

Art on a plate

Museums, galleries and even auction rooms pride themselves on the quality of their cafes. **Rachel Walker** gives a guided tour to great gastronomy, with a painting or two on the side



In my experience, you either are or aren't a "popcorn at the cinema" person. At £13.95 for a seat at my Odeon, I struggle to justify spending the equivalent of a small roasting joint on a box of popcorn, but with more than 50 free national museums and countless free galleries in the UK, it's considerably easier to justify spending the equivalent of a cinema ticket on a good meal to make the most of the otherwise free day out.

The concept of a museum restaurant emerged in the mid-19th century, when Henry Cole, the first director at the V&A, introduced one. It had first- and second-class menus, and a third-class service for "mechanics and all workmen... even for the humble working-class visitors".

The days of Victorian grandeur faded, though, and good museum or gallery restaurants became a rare find. Most were downgraded to cafeterias: self-service, plastic trays and cold chips. The late 1980s saw murmurs of change. Lunch at a museum started being a way of extending the experience once again — in 1988 the V&A ran a campaign asking: "Where else do they give you £100m worth of objets d'art free with every egg salad?"

The big change since then has been the egg salad. In the midst of a food revolution, where the high street, pubs and even food vans have smartened up their act, galleries and museums have followed suit. Top chefs have been installed, local ingredients have been sourced, kitchen gardens have been dug and planted. Now all that's left is for the public to enjoy the benefits.

LONDON AND THE SOUTHEAST

WORK OF ART

The Magazine, Serpentine Gallery, Hyde Park, London W2

The Magazine takes its name from the adjacent Serpentine Sackler Gallery, originally built as a gunpowder store. Two years ago, in a £14m project led by Zaha Hadid, a new light, modern dining room was created. Chef Emmanuel Eger's dishes mirror the aesthetic: light, structured and beautiful. There's a kids' menu too — art isn't an adults-only affair.

BEST VIEW IN THE HOUSE

The National Dining Room, National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London WC2

The floor-to-ceiling windows create a brilliantly light space, and offer views over Trafalgar Square. This is part of Oliver Peyton's portfolio, along with the Wallace Restaurant, the Orangery, Kew and many others, which come under the Great British Menu judge's company, Peyton and Byrne. An excellent escape for a leisurely lunch or afternoon tea.

peytonandbyrne.co.uk/the-national-dining-rooms

INIMITABLE INGREDIENTS

Bonhams Restaurant, Bonhams, Bond Street, London W1

Within a year of its launch, Bonhams restaurant has won a Michelin star and the head chef, Tom Kemble, has received wide acclaim for his thoughtful dishes. The sparsely decorated restaurant doesn't vie for attention with elegantly understated food, letting the exquisite ingredients speak for themselves. The only downside is that the only evening meal currently available is as a supper club on Thursdays (£55 for a four-course set menu).

bonhams.com/locations/RES/

FINE ART

Sotheby's Cafe, Sotheby's, Bond Street, London W1

The misleadingly named "cafe" perhaps harks back to the days when two courses in a brasserie-style setting may have felt like a light lunch to those who popped into Sotheby's. In fact, the elegance and starched linen create a sense of occasion. The set lunch at £22.50 is good value for such a chic meal in this part of town.

sothebys.com/en/inside/services/sothebys-caf.html



PICTURE PERFECT

Rex Whistler, Tate Britain, Pimlico, London SW1

The Arcadian mural *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats* that covers the walls of Tate Britain's basement restaurant is breathtaking. The eatery takes its name from the artist who painted the mural at the age of 23, in 1927. Decor aside, the restaurant is known for having one of London's best wine lists (about 40 pages long) and often features some good game dishes, in tribute to the mural.

tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain/eat-drink-and-shop/rex-whistler-restaurant

STYLISH AND SEASONAL

No 67, South London Gallery, Camberwell, London SE5

The gallery was founded in 1891 to "bring art to the people of south London". Five years ago, some brave soul decided that the people of Camberwell were ready for some decent gallery food, too. The "Spanglish" brunch, featuring chargrilled chorizo and morcilla, has quickly won a cult following, as have the lunch and dinner menus, which feature elegant seasonal dishes, from braised rabbit with broad beans to pumpkin and lentil soup.

