

RESTAURANTS

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Acorn House is London's first truly environmentally sustainable restaurant, which is fine — restaurants are, on the whole, obscenely wasteful — but I would ask this: has it occurred to anyone that maybe the environment doesn't particularly wish to be saved? I get people at the door offering to save me all the time. I get the Jehovah's and the Mormons and the Seventh Day Adventists and even the Sixth Day Adventists, who have come a day early (not very bright, Sixth Day Adventists) but do I want to be saved? I do not. 'Thank you for calling,' I say, 'but I do not wish to be saved.' Maybe the earth feels the same. Maybe it wants to live fast, die young, shut the door in our face. That said, though, I always do my bit by, at least, never giving way to 4x4s even though I accept they are essential for school runs here in north London. After all, who knows what hazards you might meet. A Ribena slick, perhaps, at the top of Muswell Hill?

Anyway, to the restaurant, then, which is on the corner of Swinton Street at the start of the Euston Road. The restaurant itself isn't all cutesy or knitted from hemp but is instead long and modern with an open kitchen at one end, open shelves bursting with posh condiments and utensils, and those toilets offering different flushes depending on whether you have done a Number One or a Number Two (should you press a bit of both, if you do a bit of each?).

Acorn House is not green in a lip-service kind of way. Here goes: it pledges to never use air freight, runs its own vans on bio-diesel, composts or recycles all its own waste, has its own wormery, demands positive animal husbandry and offers free, purified tap water rather than mineral that has to be shipped. If the environmental debate is quasi-religious, which I think it is — you have sinned! you must repent! — then this place is repenting most handsomely. I am minded to ask it to repent for me although I am, in fact, quite good and do conscientiously separate all our rubbish — paper, bottles, tins, compost — so that the council can come along and throw it all into the back of the same truck. I also save energy by getting up quite late.

It is certainly busy and buzzy when we arrive, which probably indicates that it has already become a destination restaurant, as why else would anyone find themselves at the start of the Euston Road? True enough, there are the drugs and the prostitutes, but if you're coming to the start of the Euston Road for the drugs and prostitutes, I'm not sure you'd stop to eat at a fairly fancy eco-



restaurant while you were there. We are seated at our table (yes, made from recycled materials) but not offered menus because there are no menus currently on offer. 'Sorry,' apologises our waiter, 'there just aren't enough to go round. We're that busy. Now, what would you like to drink?' Bit tricky to answer that, I say. He offers to choose a bottle of red and a bottle of white on our behalf, which is good. I like decisions to be made for me. I would have been happy living under Stalin. He returns with a bottle of Argentinian Merlot and a bottle of Pinot Blanc from France. I say I hope they aren't too expensive. I say I once ordered a £10,000 bottle of wine in the Mirabelle as a joke and then had to chase the waiter down the restaurant shouting, 'No, no, I was only joking!' He promises me they are both under £20 and says that if we don't like them he'll be happy to replace them. But we do like them. A lot. I like this place. I like decisions being made for me. I would have been very happy living under Stalin.

Anyway, we have to wait quite a while for menus (and then again for our food), but that's OK. I'm with my young friends, Adam and Sarah and Rebecca, who are all in their twenties and so talk a lot about sex. At my age, this is as near as you get to it. I've even been thinking, lately, of sending my sex life



'I sentence you to six months' imprisonment — subject to availability.'

off to Africa like you can do with the old mobile phones and football boots you've no use for any more, but then I thought: on top of all their other troubles, does Africa also need my old sex life? I'm guessing not.

The menu itself? Good and unfussy: two soups; five starters; two pastas and six mains. I don't know why, but I find I quite like their random use of the capital letter. You could, for example, have the 'beetroot, cardamom and Sour cream soup' (£6.50). Or how about the 'tagliatelle of Wild venison, juniper, nutmeg and parmesan' (£12.00)? Whatever, I choose to start with the winter salad of pheasant, pomegranate and dandelion, which is truly excellent, a terrific mixture of tender, gamey meat, bitter leaves and the sweet pomegranate which glistens like tiny jewels. My only complaint is that the portion is rather small. I could have easily eaten it twice over, but there you are. I am greedy. Rebecca and Sarah both have the yellow beetroot salad (£8.00) and that is lovely too. The beetroot is woody and beetrooty, yet so, so melting. How do you get beetroot to behave like that? I seriously wish I knew.

Next, Adam and I both have the grilled sea bream with cardamom and horseradish (£14) and it's a wonderful bit of fish, charred on the outside, pearlescent and juicy within, but we both agree we could do with some accompanying potatoes or something. We ask if we might have some . . . hmm . . . chips? No, they say, they don't do chips. Could we have any kind of potato as a side dish? No, they say, they don't do potatoes. No potatoes? What do they have against potatoes? I've never met a potato I didn't like. Luckily, though, Sarah and Rebecca both have the pasta. Sarah has the one with Wild venison whereas Rebecca has the one with Tuscan sausage, borlotti beans and tomato (£14.00), and their portions are massive. They can't finish. Adam and I move in fast. I rarely do anything fast, as I like to conserve energy, but I am willing to make an exception in this instance.

Puddings? Great, particularly the caramel ice cream (£3.50 per scoop), which is sensationally creamy with a burnt-sugar kick. This restaurant is not a compromise. It is good. It is very good. And it is excellent value, too. One last thing: on the way out I take what I think is a book of matches. It is not. It turns out to be little seeds on the end of wooden sticks that you can plant. This *is* cute unless you then try to light your gas cooker with them, in which case it is quite annoying. It may even be very annoying. I was there for hours.

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