

## Restaurant of the week: Boulevard Brasserie

# Wear le style Anglais for a lunch Français

Joseph Connolly finds a French brasserie near Savile Row with Piaf gargling in the background and a hen do cackling in his ear where he waits ages for his food to be served

Style. Having commenced with this little word, you may well be suspicious that all I am about to do now is shamelessly plug my brand new novel of the same name ... but honestly, you would be quite wrong about that. It is not even my intention to so much as mention in passing my brand new novel of the same name: the fact that I have just published a brand new novel called *Style* is no more than the merest coincidence. For I mean to kick off this review with a foray into style, as in clothes. Not fashion, you understand – nothing to do with glowering models who are no more than a pair of legs like tent poles surmounted by a couple of cheekbones and angry druggy eyes as they threaten you with an aggressive handbag, no no. Nothing about the front row with Anna Wintour in her comely bob and ski-goggles, amid a yawn of the usual suspects such as Naomi and Kate and Stella and Mario and bloody Harry Styles. All this, it is nothing to do with style and everything to do with money, transience, corruption, the cult of the celeb and the insemination of lust and greed into the tortured minds of females driven practically insane with desperation to leap to the top of the waiting list for another stupid looking bag, while all the gurning journos have been given this thing gratis in order to insist that it is a must-have, while actual stars and front-rowers are handsomely paid to dangle the damned great ugly thing from their emaciated forearms.

I am talking style for gentlemen – the epitome of which is still exemplified by Savile Row and

“Their aperitif ‘French revolution’ is raspberry vodka, champagne and cassis so it looks like a bloody execution

Jermyn Street. Huntsman, maybe, for suits, Hilditch & Key for shirts and Bates for hats. I am not talking of ‘the young’, of course, for whom denim, hoodies, t-shirts, grey marl and trainers will do admirably, as they have for many a dull decade. And the reason for all this palaver is that my guest for lunch was Marie Scott, editor of *Savile Row* magazine – a very beautifully produced glossy. This country is rather embarrassed by its peerless contribution to sartorial elegance – just as it is by its great schools – so it is largely left to the Europeans, and particularly the French, to indulge the obsession: they call it *Le Style Anglais*. So I thought (clever little reviewer that I am) let us combine this representative of the Row with a honkingly Froggy eating place, for the sake of, um ... verisimilitude. And so, then, to Boulevard Brasserie in Covent Garden – a very authentically Parisian-looking place with café chairs on the pavement, gold lettering on the glass ... like *Café Rouge*, but – we earnestly hope – a great deal better. Inside are all the posters for old Cognac and the *Moulin Rouge* that you might expect, with Piaf or somebody gargling in the background. Their suggestion for the perfect aperitif is a

‘French Revolution’, comprising raspberry vodka, Chambord (a cassis) and champagne – so it would look like a bloody execution.

The menu is extensive and plastic-covered, with a decent smattering of classics – French onion soup, moules frites, boeuf bourguignon and so on. As we browsed, Marie told me that she was just back from Bangkok where she had dined at a restaurant called *Cabbages & Condoms*. “After the meal,” she said, “they gave me a little packet. I thought it was a mint.” Marie was starting with soup of the day (carrot) followed by said boeuf bourguignon and mash, while I went for foie gras and chicken liver parfait with caramelised onions, and then a classic steak frites. We ordered sides of green beans and petits pois à la Française. And then we sipped wine ... and then we moved tables. Oh yes – we had to: the noise was unbelievable. Nothing to do with Piaf, but a party of eight women, one of whom was wearing a hat in the form of a birthday cake with candles (not from Bates, then). They shrieked, they whooped, they screamed – largely about Katie Price, Celebrity Big Brother Fifty Shades of Grey, and Bertrand Russell. I lied about one of these. So we slipped around the corner, and all was (relatively) serene. And we waited ... we waited for simply AGES ... the manager blaming the hen party for the delay. Mmm. The soup, when it came, was deemed “a bit thin – more tomato than carrot, actually”, while my creamy parfait was extremely good: cool and luscious.

And then we REALLY waited ...

oh my God: it was nearly quarter to three. “Thank heaven,” said Marie, “for the bread”. I was pondering sending out for a pizza when finally the food arrived. “I am trying ...” said the manager. Mmm. Marie – who lives in what she calls “the tatty bit of Islington, not the snobby bit” – has always been in journalism. “I started as a dogbody at *Woman* and *Woman’s Realm*. Turned down a job at the *Eagle* comic in favour of *Tailor & Cutter*”. This was a hugely influential trade magazine that evolved into *Savile Row* magazine. Yes ... but how’s the boeuf bourguignon? “Really good. Very flavoursome. Beans just right – mash exactly as you want it”. My sirloin was adequate – nothing to storm the

## FACTFILE

- Boulevard Brasserie, 40 Wellington Street WC2. Tel 020 7240 2992
  - Open Mon-Sat 9am – 12pm. Sun 12 – 12pm.
  - FOOD ★★★★★☆☆
  - SERVICE ★★★★★☆☆ (made a snail resemble a cheetah)
  - THE FEELING ★★★★★☆☆
  - COST Pretty good value. Two of you will have lots of food and drink for £100.
- Joseph Connolly’s *The A-Z of Eating Out* is published by Thames & Hudson. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk)

Bastille about – the chips rather pale and flabby, the pois not petit but grand, nor gooly infused with onion and lettuce as they should be. Devoured the lot because I’d waited just days for it. It took further ages to get the plates cleared. “I am trying ...” said the manager. “Yes,” agreed Marie, “you are”.

And then we got buckshee bellinis ...! Not white peach juice but yellow – quite nice. And an Eton Mess for Marie with lemon verbena shortbread, which was enjoyed. I had an absolutely perfect pot au chocolat: not all airy-fairy as they can be, but just like the gorgeous ganache centre of chocolates you don’t buy as often as you’d like to. And so endeth the review, together with the fulfilment of my pledge to you not to mention *Style*, my brand new novel, even once.

