



MARK BOLLAND IS THE...

Restaurant Spy

We had a silent duel of spoons over the raspberry sorbet at TRINITY

If a phrase is repeated often enough, then people start believing it. Take Robert Louis Stevenson's 'It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive'. Is it? Maybe if you're desert-rat 'Sir' Mark Thatcher, or a failing political leader (Ming, David), but for most of us, it's the getting there that counts. In fact, if we say that someone has 'arrived', they're considered to be a bit of a star.

Travel is such a boring and contentious subject these days, with the potential to ruin a perfectly good dinner party in a way that discussing the once-forbidden sex or death never did. An innocent remark about a trip to Europe can result in a fierce interrogation about how your intended mode of transport is harming the planet. But if people stop using planes to fly abroad, then surely the next logical step is that they'll take more holidays in this country, by car. And more car journeys mean more pollution and more breakdowns.

All of which must be very good news for the AA, which, as well as rescuing us from the side of the road, annually draws up a list of the best eating places to be found on this island. This year, Trinity in Clapham was voted the best London restaurant.

There's always a slight worry about knowing in advance that a restaurant has won an award. Inevitably, it raises your expectations to an unrealistic degree and you expect everything to be flawless. It's a bit like when a friend insists that you must meet X because you'll absolutely love X - but what if you don't, and you loathe them on sight? Does that say more about you, or more about them?

I'd already done a fair bit of travelling on the day I visited Trinity: I'd walked to work, caught a helicopter for lunch, and in the evening I hailed a cab

TableTalk TRINITY

4 The Polygon, Clapham, SW4 (020 7622 1199)

Who goes there? Locals who want to eat local; Dannii Minogue and Gordon Ramsay (left).

Why the hype? Trinity has just won the AA award for London Restaurant of the Year. Adam Byatt, the chef/owner, has brought good taste back to Clapham.

What to order? Start with salad of confit rabbit and pink fir apple potatoes with pommery mustard

and green beans, then whole roast baby lobster with saffron tagliatelle for the main course. For pudding, poached strawberries with hazelnut shortbread and clotted cream won't disappoint.

Best table Table six by the French windows seats two, and the chef's table seats 12 in an enclave, with a hatch that allows you to peep into the kitchen.

Cost £30 for two courses without wine.

Restaurant manager Darren McHugh.



Hot dish

Having grown up in Auckland, New Zealand, waitress **Daisy Sievewright** followed her family roots back to London. 'My mother is English and my father's Irish, so I have a huge support base here.' Previously, the 24-year-old worked at Adam Byatt's first restaurant, Thyme. 'Adam's always the first to share his knowledge and love of cooking.'

for the long journey south. Through the twinkling lights of Westminster we drove over Battersea Bridge, past the Stalinist might of

the power station, until eventually we reached Clapham. It's a part of London I don't know at all, but it has a green, leafy common that was put on the map by Ron Davies, for reasons that had nothing to do with verdure.

You know instantly when a restaurant has arrived. There's a certain buzz to it, a feel that is a cocktail of efficiency, pleasure and self-importance. There's a sensation that you really should be glad to be there, and this attitude is strangely contagious.

The room is modern and very light - not an observation that could ever be levelled at the food. With a menu that offers pig's head as an entrée and sleek, uncluttered décor, this is essentially a masculine establishment.

I was meeting my author friend, who had already plotted out her

latest story on the back of the menu by the time I arrived, and who was hungry after a day spent blitzing the shops. She ordered lobster cocktail - which she complained was much too gloopy and drowning in mayonnaise: 'Women don't want a lot of stodge as a starter.' But my pig's trotter with crackling and quail's eggs was fabulous, and the best thing I'd eaten in ages.

Next came a beef and onion cottage pie, speared by a marrowbone on which a small heap of herbs was being cremated. It was exactly the kind of dinner that Desperate Dan would love to get his jaws around, but the novelist thought that her pigeon was a tad underdone, that maybe it should have been bowed rather than just bloodied.

We decided to share a pudding, which is never a good idea. What starts out as an exercise in restraint inevitably becomes a demonstration of greed - a silent duel of spoons fought over the raspberry sorbet and walnut shortbread. And the woman always wins.

As well as being a restaurant, Trinity runs regular masterclasses in basic cookery - and this shows in the service. Every olive and each piece of bread is introduced with a little explanation, and while it's initially charming, it does run the risk of being slightly intrusive. Having said that, we were being taught by the sweetest waiter in the world, called Wayne. I guess you could say this was Wayne's world. And it was a fine one.

Mimi Mollica, Dave M Bennett/Getty Images

