



The chef recommends

We ask Tom Aikens, chef of newly opened restaurant Muse, for his London gastronomic highlights

WORDS JENNY ROWE



You opened Muse in January. How does it differ from your other London restaurant, Tom's Kitchen in Chelsea?
Well, Tom's Kitchen is an all-day British brasserie that serves seasonal British comfort food in a relaxed, informal setting. Muse is quite different because it is inspired by my life and all its pivotal relationships, experiences and influences, from the moment I first discovered food with my mother until I finally became a professional chef. Drawing from poignant memories of my childhood and career, each signature dish spotlights one key ingredient or element, allowing it to tell a story.

Why did you choose Belgravia as the location for Muse?
I had been looking for a new space to house a fine-dining restaurant for almost five years. I must have looked at 40 or 50 sites before I found the right building in June 2018. I was not searching for somewhere in Belgravia particularly, it was just luck. It has just the right amount of space I need to seat 25 guests and to be able to offer the right level of food and service.



Muse has two theatre kitchens so that every guest feels involved. Why did you incorporate this intimate aspect into your restaurant?
Watching chefs live in front of you is always magical and fun, and for each customer to see their entire meal created in front of them has always been popular. I want to give every guest the very best level of service and this includes feeling a part of and understanding the cooking processes. It's now important to give guests a real journey and experience as well as a great plate of food and high level of service.

How has the restaurant scene in London changed since you first came here 30 years ago?
Restaurants have become far more diverse and even



Previous page from top:
One of two intimate theatre kitchens inside Muse; fine dining inspired by Aikens' life and career; the renowned chef
Clockwise from far left:
Outside Tom Aikens' new restaurant, Muse; The Wolseley; fresh fare at Perilla; Pimlico Road Farmers' Market



Clockwise from this image:
The Good Life Eatery;
Mont Blanc for dessert
at Frenchie; the
Harwood Arms

more popular than ever before, which means that every single type of cuisine is now available in London at every price point. From fast casual to fine dining, there is something for everyone.

What kind of food does Britain do best?

Britain does so many things right at the highest level, from a great curry and the best fish and chips to an amazing gastropub feast; from organic plant-based food to the heady heights of Michelin-star dining. I ate recently at the Quality Chop House and it was all delicious and very British. I'd wanted to eat there for ages.

What's the most romantic restaurant in the city?

I actually don't think it's the restaurants that provide the romance, it's the couples that dine in them that have the magic. It depends on what floats your boat! Some say high-end fine dining, some say a great view, some say a great atmosphere... but I will never take my wife out on Valentine's Day, for example, as you shouldn't need an excuse to be romantic.

What's your favourite cheap eat in London?

I ate fairly recently at Chick'n'Sours. It was superb and ticked all the boxes of affordable, great, tasty food.

Do you have a favourite food or farmers' market?

As I live in Chelsea I would say that the Pimlico Road Farmers' Market is great to go along to. Depending on my mood, I'll go for anything from a veg burger to a 28-day-aged medium-rare rib eye.

What's your go-to pub to grab a drink outdoors in the sun?

The Harwood Arms in Fulham is a good one, great food...

What's the most atmospheric bar in the capital?

There are a couple that I like. The first because ►





From top to bottom:
Golden Egg Flan from
Cakes & Bubbles; China
Tang; The Quality
Chop House

they do a superb whiskey sour, which is my go-to cocktail and if done well, is always a sign of a good bar. You can get the best at China Tang at The Dorchester. I also like Lyaness cocktail bar set within the iconic Sea Containers hotel on the South Bank. It's very swanky, with a beautiful marble bar and views over the Thames.

What's your most frequented café?
I go to the Good Life Eatery on Sloane Avenue occasionally, or Café Colbert on Sloane Square. Come wintertime at breakfast I always order a bowl of hot porridge with mixed grains, banana and pumpkin seeds.

Where did you have your last truly memorable meal out?
I had a really great meal at Perilla not so long ago, cooked by the chef Ben Marks who has worked at Claridge's, Noma and The Square – and he's only 26! That's an amazing pedigree, so it's no wonder the food at Perilla on Newington Green is sublime.



PHOTOS © DAVID JENSEN PHOTOS/CHRIS COULSON



Where would you recommend for a late-night dessert?
I would go to Cakes & Bubbles as it's dessert heaven. It's run by Albert Adrià at the Hotel Café Royal and it will definitely give you the sugar rush you're looking for. And what to eat? That's tricky – it's all great!

What's your favourite spot for eating and people watching?
The best place, without question, is The Wolseley.

You're in Covent Garden for the first and only time in your life and only have an hour. Where do you go?
It has to be Frenchie. Gregory Marchand has worked at The Savoy, Gramercy Tavern in Manhattan, as well as for Jamie Oliver. When he was about to launch his first solo spot, he needed a name. And so Frenchie was born; opening in Paris first and now, of course, in Covent Garden. It's great food – inventive and tasty.



Left to right:
Café Colbert;
Chick'n'Sours

TOM'S PICKS

Muse
Belgravia; www.tomaikens.co.uk

Tom's Kitchen
Chelsea; www.tomskitchen.co.uk

Quality Chop House
Farringdon;
www.thequalitychophouse.com

Chick'n'Sours
Covent Garden, Islington,
Spitalfields, Haggerston;
www.chicknsours.co.uk

Pimlico Road Farmer's Market
Pimlico; www.lfm.org.uk

Harwood Arms
Fulham; www.harwoodarms.com

China Tang at The Dorchester
Mayfair;
www.chinatanglondon.co.uk

Lyaness
South Bank; www.lyaness.com

Good Life Eatery
Chelsea; www.goodlifeeatery.com

Café Colbert
Chelsea; www.colbertchelsea.com

Perilla
Dalston; www.perilladining.co.uk

Cakes & Bubbles at Hotel Café Royal
Soho; www.cakesandbubbles.co.uk

The Wolseley
St James's; www.thewolseley.com

Frenchie
Covent Garden;
www.frenchiecoventgarden.com

