



Dream team

Helena Lang savours a touch of Basque magic as Elena Arzak brings her family's exciting cuisine to a luxurious London hotel

When you work in public relations you know that the most important thing about eating out is to see and be seen, so if you're planning to court a new communications professional over dinner or arranging a night out with the team, the social status of the restaurant needs to be just as powerful as the food it serves.

Ametza with Arzak Instruction at The Halkin, a luxurious boutique hotel in London's Belgravia, is the ultimate in social currency. Elena Arzak, who was voted world's best female chef by *Veuve Clicquot* last year, oversees Ametsa, which means dream in Basque. She has



Quirky: the Buddha-Bar in London's Knightsbridge is a stylish spin-off from the Paris original

brought her father Juan Mari Arzak's innovative interpretation of New Basque cuisine to the capital from his eponymous, three-Michelin-starred restaurant in San Sebastián, Spain's foodie capital.

Ametza's interior is a slick, choreographed, theatrical experience of clinical, high-end décor and delicious experimental food. On the night of our visit we kicked off with a tableau of canapés, including king prawns wrapped in fried rice noodles, a cheese puzzle (a skilfully carved piece of goat's cheese) and a scorpion fish cake. Menu highlights were the red-skin sardines served with a dense orange sauce and the quick change squid – small parcels of butternut squash stuffed with squid and coated in a squid ink lacquer that dissolved when hot broth was poured over them.

Just as cool, but with a much quirkier environment, is the **Buddha-Bar** in London's Knightsbridge. A spin-off from the original Paris restaurant and lounge bar that inspired a



Spain on a plate: Ametsa with Arzak Instruction, top, serves innovative food in a slick dining room

thousand imitators and put ambient music on the map, this is a glamorous, smooth operation with serious sex appeal. The stylish, dark-wood interior features a central staircase designed for poseurs and a floating David Begbie Buddha sculpture, which presides over proceedings while chefs rustle up the finest Pacific Rim cuisine.

It's impossible to order a dud dish from this menu because there isn't one, but highlights include the Buddha-Bar chicken salad, which was sticky, sweet and crunchy, chilli salt crispy baby squid, mouthwatering platters of sushi and the roasted black cod with lemongrass miso. Even the desserts hit the high notes with the caramelised five-spice pear and lime yogurt making a perfect finish to a wonderful meal.

www.comohotels.com/thehalkin/dining/ametsa
www.buddhabarlondon.com

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They're all talking about...

Kaspar's Seafood Bar & Grill at The Savoy hotel in London

Smart, chic but casual and cool too, this is the perfect drop-in venue for delicious platters of smoked fish and oysters. Or perhaps you'll be tempted by the smoked salmon sausage served with apple sauerkraut and horseradish sauce or the smoky, Indonesian prawn salad. Finish off with a stunning Valrhona manjari chocolate sphere – a crisp, thin-shelled chocolate dome stuffed with passion fruit sorbet.

www.fairmont.com/savoy-london/dining/kaspars

What to order at...

Brasserie Forty 4, 44 The Calls, Leeds



At this bustling brasserie the best tables overlook the river Aire. Order **peppered fillet of mackerel** with potato salad and grain mustard to start and the **pork tenderloin** for your main course, which comes wrapped in Parma ham with apples, prunes and a calvados sauce. The **vanilla crème brûlée** is a delicious dessert.

www.brasserie44.com



Where I do business...

Amelia Rope, owner of **Milsoms**, in Dedham,

Essex, is fabulous and although it's just off the A12 it's bang in the heart of Constable country. There's lots of space and light, and the gardens are superb. You can have a great business lunch here without being overheard. Last time I was there I ordered an Asian spring roll of enoki mushroom and pak choi that came with roasted peanuts and dipping sauces, and a warm salad with golden sultanas, olives, bresaola and manchego cheese."

www.milsomhotels.com