

RESTAURANT REVIEW

No Reservations

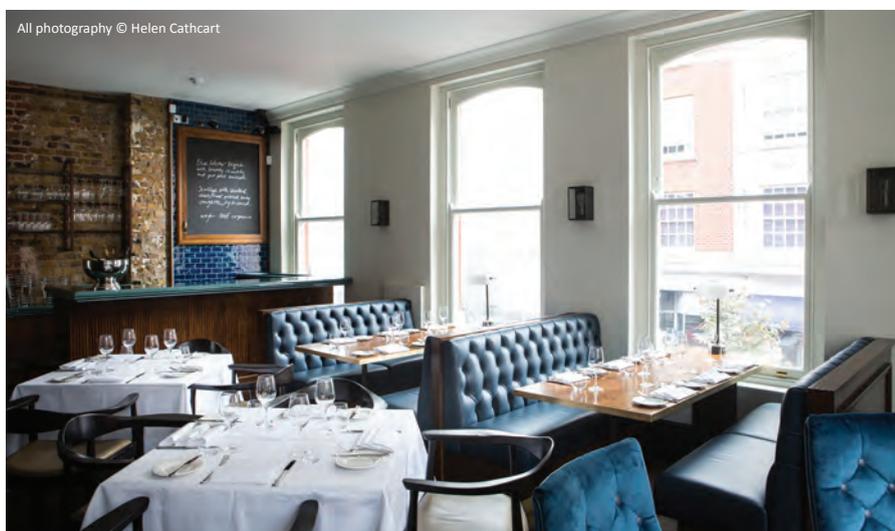
Kari Colmans avoids biting the hand that feeds her at Marylebone's latest opening, The Cavendish

I'm already geared up to review The Cavendish, whose opening we covered in our news pages last month, before discovering that one of its owners is a childhood friend – one that holds all manner of embarrassing photos at his disposal. Cue the panicked cabinet re-shuffle, ‘can someone else take one for the overly-fed team?’ to save me facing the prospect of an internet shaming should it be utterly awful, and I say so. But it seems I can't get out of it, so off I go.

The décor is smart and the dining space split over two levels; downstairs the bar area is busy but not jam-packed, as couples and groups sip expensive wine and colourful cocktails. We head upstairs, where the white tablecloths and dark teal banquettes set a sophisticated scene. The menu, designed by elBulli-trained chef Alfonso Lillo Fas, speaks of a life spent in modern, fine-dining establishments. Nothing is too fussy but it all sounds delicious, reminiscent of the best dishes from the capital's best menus.

My husband and I order three starters, just because we're greedy and they all sound too good to miss; a tuna tartare, served at room temperature (there's nothing worse than getting brain freeze from raw fish), is perfectly seasoned but stingy on the avocado. The creamy, exploding burrata accompanied by Parma ham and tomatoes feels as indulgent and velvety as a bowl of vanilla ice cream, while the dressed crab, served prepared in its shell, is generous and sweet, and there is more than enough of it to heap gluttonously onto the smokey, grilled bread, slathered with mayonnaise. The specials board teases us with wagyu beef carpaccio, only because it hasn't been wiped off since the morning's photoshoot, but we are assured by our waiter that the dish will be available soon, “because the chef really likes to eat wagyu”. Other choices include a range of raw crustacea and ceviches.

Mains, again, are hard to narrow down; Iberian slow-cooked pork shoulder, veal chop, rib-eye steak. I find out later, after a trip through the bar to the ladies on the lower ground floor, where punters have



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moved on to food, that the vongole is served at the table “for added theatre”, which I probably would have ordered had I known. But I go for Dover sole served meunière style, which is large and fresh and as tasty as I've ever had. The other half, a reliable carnivore, chooses the fillet steak, which is butter-soft and full of flavour, having been cooked on the bone. It is also an impeccable medium, which sounds simple enough, but is more often than not ballsed up. The chips are golden on the outside and fluffy in the middle, but I'd prefer my courgette fries fatter; shredded Julienne, there is far more batter than vegetable.

Desserts are classic European – panna cotta, crema catalana, crêpe Suzette – and I chance on the latter for the first time in my life, as it too is prepared at the table. But the waiter, after much Manuel-style head-slapping, can't reach our corner spot, so it is flambéed to the delight of the other side of the restaurant, leaving us with an orange-flavoured pancake and a side of FOMO.

Although the staff upstairs don't seem as sharp as the (gorgeous) tux 'n' tailed waiters at the bar, the food really is faultless; a relief for my toddler-aged self and that brief stint as a ball-pond diving naturalist. ■

35 New Cavendish Street, W1G
35newcavendish.co.uk