

The meat—from old dairy cows—has a flavor so deep, you might tumble in after a few glasses of wine. It's long-lasting and insistent, rich as a Mayfair resident, and as redolent of the countryside as a peasant who's been spreading manure.



■ The Galician steak comes from dairy cows. The flavor is deep and rich in this signature dish. Source: Kitty Fisher's via Bloomberg

There's a sweetness from the charring and an earthiness from the meat that can be sensational, particularly when combined with the nutty cheese and the acidity of the walnut. The meat varies from day to day, depending on what's available, so it might not be a perfect 10 every time. But get it on the right day, and you will find the kind of flavor of which steak lovers dream.

The desserts are something of an afterthought, usually with just one pudding, an ice cream, and a sorbet. Having said that, the buttermilk rice pudding with rhubarb and hazelnuts is well-balanced; the brown-bread ice cream and marmalade is like a toasty treat; and the blood-orange sorbet has a refreshing hint of sharpness.



■ Lemon sole comes with fennel, blood orange, and monk's beard. Source: Kitty Fisher's via Bloomberg

The wine list is short and ungreedy, with a decent Vin de Pays d'Oc 2013 at £4 a glass and £15 a carafe. (And, surprise: It comes from a box. I may have to drop my prejudices, just as I did with screw caps a decade ago.)

I really have trouble recalling such gracious and unhurried service in London. It's best if you're not in a hurry, either, as it's basically just Parry cooking with his mate Chris Leach, formerly of [Pitt Cue Co.](#) They do everything except wash the dishes. This is not the spot for a quick bite.



Kitty Fisher's owners include the actor [Oliver Milburn](#), whom you might recognize from *Coronation Street*, and his chum Tom Mullion, whose résumé includes acting, oil trading, 13 months as development director at the Tricycle Theatre, and co-founding [All Star Lanes](#).

They're well-connected socially, so it's not surprising that their small restaurant should be popular with the Mayfair crowd. What is surprising is the quality of the cooking and service.

■ Shrimp is included on the Basque-inspired menu. Source: [Kitty Fisher's via Bloomberg](#)

Kitty Fisher's is like a private club.

Better than that, it's how you might

hope a private club would be. It's not Chiltern Firehouse—of which I continue to be a fan—although you may well spot the occasional celebrity.

It's Kitty Fisher's, and it's worth persevering to get a table.

Kitty Fisher's is located at 10 Shepherd Market, Mayfair, London, W1J7QF; +44-20-3302-1661 or [kittyfishers.com](#).

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