



# Dinner is Served

By Jackie Mitchell

**C**elebrity chef Heston Blumenthal's new restaurant, Dinner, recently opened at London's Mandarin Oriental hotel to acclaim by restaurant critics. In complete contrast to Blumenthal's first restaurant, The Fat Duck, in Bray in the UK, the menu at Dinner doesn't include his trademark dishes – snail porridge or bacon and egg ice cream. The chef who took dining to the next level by incorporating all the senses (eg. a seashell on the table containing an iPod playing sea sounds during a dinner of oysters) has moved to a whole different arena.

Inspiration for Dinner comes from the past, with British recipes inspired by dishes from the Middle Ages, Tudor, Stuart and Georgian eras. The menu gives historical notes for each dish. For example, Hay Smoked Mackerel dates to 1730, while Rice and Flesh (saffron, calf tail and red wine) was first served in 1390.



It's action stations in the kitchen at Dinner.

**Top:** The menu at Dinner might feature antique dishes but they're being prepared on ultra-modern equipment including state-of-the-art, energy-saving induction hobs. Instead of many hoods, they installed Halton's ventilated ceiling.



**Adam Tihany designed the restaurant's interior from which guests can see the staff at work in the kitchen behind a glass screen. The aim is to involve them in the food preparation at some level.**

An important part of the overall dining experience is that customers can see the chefs at work in the open kitchen through a glass screen. "The open kitchen means that customers engage with the food. Feedback from diners is that it seems so calm – no-one is rushing around," says Ashley Palmer-Watts, Group Executive Chef. "We wanted to break down the mystery – the food isn't the same as at The Fat Duck. From a practical point of view, an open kitchen means everyone is clean and tidy. There's no equipment above worktop level, which gives open calm in a great space. It's not a quiet, dull dining room where people eat exquisite food. It's an experience to be enjoyed even though it's a large brasserie."

UK design company, SeftonHornWinch, got involved three years ago, to develop the kitchen from concept to completion, work-



**Gareth Sefton, FCSI, and Ashley Palmer-Watts, group executive chef, pose in front of the elaborate clockwork mechanism for the rotisserie spit.**

ing with Adam Tihany, who designed the restaurant interior which also includes a chef's table of six and a private dining room for up to ten guests.

The pass counter – the unit where the chef finishes off the dish – is made of granite, "which softens the utilitarian aspect of the station," says Gareth Sefton, FCSI, managing director, SeftonHornWinch. "It bridges the gap between the kitchen and the restaurant." The hot pass counter also has a refrigerated drawer inside

it for last minute garnishes.

"We reviewed the cooking techniques used at The Fat Duck for the last 15 years and wanted to bring them to the next level," he explains. "The idea evolved. While it's not that far away from what we set out to do, it's more elegant and refined. Initially, we went on several research trips including one to see Ivan Day, the food historian in the Lake District, to come up with ideas."

# Dinner

**Mandarin Oriental Hotel** Hyde Park, London

[www.mandarinoriental.com/london](http://www.mandarinoriental.com/london)

The following are selected menu items:

## Starter

- Meat Fruit (c.1500)  
*Mandarin, Chicken Liver Parfait and Grilled Bread* £12.50
- Roast Marrowbone (c.1720)  
*Parsley, Anchovy and Mace, Pickled Vegetables* £14.00
- Broth of Lamb (c.1730)  
*Slow Cooked Hen's Egg, Celery, Radish, Turnip and Sweetbreads* £12.50
- Salamagundy (c.1720)  
*Chicken Oysters, Bone Marrow and Horseradish Cream* £15.00
- Hay Smoked Mackerel (c.1730)  
*Lemon Salad, Gentleman's Relish and Olive Oil* £14.50

## Main

- Powdered Duck (c.1670)  
*Smoked Fennel and Potato Puree* £24.00
- Spiced Pigeon (c.1780)  
*Ale and Artichokes* £32.00
- Turkey Pudding (c.1730)  
*Mushrooms, Cockscomb and Bone Marrow* £22.00
- Black Foot Pork Chop (c.1860)  
*Pointy cabbage, Robert Sauce* £28.00
- Beef Royal (c.1720)  
*72 hours Slow Cooked Short Rib of Angus, Smoked Anchovy and Onion Puree, Ox Tongue* £28.00

## Dessert

- Tipsy Cake (c.1810)  
*Spit Roast Pineapple* £10.00
- Taffety Tart (c.1660)  
*Rose, Fennel, Lemon and Blackcurrant Sorbet* £8.50
- Baked Lemon Suet Pudding (c.1630)  
*Lemon, Caramel and Jersey Cream* £8.50
- Brown Bread Ice Cream (c.1830)  
*Salted Butter Caramel Malted Yeast Syrup* £8.00
- Chocolate Bar (c.1730)  
*Passion Fruit Jam and Ginger Ice Cream* £8.50
- Poached Rhubarb (c.1590)  
*Rosehips, Rhubarb Sorbet* £8.00

Sefton adds, "Ashley knew what he wanted and we gave him options of how to adapt his vision. As designers, the most successful kitchens are those with the strongest ideas."

Considerable research was undertaken in developing the dishes on the menu. Blumenthal met with Mark Meltonville and Richard Fitch, food historians at Hampton Court Palace, Surrey, England. They showed him pictures of historical Tudor dishes such as Meat Fruit, a dish of pork and veal meatballs cooked on a spit, then covered with parsley custard which eventually resembled an apple with brown leaves.

