

Review: How Kitty Fisher's became the hottest restaurant in town

At last, says Xanthe Clay, a good, clean reason to visit Shepherd's Market



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Kitty Fisher's in Mayfair Photo: Evening Standard / Eyevine



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By Xanthe Clay

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Comment

History does not recount if Jeffrey Archer stopped off for a plate of carbonara when he came to Shepherd's Market to meet sex worker Monica Coghlan. If he did, I doubt it was much cop. The little corner of London squished between the club mansions at the Green Park end of Piccadilly and the louche offices of Curzon Street, has long been better known for its call girls than its cuisine gourmet. The restaurants that pepper the enchanting mini-maze of eighteenth century lanes, mostly eighties-style trattorias or mediocre Middle Easterns, are resolutely aimed at customers whose interest in the area is not gastronomic.

Until now. Last Wednesday it was **David Cameron's** turn to pop down to Shepherd's Market, but this time was very much about the food, for a "date night" with the sumptuous Samantha – plus a couple of friends and an entourage of bodyguards. The location was Kitty Fishers, a tiny new restaurant named after a Georgian-era courtesan, that opened quietly before Christmas and has, by word of mouth, become the hottest table in town.

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When I rang to book last month (so ahead of the curve, or at least the Prime Minister, me) the gentleman who took the call admitted that he had relocated to the pub across the road with the reservations book as they didn't have a proper office. Could we come tonight? "I'll just nip across and check... There's no tables but do you mind sitting at the bar? It's my favourite spot." Put like that, of course we didn't.

Arriving on a dark evening, the Kitty Fisher's corner shopfront was a golden-glowing beacon of snugness, like a Dickensian Christmas card. We perched on bar stools crammed in at one end of the bar in the tiny dark, low ceilinged upstairs room. "It feels like it's been there for a couple of centuries rather than a couple months," remarked my companion. Surely Lord Byron popped in for a drink after visiting his publisher John Murray round the corner in Albermarle St?

But never mind the mad, bad, and dangerous-to-know Lord B, we had the next best thing, Byron's BFF and Regency bad boy Scrope Davies. Behind the bar and mixing up our Bad Kitty cocktails, an intoxicating blend of sloe gin and cava, was Oliver Milburn, the very actor who played Davies in the BBC film of Byron's life.

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mushrooms here. The chefs – headed up last year's winner of the Young British Foodie Award Tomas Parry, and sous chef Chris Leach from trendy barbecue spot **Pitt Cue Co** – are very much at the cool end of the culinary spectrum.

Their kitchen, crammed in what feels like the cupboard under the rickety stairs that lead to the downstairs dining room (more girly than upstairs, with bordello-pink banquettes) is dominated by a wood grill which is clearly their pride and joy.

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The food is fashionable, without trying too hard. Butter came whipped (soft-serve consistency is very new, a sort of posh Lurpack spreadable) and comes with damp, rippable sourdough bread and a dusting black onion ash. "At home, ash is what happens when I burn something, so how is it cool in restaurants?" I wondered. My friend looked at me pityingly and tucked into a bowl of rosy Mylor harbor prawns, fried so that they could be crunched up whole like whitebait, salty-sweet and crisp.

We shared a plate of delectably light and creamy cod's roe mousse prettily piped onto toast soldiers, and a well seasoned beef tartare on more toast, spiked with slivers of horseradish-peppery nasturtium root. "You should try the steak for two," advised Milburn and he poured us glasses of the house red (£4). "It's from Galicia, properly aged and finished dairy cow." Tempting – but £75 for two people? Ouch.

Reader, we ordered it. It arrived sliced into trembling rouge-pink slices, edged with a darkly caramelized crust. Along side were cups of black rimmed onion (not all of it had to be reduced to butter-ash apparently) filled with meaty juices. It was rich, tender, and intensely beefy with (maybe I'm imagining it) just a hint of dairy cheesiness. Bloody lovely, we agreed, and that is a descriptor not a profanity. Mind you, the same could be said for Kitty Fishers. I'm told that while it's fully booked until Easter, there are places at the bar available every day. At last, there's a good, clean reason to visit Shepherd's Market.

***10 Shepherd Market, Mayfair, London W1J 7QF; 020 3302 1661;
kittyfishers.com***