

Dining Adventures

By David Rottenberg

Fine restaurants come in all sorts of shapes and sizes.

Sometimes the most highly regarded places are small dining rooms located in remote villages that have become meccas to foodies who are willing to go on pilgrimages for the perfect meal.

But, in the past 10 years, many famous chefs have established their dining palaces in major hotels.

Theo Randall, the London restaurant that is named after its owner and chef, is located in the lobby of the InterContinental Hotel London Park Lane. He opened his own restaurant in 2006 after working for many years at The River Café, garnering a Michelin star.

The InterContinental Hotel London Park Lane lives up to the highest standards of the InterContinental brand, which has a worldwide reputation for luxury and service.

One can almost immediately sense the wealth of the guests. The lobby is full of visitors from Dubai, Oman and Saudi Arabia who come to London to shop and for the entertainment. There is a

melding of traditional Arab dress, expensive suits and shabbiness whose wealth is displayed by gold watches and jewelry. The ambiance is international, multi-cultural and, frankly, very exciting.

At the end of the lobby, the Cookbook Café features a clever restaurant concept.

Cookbooks are available for reading and buying while dining on outstanding cuisine.

In fact, the recipes for the dishes one may be enjoying can be reviewed while eating.

The Sunday brunch at the Cookbook Café, with its buffet of fresh produce and delicious hot dishes, should not be missed.

Rooms at the InterContinental are large by London standards.

The concierge floor, though slightly more expensive, allows entry to the lounge, which contains computers for guests to use, an ongoing food service with beverages (including wine and liquor), and hot and cold dishes that were exceptionally good.

London is a fascinating city. It is a mixture of history and modernity, where a steel and glass structure abuts the streets where kings walked hundreds of years ago.

There is great pageantry, colorful costumes, castles to

explore and narrow alleyways that lead to marvelous shops. Located in Hyde Park Corner, surrounded by green parks and historic monuments, the InterContinental is well located for serious exploration of the city.

It is no wonder that Theo Randall selected this property for his own restaurant.

He built a relatively small dining room — only 124 seats — in a comfortable yet minimalist style that allows focus on the cuisine. Opened in 2006, it has become the new destination for foodies and has just been awarded the recognition of "Italian Restaurant Of The Year" by London Restaurant Awards 2008. The panel of judges was comprised of critics working for some of London's most important newspapers.

London's restaurant scene has changed. Whereas at one time people looked down at the idea of dining in the city, anticipating bland cooking, now London is filled with thousands of places to eat and a dazzling variety of ethnic food choices.

Randall was inspired by his parents, who often took him to Italy, where they showed him the delights of freshly pressed olive oil, cheeses, pasta and other fine items that they found in their travels.

When he grew up, he ended up working for many years at The River Café, spent time at Chez Panisse and returned to The River Café to help the restaurant acquire a Michelin star. But there is nothing like controlling one's own destiny in one's own restaurant — the dream of every chef.

Randall's menu is continually changing and developing, but incorporates the freshest of products and his flair for combining flavors. Prices are competitive, given the reputation and quality.

The InterContinental had just completed a \$150,000,000 renovation so it was a good match for Randall and the property. On a visit to London, staying at InterContinental Hotel London Park Lane and dining at Theo Randall is a combination that will make the trip most memorable. For more information, visit ichotelsgroup.com and theorandall.com.

Rottenberg is editor of Dining San Diego Magazine and member of the California Restaurant Writers Association. Send comments to the editor@sddt.com. All letters are forwarded to the author and may be used as Letters to the Editor.

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