



Ostentation is off the menu at this deliberately pared-back venture from the founder of Frieze, where dishes are artfully assembled. Fay Maschler approves

MY SECOND HUSBAND, Reg Gadney, had a bit of a thing, he said, for the children's books editor Jill Slotover. You don't expect second husbands to arrive unencumbered, so I wasn't much concerned and just thought what a cool name. Then I registered that Jill's son Matthew Slotover was the chap behind *Frieze* magazine and, later, the Frieze Art Fair. The fairs in London and elsewhere always involve reckonable catering and now Matthew and his partner, Amanda Sharp, have opened a restaurant called Toklas in the brutalist building 180 The Strand occupied by Frieze offices and an iteration of Soho House. Of course I am riveted.

Since the sad closure of Rochelle Canteen's second home at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Toklas – named after Alice B Toklas, the lover of Gertrude Stein

Eat, Fay, love



The Countess of Carnarvon's venison ragu with tagliatelle

Serves 4

1kg venison
Olive oil
200g pancetta
1 carrot, chopped
1 stick celery, chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
3 tbsp tomato purée
1 tin of passata
1 bouquet garni
4 cloves garlic, chopped
500ml red wine
500ml beef stock
500g tagliatelle
Large knob of butter
Parmesan for serving

'Pulled venison works so well in a ragu. It's a perfect recipe when one has plenty of time and delicious served with asparagus spears and a couple of roasted baby carrots.' Heat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas 6. Season the venison, drizzle with olive oil, then roast for 2 hours. Reserve the pan juices. Fry the pancetta, add the vegetables, tomato purée, passata, bouquet garni and garlic. Cook on a low heat for 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Pull the roast venison with two forks and add the vegetables. Fry on a high heat for 10 minutes. Add the roasting juices, wine and stock. Simmer, cover and cook in the oven for 90 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cook the pasta, reserving a small amount of the liquid to add to the meat ragu. Add the butter to the pasta and coat with the sauce. Top with grated Parmesan.

and, in my upbringing, famed author of the go-to recipe for hash fudge published in the *Alice B Toklas Cookbook* – feels like the establishment poised to take on that mantle. One of my dinner companions described it as 'a place where unostentatious, clever people get together and talk about clever things'. Naturally, we include ourselves in that category.

The assembly of deliberately plain, pared-back spaces smelling sweetly of oiled wood includes not just restaurant and bar but also a bakery set up by Adam Sellar, who was responsible for establishing The Angel Bakery in Abergavenny and, before that, the Little Bread Pedlar. There is a grocery shop, too. When the weather plays ball, the 3,000-square-foot terrace, beautifully planted and with a possible crane-your-neck view of the river, will come into its own.

In the open kitchen the head chef is Martyn Lyons, who has worked with Ollie Dabbous, as well as with Skye Gyngell at Spring and Sam and Sam Clark at Moro – all very fit, desirable names on a CV. In her handsome head my friend Kate has got Alice B Toklas

muddled with Alice Waters, founder of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. She consequently falls on the panisses – chickpea chips served here as a snack with fried sage – with unfounded, but as it turns out completely appropriate, enthusiasm. They are airily light, hot and crisp, bristling with grated Parmesan. A good foil is the celery, anchovies and almonds – more assemblage than cooking, but all components with claims to health benefits and the anchovies plump and salty without being aggressive.

The kitchen favours chicken, fish and vegetables over red meat. Main-course-priced assemblies of cuttlefish, mussel and chickpea stew served with a scoop of aioli, and cod with borlotti beans, red chard and salsa verde exhibit a profound comprehension of what flatters what and how. My former colleague David makes me laugh describing his squid with polenta, tomatoes and coriander as soft, well-seasoned, beautifully burnished when 'usually I find it too chewy, the doormat of the sea'. Fettucine with buffalo butter and Parmesan – 'cacio e pepe' by another name – is a delight, as are clams with sherry and grilled bread. Dessert is four scoops of fabulous ice cream to share, the nubbly pistachio with crunch, chew and silky creaminess arguably the best.

Choice of wines leans towards low intervention and natural but not in the way that demands a new set of taste buds. The Alsace Riesling chosen by my gastroenterologist friend Sean – the ideal pal for a restaurant reviewer – is low on acidity, crystalline in the mouth. Service is graceful as if 'we are all in this together'. Which we are. □
toklaslondon.com

CANTEEN CULTURED

Minimalist interiors at these fashionably low-key restaurants means the focus is kept firmly on the food

Restaurant de Kas

'Harvested in the morning. On your plate in the afternoon. Following the seasons one day at a time,' says this long-established East Amsterdam restaurant, where an old greenhouse has been renovated with natural materials and clean lines.
restaurantdekas.com

Café Cecilia

Max Rocha, son of John Rocha, brother of Simone, not surprisingly attracts a fashion-conscious crowd to his deliberately plain café in E8. Stints at The River Café and St John Bread & Wine are evident in both competence and attitude.
cafececilia.com

Prado Restaurante

Spare, light and lofty, this former jam factory in Lisbon with health-forward cooking, natural and biodynamic Portuguese wines and locally brewed kombucha is much liked by local artists, architects, curators, designers, hipsters – and, of course, by visitors.
pradorestaaurante.com