

# Food porn *in Fitzrovia*

The best independent coffee shops are starting to counter the blandness of high street chains with inspiring offers. In the vanguard of the movement is Peter Dore-Smith's Kaffeine in Great Titchfield Street, London, where the food is as fantastic as the coffee. Nellie Nichols meets the 'true coffee Messiah'



Nellie Nichols





I must admit I rather admire Lynne Rosenthal, the English professor recently ejected from Starbucks in New York for refusing to partake in their 'linguistic fascism'. Like her, time and again I've been corrected while ordering in the big coffee chains and their terminology has been irritating me for so long I've given up buying my latte anywhere that sells more than one size.

Coffee making in London has lost its way in too many establishments with what has become a sea of mass produced poor quality drinks made by the under qualified, using stale beans, overheated milk and dirty machines, often resulting in over-extracted, under-dosed burnt stuff.

But dress it up with a pretentious name and many of the eight million who buy it will be forgiving. Finding anyone to make a decent cup of coffee the way it really should be done with the right dedication and attention to detail has been hard to find.

For a truly genuine coffee experience, it will require a little patience while it's being made and a bit of queuing in the independents that are now appearing around town. Fernandez & Wells, The Monmouth Coffee Company, Flat White, Milk Bar, Ottolenghi are all on my list if I'm passing, and now a new addition: Kaffeine in Great Titchfield Street.

Peter Dore-Smith, originally from Australia, came to London four years ago with a first class, twenty-year track record in the hospitality industry. Walking the streets of London, his vision became to create an environment with brilliant coffee and light, fresh food in an architecturally creative space, with outstanding hospitality standards.

Fast forward to the here and now and it would be safe



to say he has achieved this and a great deal more in what is just one year almost to the day since he opened. The reality is that he has conceived a coffee Mecca in a creative part of London which has welcomed his presence with open arms and wallets.

I'm sitting at one of the benches in this little shop in

Fitzrovia waiting to meet him. I later learn he has measured this bench precisely to be sure that enough room was left for customers and staff to pass the other side of comfortably in front of the main counter. The bench I sit on is a solid block of wood and there is a thoughtfully provided ledge below for feet to rest on. This

bench and seat are at the perfect height to just fractionally look down upon the counter opposite and the coffee making that is taking place with such dedication.

In front of me is a small, round glass jar for jam with a slot in its lid for its accompanying glass spoon. Attached to the lid is a tiny, white handwritten label tied with its little piece of white string, the sort of label you would find tied to a deco lamp in a dark and dusty antique shop in Arundel. On the label is carefully and beautifully written; Carrot and Lemon Marmalade. It's all I can do to stop myself sticking my finger in it for a lick of its orangeness.

Peter is willowy tall and fascinating to listen to. He talks with a fresh approach to an industry he respects he has just walked into with an intoxicating mixture of creative knowledge, humility and common sense. His belief is that there was a time when coffee was being treated badly in Australia, which underwent a fundamental change for the better in the late 90's, resulting in a vastly improved quality with a great injection of effort.

Now he believes this is happening in London and that consumer awareness is now being fed by the thirst for food programmes, celebrity cooks such as Oliver, and markets such as Borough.

He has without doubt achieved something remarkable in the form of a true coffee Mecca in under a year, and on the back of a recession to boot. His Baristas are mainly from Australia and New Zealand and all of them will take the time to show you how their Synesso works, the 'Rolls Royce' of coffee machines and only one of eight currently in the UK; how clean the machine is, how precise the grinding dosage is, smell the beans and have a lesson, all of it

# NELLIE NICHOLS



precision driven. Even latte art has become sophisticated here: a different picture on the top of each and every single cup, designs are never repeated. Rumour has it if you ask Catherine nicely she will even do you a swan run over by a truck.

I ask him what he considers the bedrock of his success to date and he immediately refers to his remarkable staff whom, I have to say, are charmingly efficient - when I walk by a week later I am greeted by name and another genuine warm welcome.

But I am dying to move him on and find out about his food, which, behind and above a single glass counter with a slate base represents in the mid-morning the most outrageous, sumptuous selection of home made bakery goods.

There are muffins bursting from their cases with strawberries and others made with sweet potato, white chocolate blondies, super moist dark chocolate brownies, carrot cake fronds and Portuguese tarts. Earlier in the morning there is toast and banana bread to have with that delicious marmalade and other jams are constantly made and sold; raspberry, greengage and plum. Then there is the most indulgent croissant you will probably ever find made with Italian roast ham, tallegio cheese, spinach leaves and plum tomatoes.

There is a constant stream of regulars, the door incessantly opening and closing, the cakes and muffins replaced by even more delicious new and different ones as fast as they disappear. It's almost impossible to keep up with the never ending choice in such a small area. Before I know it lunch is arriving and I want everything I see: a giant mushroom, goats cheese and thyme tart cut into huge wedges, plates piled high with chantenay carrot, kumra (white fleshed sweet potato), red rice, orange segments and rocket salad, mountainous tiny new potatoes with a sweet wholegrain mustard dressing, another salad of rocket, gem lettuce, coppa cotta ham, pecorino and strawberries. Huge hand wrapped chunks of sea salt and rosemary crusted focaccias stuffed with tuna, roasted red peppers and aioli or ones with Italian ham, the squiggliest of brie, home roasted seasonal apricots and spinach. This is full on, sensual, hard core glorious food porn and I'm just loving it. None of it particularly cheap but just the sight of it will have you running to the cash point without a care in the world to return as fast as you can to

buy what will be one of the best lunches you will experience in a long while.

The talent behind this stove is Jared, a chef from New Zealand whom Peter is personally sponsoring. Every week he creates a small menu incorporating seasonality using a valuable market report from Chefs Connection, who source the unusual and the best possible ingredients for chefs and restaurants all over London.

Jared, like many chefs I have met or come across from either New Zealand or Australia, has a totally unique interpretation of recipes and the creative pairings and combinations that create them. He works with many fruits: the addition in salads of strawberries; the soft sweet slightly acidic addition of warm apricots he grills with seeded mustard and honey piled in a ham focaccia; his apple butter - these all offer an effortless deliciousness I can't imagine finding anywhere else.

But make no mistake, this will not be the first of a chain. Peter is a realist, he knows he can't clone or duplicate these marvellously cheerful and dedicated staff, and anyway he believes there is a real move towards the

smaller artisan operator and instead will diversify into another part of the industry in some way.

He has achieved a remarkable result very fast through his own natural ability to connect with his customers, being the owner on site, creating loyalty on a personal level, not through using cards with little ink stamps on them to get customers to come back. He calls it the power of the handshake.

He brims with new ideas: 'keep cups,' which are given to customers to take coffee back to their offices in - he just asks for the cups to be washed before they are returned for a refill. He talks of the next coffee he believes will be the Long Black to follow the Flat White.

He insists I am shown how a ristretto is made, the purest small shot of coffee imaginable.

When it is made I have to confess I have never tasted anything like it and six hours later I can still feel it. This is one of the many reasons Kaffeine has already reached the status of being one of the top ten coffee shops in London that is frequented by every visiting barista from around the world, who sign one of Peter's many specialist books on coffee when they are here.

Divinely inspired, I skip off down the road to Oxford Street. I have just met the true coffee Messiah.

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