Ashley Palmer-Watts, Group Executive Chef, said "We also carried out research at the British Museum and met with Ivan Day, the well known food historian who lives in the Lake District in England. He would cook something over the open fire using a roast spit mechanism. We made notes, photocopied documents and read through all the material which sparked off ideas for new contemporary dishes using top British ingredients."

He points out that the dishes on the menu aren't recreations. "Our research was used as inspiration for new contemporary



**Salamagundy, a dish that dates to 1720, is given a new twist by Heston Blumenthal at Dinner.**

dishes. Hampton Court Palace would make a 17th century dish, for example, exactly as it used to be made. We used these dishes as inspiration, taking perhaps one element," says Palmer-Watts. "The biggest challenge was that, back then they didn't have much refrigeration or storage facilities, so sometimes the food they used was at the end of its life. As a consequence, they used strong flavouring like anchovies, garlic and rosewater. In our dishes, it was important not to have the same flavourings. There was also some repetition. If a new ingredient emerged, all the dishes would have it – in particular, rosewater, so we had to strip that out of some of the dishes. There weren't



**Instead of meat, pineapples – part of a dessert called Topsy Cake that dates to the early 1800s – rotate over the flames. The huge Medieval style spit is based on a 16th century design.**

always recipes to refer to – sometimes just notes – so we adapted these into recipes and put a contemporary twist on them.”

The dramatic visual feature of the kitchen, which reflects the restaurant’s historical theme, is the pulley system, based on a 16th century design. This comprises a huge medieval-style meat spit over an open fire, operated by a clockwork mechanism designed by Swiss watchmakers Ebel. But instead of meat on the spit, there are pineapples. One of the signature dishes is Topsy Cake, with spit-roasted pineapple. Palmer-Watts says, “Having pineapples on the spit gives the impression that things aren’t what they seem.”

Several manufacturers were involved in making the pulley system – Ebel made the watch mechanism, Beech Ovens from Australia provided the gas fire, and Tim Martin supplied the rotisserie spit mechanism, a bespoke piece, developed from scratch. “There will be another retrospective fit coming on the spit so that larger cuts of meat can be slowly roasted,” says Palmer-Watts.

The kitchen is divided into different sections – hot starters, meat, fish, sauce, garnish, and so on. “This way, large num-



**Ash, beech and hornbeam logs are piled up for use in the Josper oven. After several research trips, Palmer-Watts and Sefton settled on a charcoal grill encased in a cabinet, that uses 80% charcoal and 20% wood.**

bers can be dealt with,” says Palmer-Watts. “If you have sections which overlap, the workflow isn’t as efficient. The rhythm is always different as you can’t predict what customers are going to order.”

Sefton pointed out the gap in the middle of the double-sided cooking suite, which allows chefs to stay in their section while kitchen staff can move up and down the gap, collecting food. "In a traditional double-sided suite, the chef would have to cross the section to deliver the food to be plated up," says Sefton.

Energy-saving induction oven suites have been installed. "The carcass of the oven was made by Rorgue, then we installed Menu System induction hobs," says Sefton. With induction, when a pan is taken off the hob, the energy stops, "so on a daily basis, you save a lot of energy," adds Palmer-Watts.

Cooking on charcoal is one of the restaurant's specialities. After several research trips in search of a suitable charcoal oven, Palmer-Watts and Sefton settled on the Jospier oven, a charcoal grill encased in a cabinet, that uses 80% charcoal and 20% wood. Palmer-Watts says, "The flavour from cooking over wood and charcoal embers is wonderful – you can't get that from anything else. You'll never get that flavour from electric or gas versions."

Palmer-Watts carried out nine months of trials at a test kitchen, trying out different types of wood. "We use ash, beech and hornbeam wood from sustainable forests in Kent." The charcoal oven is used to cook dishes such as Black Foot Pork Chop (c.1860). The chopped wooden logs are neatly stacked behind the glass screen of the open kitchen.

Water baths are used for slow cooking, another feature of the menu, eg. "Beef Royal (c.1720) is a 72-hour, slow cooked short rib of Angus". Ingredients are vacuum packed and then slowly cooked in water at a controlled temperature. "We've been using water baths for 12 years at The Fat Duck," says Palmer-Watts.

Except for one canopy at the back of the Jospier which takes away smoke from the charcoal, the kitchen has a Halton ventilation ceiling. Sefton says, "One of the advantages is that you can achieve much higher ceiling levels."

Great attention to detail has been taken with "dipper wells" for tasting spoons at the corner of each cook suite. These are stainless steel containers for cutlery which



automatically fill with water, so they can be rinsed easily.

Hand wash basins have been specially developed for the kitchen and are dotted round the space. These are designed so that the soap, towels and bin are in one unit without secondary fittings screwed to the wall. Everything is easily accessible. Palmer-Watts says "These basins deserve an award – they're normally added on as an after thought and you can't find the soap or towels, but not these."

The cold larder, at the back of the kitchen, houses small pieces of equipment such as the MKN mini combi oven and the Hatco quick therm salamander as well as a Chambrair fridge, to keep cheese at the right temperature.

One unusual piece of equipment, resembling a sewing machine, is the ice cream churn which is mounted on a trolley. During the summer, this machine will be brought to customers' tables, where it will produce ice cream, frozen before their eyes by liquid nitrogen poured from a silver jug.

Unlike a kitchen behind closed doors, Dinner's open kitchen brings the food to the customers, making a more interesting and entertaining dining experience. 🌍

**Ice cream for dessert is prepared in a real ice cream churn on a trolley. This is brought to the tables so customers can see ice cream prepared before them.**