number67.co.uk

ARTS+CRAFT

Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft Cafe, Hassocks, East Sussex

The designers of this cafe, which opened in 2013, commissioned bespoke crockery that complements the decor: craft tables and chairs in an exposed timber and brick interior. The menu doesn't veer far from top-notch quiche and cakes, much of it from local producers.

ditchlingmuseumartcraft.org.uk/shop-cafe

SEA VIEW

De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex

The sea view is a stunning backdrop for lunch at this grade I listed arts centre. The floor-to-ceiling windows mean there's no bad seat in the house, and the location is reflected in the

menu, with locally smoked mackerel, south-coast crab and fish and chips. When the sun is out, the balcony is one of the best spots on the seafront.

dlwp.com/eat-and-drink

WEST AND SOUTHWEST HARBOUR MASTER

Arnolfini Cafe, Arnolfini, Bristol

With good food and speedy wi-fi, it's easy to while away a few hours here. As the sun sets, the metropolitan cafe becomes a buzzing bar. There's an Italian bent to the menu, with boards of cured meats, inventive pizza and salads. It's a great place to end the night with a glass of sangiovese after one of the gallery's short-film shows.

arnolfini.org.uk/visit/cafe-bar

WHEN IN ROME

The Pump Room Restaurant, Roman Baths, Bath

The Pump Room Restaurant first opened in 1706 and has retained its Georgian grandeur: grand columns, elaborate cornices and a string trio that accompanies the celebrated afternoon tea. Make sure you try a glass of warm, mineral-rich water from the fountain, which is what first tempted people to this spot more than 2,000 years ago.

romanbaths.co.uk/pump-room-restaurant

DOWN ON THE FARM

Roth Bar & Grill, Hauser & Wirth, Bruton, Somerset

Taking advantage of the working-farm location, chef Steve Horrell has committed to sourcing ingredients where possible from within a five-mile radius, curing meats in the on-site salt room and churning his own butter. The dining room is in a converted cowshed adorned with artwork (including a Henry Moore drawing). See the gardens and make a weekend of it by staying in the impeccable Durslade Farmhouse.

