

Chef test

By Laura Enfield

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In childhood, the only salad that would pass my pursed lips was tomatoes fresh from the vine in my grandad's kitchen garden.

That juicy flesh has never been matched. Until now.

I had been lured on my first visit to Sanderson London by the name of its new executive chef Barry Tonks, but inside I was a kid once more, posing on the giant lips sofa, cooing over the flower swing and giggling after bar chairs with fluttering eyelashes.

Barry has come up with a menu of seasonal classics such as steak tartare and sea bass but with twists like bbq sourdough and crab ketchup.

I chose the crispy pig's head to start but was disappointed with the bread-crumbed cigar. It needed the punch of a moist chutney to lift the meat instead of the scattering of dry Pecorino.

My covetous gaze turned pure green as my friend devoured her burrata and tomato salad with lip-smacking glee and I knew I had to have a taste.

So to temper my heavy beef fillet, with its rich coating of Cafe Du Paris butter and black garlic puree, I ordered the most simple dish on the menu.

The heritage tomatoes arrived glistening with olive oil and basil. From the first bite it was deep, passionate love.

Long after the delicious whipped rice pudding with accents of mango had disappeared I was still basking in the ruby glow of those tomatoes.

Barry, you made my innocent joy ripen into full blown lust.



The burrata and tomato salad

Laura Enfield ingests and digests before mulling over experiences on behalf of *The Wharf's* readers

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this is pure Italian decadence



Chef Emanuele Morisi at Villa Di Geggiano in Chiswick and, right, dining on the terrace

Jon Massey ventures across London to savour the pleasures of Chiswick

There's a certain type of carefree hedonism the west of the capital does better than the east.

While Villa Di Geggiano might just about have managed the City, it's not a restaurant that would comfortably sit in the E-postcodes proper.

They lack the buoyant lagoon of West End economic stability that can sustain eccentric decadence.

The Villa is the kind of place that relies on the moneyed to keep its flavours honeyed wrapped up in an aesthetic just the right side of crazed.

For the corporate market, it's an oasis of unexpected depth set back from Chiswick High Road – playing host to banks and businesses.

Boasting two private dining rooms catering for up to 28 or 16 guests, its facilities also include a 50-cover terrace, a comfortable lounge area, meeting rooms, what amounts to a private flat and a sparkling restaurant space.

But why bother to make the journey all the way from Canary Wharf?

While there are plenty of pleasant places for hire locally that don't involve a lengthy car journey or sweaty hour-long marathon to Stamford Brook on the Tube, none deliver the same character as a meal at the Villa.

Before we go any further, let's get things straight.

The actual Villa Di Geggiano is an Italian wine estate with five centuries of history.

Its London outpost has been around a few years, having risen in the shell of a failed joint venture between Marco Pierre White and Frankie Dettori.

With trompe l'oeil shutters, it's a fair pastiche of the original and carries the spirit of the Bianchi Bandinelli family throughout – most notably that of art historian, archaeologist, anti-fascist and Marxist Ranuccio, who once showed Hitler around Rome.

With the work of eight artists in residence on show, diners are surrounded by curiosities large and small.

Gently dominating the main restaurant space, for example, is Nic Parnell's coloured tree – a piece of timber flocked in bright colours to soften its form.

Thousands of words could

be written on the contents of the Villa's rooms, but that would be to miss the main event.

Bookings should be made for the service.

There's an easy, familial feel to the staff who effortlessly include guests in the fun of the place.

Above all, the delivery is personal, engaging and slick and that prevents the food and drink becoming lost in the blizzard of images and history.

Sitting outside on the terrace refreshes even in the heat of a globally warmed summer as surprisingly hearty Italian dishes swing by.

Chef Emanuele Morisi places a refined gloss on rustic food, delivering pretty, well-priced plates.

His burrata with courgette and mint sauce is fresh and creamy, while pickled mackerel is all tart sharpness and challenging angles.

The stars are the uncomplicated duck ravioli, powerful and warm with a hint of orange, narrowly beating the equally toothsome lamb cutlets of the main.

All around, diners sup contentedly with the satisfied demeanour of regulars.

And while the Villa's wines are crisp and surprisingly versatile – one red dealing admirably with the vinegary fish – the lasting finish is of welcoming and warmth.

A five-course menu costs £45 a head or £80 with wine.

Go to villadigeggiano.co.uk for more information

