

# The Economist

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BLACK HOLE

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WHAT MOTIVATES  
MICROSOFT?

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## MOREOVER

### Art in London restaurants

# Watching where you eat

## Art is coming to count as much as food in smart London restaurants

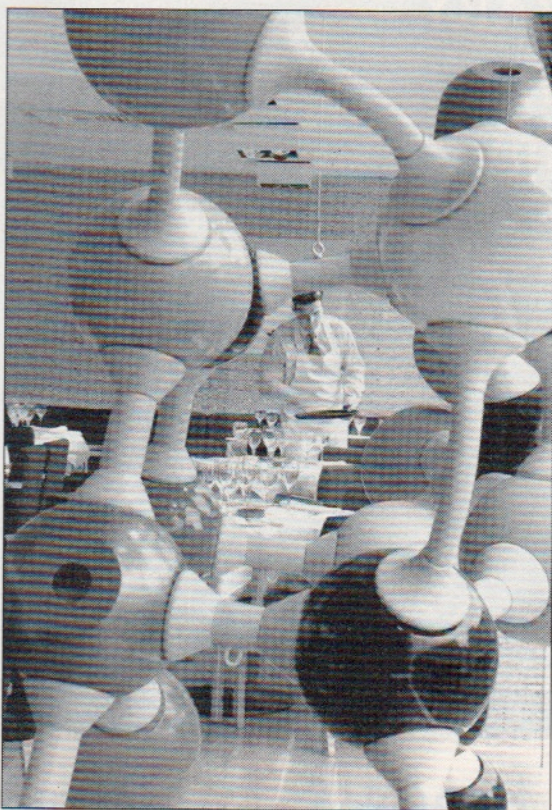
AS EVOLUTION goes, from cave to restaurant is not a huge leap. Neolithic artists painted walls with what they hunted and ate. So nowadays art counts more and more in the chase to create fashionable restaurants: what's on the walls can matter as much as what's on the plate. Nowhere is that truer than London, which may not

style, shows a late-Victorian hunt setting out from a palace; maids wave from the windows, children bathe under a nearby bridge. On its (ultimately successful) journey through mountains and forests in search of wild quail, sturgeon and truffles, the party encounters a unicorn and a leopard, resists the temptation of mermaids, and drinks scented tea with Chinese mandarins. Whistler, who died at 39 in military action in 1944, had an enchanting eye for curious detail, and painted well.

Good art in restaurants depends on owners with courage and original taste. Chris Corbin, who co-runs The Ivy in London's theatreland, recalls Peter Langan's restaurant in the 1970s: "It wasn't like any other restaurant, I remember walking in, and they were nailing a David Hockney to the wall with six-inch nails." Langan, who died in 1988, has left behind two art-rich restaurants: his Brasserie off Piccadilly, and Odins. At the latter, opened in 1965, David Hockney and a fellow art student, Patrick Proctor, eked out their grants by helping in the kitchens. Langan was then chef, until he relaunched Odins himself two years later. Semi-hidden at Odins among lush Art Nouveau lamps and mirrors, portraits of Edwardian society beauties and academic landscapes, are works

by Messrs Proctor, Kitaj and Hockney. The fine and subtle drawings by Mr Hockney immortalise Langan the restaurateur in red braces, with dishevelled hair.

In "The Ivy: The Restaurant and its Recipes" (Hodder and Stoughton; £25), A. A. Gill surveys a frenetically composed day in the life there. This, he says, is "the pre-eminent club of the British theatre, drama's green room", and he speculates that its two 40-something male owners have "invented a perfect world with the glamour and sophistication that their comparatively bleak provincial childhoods never had." The setting is indeed the antithesis of bleak. Leading contemporary British artists—Peter Blake, Howard Hodgkin, Patrick Caulfield and others—were commissioned to make site-specific works for The Ivy's relaunch in 1990. A bronze entrance screen



Scrubbing up before serving up

have the world's best food, but as a French restaurant critic ruefully admitted not long ago, probably does have more than its share of chic eateries.

