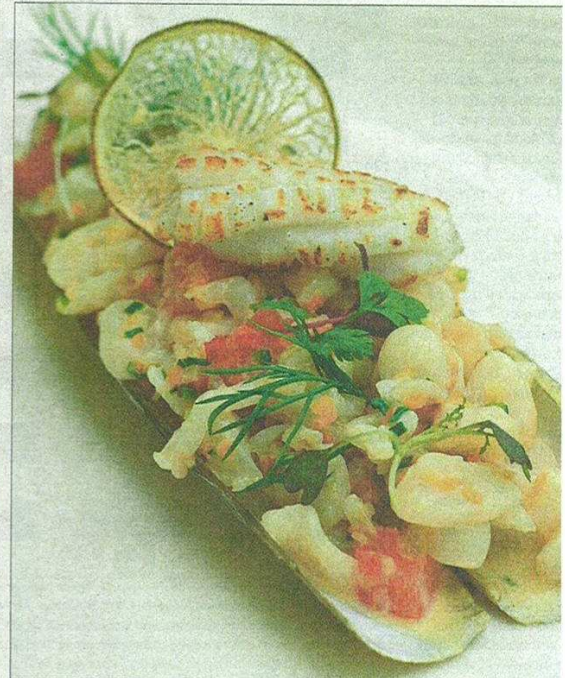


Your table is ready

This week: **Jasper Gerard** visits **The Kitchin**, Edinburgh



A day of indulgence in the Kitchin is a date that won't disappoint

The Naked Chef now offers a dating service on his website. You can picture the open-plan flat, sexily scented with basil, barolo wine and young hope as an expectant heart awaits her date. She yearns for a younger Jamie Oliver, but there aren't many of those about. Oliver is a national treasure for bringing food to the gastronomically illiterate, and one of the few people I've interviewed who seems entirely sincere. He also makes no secret that, despite his personal modesty, his ambitions extend well beyond food. And why not?

Celebrity chefs have long shifted product. The Victorian Mrs Marshall ran cookery schools, endorsed stoves and cocoa, addressed scientists about molecular gastronomy and marketed her invention, the ice-cream cone.

Tom Kitchin (pictured above), whose Edinburgh restaurant has been voted Britain's second best by *Eat Out* magazine, has many of the attributes of Britain's most celebrated and successful chefs. He has wild, Marco-esque hair and his blonde wife, Michaela, could be an extra in *Heat* magazine; but he has yet to turn his attention to the wider world of business. Today he is behind a glass partition in his boiling kitchen, firing orders while Michaela greets out front. Meeting him afterwards I sense underlings regard him with more than mere fear, but with near reverence.

Kitchin is obsessive about ingredients, and butchers stags and scours the Highlands for hare. He trained under Pierre Koffman and Alain Ducasse but his menu is unashamedly Scottish, hardy rather than twirly. He won a Michelin star within six months of his 2006 opening. Quaintly, for Kitchin it is still all about the food.

Edinburgh is not exactly local for me but I'm delighted to escape from home. We'd run out of oil and our supplier declared itself far too busy to help. So I was reduced

to collecting oil in cans from a filling station down treacherous lanes. Then, just when my children were starting to feel their toes again, our pipes froze. I was trekking across our field in search of a stopcock in a blizzard when the commission came through. "So sorry," the editor began, "to interrupt your leisure-based lifestyle..."

Anyway, back to Kitchin. He is not to be muddled with Tom's Kitchen, which is a Tom Aikens restaurant. Nor is he connected in any intimate sense to Paul Kitching, who runs another exciting Edinburgh restaurant, 21212. Confused? You won't be after sampling what comes from this cooker.

In Leith's dockyards, container ships have been replaced by cavernous restaurant space, most of it empty and going nowhere. Ambient violence, poverty and prostitution have been swept away by "urban regeneration", leaving an empty film set waiting for some moody, mock-gangster Guy Ritchie movie to turn up.

But entering The Kitchin you exclaim: "Oh, so this is where the life has been hiding." What makes Edinburgh so civilised a city is conversation. The inanity of London restaurant chatter can drive you to insanity, but the city of reason clanks contentedly to the sound of scales being finely balanced in intelligent debate, just as in the age of Hume. Happily this can now be interspersed with appreciative sighs and simpers about the fayre, quite literally food for thought. It is a grey, austere dining room with curtains drawn even at lunchtime, pulling the eye to the blazing glassed kitchen, suitably theatrical for the Festival city.

In sympathy with hedge-fund managers who regularly email saying: "It's OK for you enjoying the Berkeley, but since losing my job, dining means KFC and a shot of meths," I restrict myself to the £24.50 set menu. For those in the public sector, Diana goes à la carte, where the cheapest dish is £26. Keenly priced, this, for those at the

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nearby Scottish Executive offices.

Diana begins with chargrilled razor clams (pictured above), described here in the delightful Scottish manner as "spoots". A more Mediterranean touch is chorizo and lemon confit, lending bite and smoky flavour to the spoots. Colourful fennel, carrots, dill, chives and parsley make this sunny and yummy.

I hardly feel I'm economising with the "head to tail" pork. There is a deliciously rich quail's egg with terrine of pork (cheek, ear) with crackling, bacon and haggis, while gherkin adds acidity and texture: fun and tasty.

Just as fine is roast duck, still smouldering from the 12-bore that interrupted its day, in gravy with apricots, fresh almonds and potato barbecued on a rosemary skewer. But the highlight is Diana's boudin of (ubiquitous) pork belly with Devonshire snails, with seared lettuce and a garlicky parsley sauce. A potato plinth supports the snail like a statue on Princes Street. Atop the pork is parsley fried like Chinese seaweed and garlic crisps, echoing the sauce, with juicy girolles dotted around the base.

The set pudding completes what must be Britain's best set lunch for under £25: chocolate soufflé with chocolate chip ice cream. Rising proudly, it is light and dusted sweetly with icing sugar, the deep chocolate flavours accentuated by the ice cream. Or so I'm told: Diana wafts down from the (very) expensive seats to scoff the lot.

Great restaurant. Not sure about my date, though.

Online

Post your comments on The Kitchin and Jasper Gerard's review >> telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink

● The Kitchin, 78 Commercial Quay, Leith, Edinburgh (0131 555 1755; www.thekitchin.com). Lunch for two: £95.

● Jasper's verdict: **CRATING ★★★★★**

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