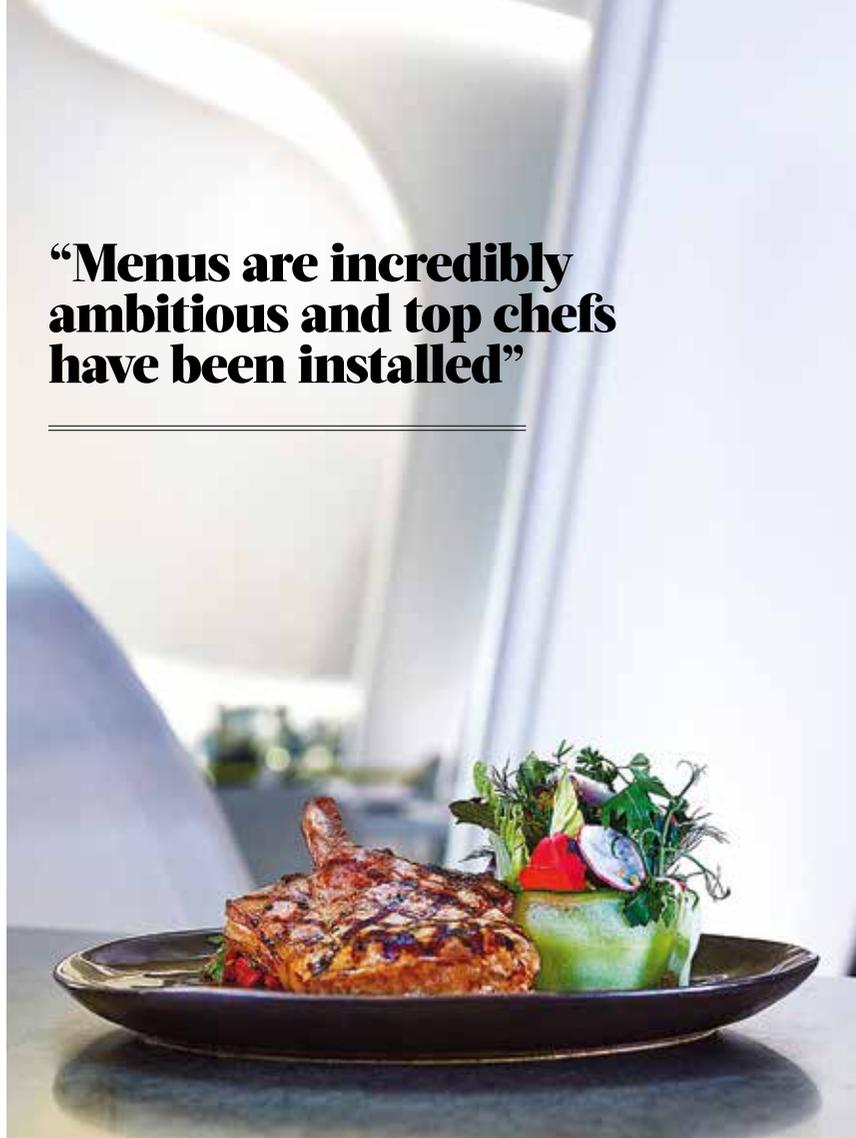
rothbarandgrill.co.uk

NORTHWEST EVERYONE'S WELCOME

Oak Street Cafe Bar, Manchester Craft & Design Centre, Manchester

The working studios in the Craft &

"Menus are incredibly ambitious and top chefs have been installed"



Design Centre are a reminder of the city's huge artistic talent, and the Oak Street Cafe is a reminder of its culinary flair. The counters are laden with delicious quiches, colourful salads and homemade cakes. Owner Karen Hadgett provides plenty of vegan and gluten-free options in a relaxed atmosphere.

craftanddesign.com/oak-st-cafe-bar

WELL-KEPT SECRET

Treeby & Bolton, Keswick, Cumbria

In this small commercial gallery in the picturesque town of Keswick, owner Libbie Graham displays a range of eclectic artwork alongside Moorcroft pottery and crockery by Royal Crown Derby. The cafe downstairs does a superb line in cakes — a highlight was the generous wedge of lemon meringue pie — as well as local cheeses such as Black Dub Blue and Eden Chieftain.

treebybolton.co.uk/visit/cafe

EAST, MIDLANDS AND NORTHEAST VEGETARIAN

Art Cafe North, Norfolk

In the Glaven Valley is a little hamlet called Glandford, where there is a converted barn with bright blue doors. Peek behind them and you'll discover a beautiful gallery-cum-restaurant where the ever-changing vegetarian menu showcases some of Norfolk's best produce. The highlights are on the sweet counter — chocolate torte served with beetroot sorbet, or chocolate and chilli cake, both delicious with a punchy little Grey Seal coffee, which is roasted nearby.

art-cafe.org

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME

Hobbs Fish and Chip Shop, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, West Midlands

This open-air museum provides an insight into Britain's industrial past. The smell of coal fires fills the air



Lunch on the horizon Stunning views from the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea. The converted cowshed at Roth Bar & Grill in Bruton, Somerset, left. A visual feast at the Magazine, at the Serpentine Gallery, London, far left

WALES, SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

BIG CHEESE

Peppers, West Wales Art Centre, Fishguard, Pembrokeshire

You know you're in Wales when you start a meal with Llandyrnog cheddar soufflé and round it off with Perl Wen brie and Welsh cakes. This Fishguard institution is known for more than its food, though. Peppers is integrated with the West Wales Art Centre, whose artwork adorns the walls. It's also a music venue, so expect a community buzz, and often a live soundtrack to your dinner.

peppers-hub.co.uk/food/

COCKTAIL HOUR

Kelvingrove Cafe, Glasgow

This cafe isn't officially linked with Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, but it's less than five minutes' walk, and their shared name is enough of a link to lure in gallery-goers. The cafe-cum-diner channels a Brooklyn vibe and does great food, brunch to dinner. It comes alive as the sun sets, when the sound of Boston shakers rattle above the chatter. Pop by to try one of the bar's 20 house cocktails.

