

FINANCIAL TIMES

superior interiors

OCTOBER 21 2017

how to spend it
interiors edition





THE GANNET

ruling the roast

The revamp of Simpson's in the Strand brings a touch both modern and sympathetic to that institution's venerable halls and famously traditional dishes

I have fond memories of Simpson's in the Strand, although not, it must be said, of its famous roast beef, which erred on the grey, institutional side of British cooking, its gravy as thick as the fug of cigar smoke that wreathed the room's venerable chandeliers. No, it was the silver tankards of foaming ale that I remember most fondly, and the steak-and-kidney pudding, a dish that makes a virtue of long-cooked greyness.

The restaurant is famous for its imposing architecture, its status as the home of British chess (chequerboard

tiles are a clue) and for its eminent patrons – Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens and Winston Churchill were regulars – but a couple of years ago its future looked in doubt: rumours swirled that The Savoy hotel, which owns the site, might allow the beef-laden trolleys to go the way of all flesh.

Happily, Simpson's reopened this year after a smart refit by interior designer Robert Angell, the man behind the look of many of London's high-end

bars and dining rooms, including the Collins Room at The Berkeley and The Savoy's American Bar. Angell's

task was to brighten up the fusty old Grand Cigar Divan while preserving its Grade II-listed interior: the booths and chandeliers have remained, but clever lighting has made the room seem

brighter and more spacious. The ornate plasterwork ceiling, once besmirched by cigar fumes, has been painted in what Angell describes as a "distressed, tea-

Lavish, rosy slices of rib cover the plate

stained colour": a dazzling white would have been almost sacrilegious.

And the food? The kitchen is now the fiefdom of chef William Hemming, whose menu (sorry, "bill of fare": Simpson's remains staunchly British) pulls off more or less the same trick as Angell managed with the decor: many of the traditional dishes are still present and correct (including steak-and-kidney pudding), but there is a lighter, more modern touch evident too.

Potted shrimps are a tad fridge-cold, but pleasingly mace-spiked, while an "English summer garden salad", featuring soft-cooked quail's eggs, charred pea pods, sweetcorn and tomatoes, has the kind of fresh crunch that previous Simpson's chefs boiled into submission.

And the beef: still on a trolley, still carved at the table, but otherwise unrecognisable. Lavish, rosy slices of rib cover the plate, with duck fat-roasted potatoes, roast carrots, a suitably punchy horseradish sauce and splendidly rich gravy on the side. And, naturally, billowing Yorkshire puddings, crisp on the outside and spongy within.

Even puddings are notably non-nursery in style, untrammelled by suet: goat's curd with poached apricots, London honey and fresh almonds, for instance, or an Eton "tidy" mess with (unsmashed) meringue, vanilla-spiked cream and Norfolk strawberries.

"Tidy", incidentally, is a Welsh term of approbation, variously meaning something beautiful, accomplished or commendable: as an adjective to describe the new incarnation of Simpson's, it could hardly be bettered. **BILL KNOTT**

SIMPSON'S IN THE STRAND, 100 THE STRAND, LONDON WC2 (020-7420 2111, SIMPSONSINTHESTRAND.CO.UK)

THE GOBLET

trolley good show

The cocktail trolley is back with a vengeance and driving a path through the nation's homes and smartest bars

One of the unintended consequences of American Prohibition was a boom in sales of cocktail ware. The mixing of drinks, a task hitherto performed by professionals on the other side of the bar, now took place behind closed doors. And so the ritual of the cocktail hour was born, along with an array of shakers, tools, glassware and trolleys fit to grace the drawing room.

Can it be a coincidence that, in this puritanical age, the cocktail trolley is now making a comeback? Even Ikea does a cocktail trolley of sorts. At the other end of the spectrum, new models include the very handsome Valet Bar Cart (£1,675) by Stellar Works, which comes with an array of leather pouches for storing cocktail kit, and the hoop-shaped, deco-style brass and white marble trolley (£325) by Madam Stoltz.

Istdibs.com also has a mouthwatering selection of vintage trolleys ranging from ornate

19th-century tea trolleys and angular mid-century designs to a swooping 1980s creation fashioned from glass. (I'm eyeing a turquoise lacquered 1950s number by Italy's Aldo Tura.)

Those after something more bespoke call on Andrew Nebbett of Andrew Nebbett Designs – he created the deco-style trolley that now trundles the bar at Gleneagles. "We're seeing a move away from chrome and nickel plate towards materials like black walnut, brass and copper," reports Nebbett, whose prices start at £5,500 for an original design.

The cocktail trolley's return won't be new to the white-jacketed bartenders at Dukes hotel – they've been mixing their legendary martinis tableside for 40 years. But at One Aldwych you can now have your Old Fashioned mixed to order from a trolley crammed with luxury spirits, syrups and tinctures. Signature recipes include a classic-style Old Fashioned made with



Woodford Reserve bourbon, as well as twists featuring Patrón blanco tequila, kaffir lime leaves syrup and vanilla bitters, and a rum Old Fashioned made with Bacardi Ocho Anejo, citrus syrup and yuzu bitters. All served with hand-carved ice, naturally.

At 45 Park Lane's Bar 45, the Bloody Mary trolley allows one to create an eye-opener to order using everything from beetroot and carrot juice, to fresh horseradish, chilli syrup and gazpacho. At The Shard's Oblix bar, after-dinner

whisky (as well as a selection of cheeses) comes to the table on a special trolley carved from one of The Macallan distillery's signature sherry butts. Irresistible. **ALICE LASCELLES**

ISTDIBS, ISTDIBS.COM. **ANDREW NEBBETT DESIGNS**, 020-7223 2303; ANDREWNEBBETDESIGNS.CO.UK. **ARBOL HOUSE**, OYNGHOM, COM. **BAR 45**, 45 PARK LANE, LONDON W1 (020-7493 4545; DORCHESTERCOLLECTION.COM). **DUKES LONDON**, 35 ST JAMES'S PLACE, LONDON SW1 (020-7491 4840; DUKESHOTEL.COM). **MADAM STOLTZ**, MADAMSTOLTZ.DK AND SEE ARBOL HOUSE. **OBLIX**, LEVEL 32, THE SHARD, 31 ST THOMAS STREET, LONDON SE1 (020-7268 6700; OBLIXRESTAURANT.COM). **ONE ALDWYCH**, LONDON WC2 (020-7300 1000; ONEALDWYCH.COM). **STELLAR WORKS**, STELLARWORKS.COM.