At Pharmacy in Notting Hill, do not expect to get your Prozac or Seroxat. This new venture of Damien Hirst's, perhaps Britain's best-known conceptual artist, is a restaurant. In its pristine, terminally smart space, the waiters wear grey hospital garb designed by Prada and serve an "anaesthetic compound" (vodka, chartreuse and krupnik) from a bar lined by pharmaceutical packets. The medicine chests recall the Hirst displays "Holidays" and "No Feelings" in London's Saatchi collection.

Quite different is the world of the Tate Gallery restaurant, where murals by Rex Whistler cover the four walls. His "Pursuit of Rare Meats", painted in neo-classical

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by Eduardo Paolozzi greets the visitor with a jazzy flourish and bold Art Deco curls. It is reminiscent of first-night glamour of earlier times, when Noel Coward and Marlene Dietrich were Ivy-habitues. Upstairs, in a dining room available for hire, is museum-quality 20th-century British art, including works by David Bomberg, Jacob Kramer and Keith Vaughan.

In Soho's Dean Street, at two nearby establishments, important aspects of British art from the 1950s to the present day can be imbibed and consumed. The Colony Room, a private members' drinking club, is a small, brashly green-painted space up some narrow stairs. Many a famous British artist has tumbled down those stairs into the Soho streets to be amazed that it was light (or dark). Run at one time by the scandalously witty Muriel Belcher (painted several times by Francis Bacon), the Colony Club is evoked in paintings, letters and cartoons on its walls. For Bacon, whose presence is recalled in ubiquitous photographs and signed posters, the Colony was "a place to go where one feels free and easy". His fellow "School of London" artists, Lucien Freud, Frank Auerbach and Michael Andrews, whose large, hessian, Bonnard-inspired mural still hangs here, suffused with three decades of nicotine, felt the same. Since Bacon's death in 1992, a new generation of British artists, notably Mr Hirst—one of whose coloured dot paintings hangs over the bar—and the portraitist Justin Mortimer, also represented here, have made this their own watering hole.

Down the road, the restaurant Quo Vadis has become a showcase for Mr Hirst's own private collection of contemporary British art—by himself and his friends. Works veer from the jokily banal—a fibreglass banana skin, a framed set of receding cigarette ends—to deliberately disorientating pieces. An example is a stark set of black-and-white photographs by Tomoko Yoneda, showing heat burns on peeling wallpaper above a radiator, interior shots of poverty positioned in such a way as to provoke and unsettle the upmarket diner. Having dined on spit-roast suckling pig with apple sauce in the ground floor restaurant, he or she may go upstairs to the bar for a drink—only to be leered at by two bulls' heads (displayed in matching glass cases by Mr Hirst), pickled and puckering in formaldehyde. A form of culinary justice perhaps.

Cosmopolitan London is reflected, too. Chor Bizarre, an Indian restaurant in New Delhi, has opened a branch in London's Mayfair. It is a fabulous and magical setting, furnished entirely with antiques (Indian and colonial European) bought in the markets of India. There are inlaid camel-head benches and painted peacock-and-lion chairs from Rajasthan, a table made from a traditional Indian four-poster bed

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decorated with embroidered cloth of gold, Hindu devotional paintings, showcases housing exquisite jewellery and carved peasant objects. Many of the works are for sale. To dine here is both an educational and aesthetic experience.

The visitor to a restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel near Hyde Park will be astonished to find a room there full of paintings by an Australian artist, Robert Campbell Junior, who died in 1993, aged 49. "He was perhaps the finest of the first generation of urban Aboriginal artists," says a London-based Australian art dealer, Rebecca Hossack. His pictures, composed of beautifully fluid lines and dots, depict an innocently imagined outback where people are happily encamped among kangaroos, snakes, trees and spinifer grasses. In one quite different picture, however, an atom bomb (its cloud painted in familiar tiny dots) is being detonated at the geographical heart of the Australian continent. A disturbing image in a temple of haute cuisine. Anyone for mushrooms?