kelvingrovecafe.com

BREAKING GROUND

Saramago Cafe, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow

Vegan and Scottish aren't words often uttered in the same sentence, but the chefs here aren't bothered. The menu in this light, airy bar flits from roast cauliflower with salsa verde to pizza with courgette, roast garlic, cherry tomatoes and pine nuts, while the terrace is perfect for a drink. The biggest steal is the pre-theatre menu: three courses for £12.95, 5pm-7pm.

cca-glasgow.com/saramago-caf

THE OPULENT OPTION

Tower Restaurant, National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh

Views of the Edinburgh skyline don't get much better than this, and the menu is everything you'd expect from the National Museum of Scotland: Dingwall haggis, Isle of Skye brown crab, as well as lobster, hand-dived scallops and cheddar

from the Isle of Mull. The set menu has plenty of tempting options and helps to contain the bill, with a two-course lunch for £18.95 and three-course supper for £35.

tower-restaurant.com/

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

Contini: the Scottish Cafe and Restaurant, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

The sharing platters at Contini are perfect for propelling you around the gallery — Clava Brie and Lanark Blue, Orkney oatcakes and chutney are a simple but delicious combination. Restaurateurs Victor and Carina Contini pledged to use locally sourced sustainable food — while their Italian heritage shines through with mains such as roe deer osso bucco and barley risotto with wild mushrooms.

contini.com/scottish-cafe-and-restaurant

SECRET SCOTLAND

Kilmartin Museum Cafe, Lochgilphead, Argyll

This archaeology museum might be off the beaten track, but it hasn't stopped it competing with the best when it comes to a tempting tea. After studying the exhibits and wandering round the Temple Wood Stone Circles, enjoy a hearty bowl of soup or homemade cake in the green-oak conservatory, while enjoying views over Kilmartin Glen.

kilmartin.org/cafe.html

GARDEN VIEWS

Quails at the Gallery, FE McWilliam, Banbridge, Co Down

The burgers are huge, the sandwiches generously filled and the views over the sculpture park a great way to extend a visit to this gallery showing the work of the surrealist sculptor Frederick Edward McWilliam. The downside can be the weather — the exposed location and large windows mean it can get cold, so bring layers if you're planning a long lunch.

femcwilliam.com/Your-visit/Quails-At-The-Gallery.aspx

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as visitors are invited to explore mineshafts and canal tunnels, and even practise their handwriting on slates in the classroom. Enjoy a pint at the replica pub the Bottle & Glass Inn before heading to Hobbs, where the chips are chunky, the batter is crisp and it tastes of Friday-night nostalgia. Just make sure you bring cash — there were no ATMs back then.

bclm.co.uk/visiting/where-to-eat-drink/21.htm

GIVING BACK

The Tetley Bar & Kitchen, The Tetley, Leeds, West Yorkshire

All the profits are ploughed straight back into the artistic and educational programming at this Leeds centre for contemporary art and learning, housed in the old Tetley HQ. The menu acknowledges its heritage with dishes such as Tetley's ale and beef stew, and Tetley's-battered fish and chips — and the dining-room tables are fashioned from timber reclaimed from the old brewery. Particularly popular is the first Thursday of the month, when the kitchen runs a set menu (two courses for £13.95 or three for £18.95) — be sure to book ahead.

thetetley.org/bar-kitchen

RIDING HIGH

The Hepworth Wakefield Cafe Bar, Wakefield, West Yorkshire

The modern aesthetic of this iconic building is continued in the cafe, with its simple black and white palette and views over the River Calder. The menu is short, hearty and well priced — think Barnsley lamb chop or slow-braised beef for less than £10. There's also the option of a classic afternoon tea for two (£14.95), served with Yorkshire tea.

hepworthwakefield.org/cafe

RIVERSIDE WAREHOUSE

Baltic Kitchen, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art is based in a converted flour mill on the south bank of the River Tyne — and the lofty proportions are reflected in its beautiful cafe. It does a solid line in soups and salads, with "sharing basket" meals for two and particularly good ice-cream milkshakes. On a sunny day, diners can spill out onto Baltic Square, which looks out over Gateshead Millennium Bridge and the industrial riverside surroundings.

balticmill.com/visit/baltic-kitchen