In the hot seat



Anyone who's worked as a waiter or watched Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen anything will be fairly familiar with the phrase, "If you can't stand the heat, get the hell out of the kitchen, and run for the hills." But a growing trend is driving us back to the foodie furnace, as such. Something like the captain's table, but so much cooler, kitchen tables allow inquisitive eaters the chance to learn the secrets of London's hallowed kitchens and see their specially-curated meal cooked.

Primrose Hill favourite Odette's offers an intimate eight-course menu with wine pairings in the heart of its lively kitchen, as chefs take guests through such delectable dishes as lemon sole Grenobloise and a jaffa cake with orange cream and marmalade. Heading east, diners who don't want to eat *in* the oven should enjoy Merchants Tavern's kitchen counter – the same immersive experience at a ten-seater counter around chef Neil Borthwick's kitchen. Here, nosy noshers can request a bespoke, seasonal menu of the day, which Neil and his team will talk them through. Finally, at the back of Champagne and hotdog haunt Bubbledogs is Kitchen Table, a 19-seat dining space offering up a daily-changing 12-14-course menu. With each dish described by just one ingredient, it's lucky that head chef James Knappett will be on hand to guide guests through dinner. And luckier still that the superb sommelier will be on hand with wine pairings.

Frankly, with grub this good, we'd happily take on Ramsay for it – thankfully, we probably won't have to.

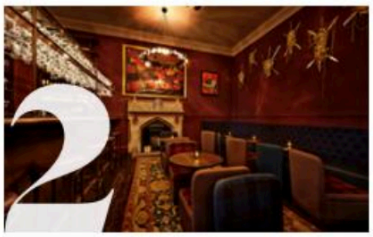
All require advance booking. Odette's, 130 Regent's Park Road, NW1 (020 7586 8569; www.odettesprimrosehill.com; parties@odettesprimrosehill.com); Merchants Tavern, 36 Charlotte Road, EC2A (020 7060 5335; www.merchantstavern.co.uk; booking@merchantstavern.co.uk); Kitchen Table, Bubbledogs, 70 Charlotte Street, W1T (www.kitchentablelondon.co.uk; kitchentable@bubbledogs.co.uk)

3 of the best... members' clubs for foodies



HOME HOUSE

Spread over three sprawling Georgian townhouses, this Portman Square beauty has as many options for posh grub as pretty posing spots. Facing the leafy square, the restaurant at No.19 serves brasserie-style British classics, while the drawing rooms at No.20 are perfect for taking afternoon tea – and swooping down the grand staircase à la Lady Mary. Or if you fancy an Asian-inspired feast in super-luxe neo-classical surroundings (who doesn't?), the Octagon at No.21 is like dining in a jewellery box. *20 Portman Square, W1H (020 7670 2000; www.homehouse.co.uk)*



THE HOUSE OF ST BARNABAS

Charity begins at home? Nonsense! At not-for-profit enterprise The House of St Barnabas, you can enjoy the perks of an exclusive bolthole with a clear conscience as all proceeds are fed back into the charity's Employment Academy. Much as it did in the 19th century, the Georgian property gives refuge to hungry Londoners – only now it offers sustenance in the form of aubergine and honey fritters, Keralan fish curry, and chocolate mousse with honeycomb pieces. Much better than a chugger with a clipboard. *1 Greek Street, W1D (020 7437 1894; www.hosb.org.uk)*



THE SOHO HOUSE GROUP

Think Soho House, think SATC's Samantha by a rooftop pool in a daring white bikini. Just us? Well the UK's Soho House group has glamour in spades too, and with less sunshine to speak of for poolside posing, the menu is top of the bill at its various outposts – whether you're hungry in Mayfair, Soho or Notting Hill. Veal Milanese in the cosy dining room at Soho House is the perfect pre-theatre pitstop, while Shoreditch House's airy open spaces lend themselves beautifully to group celebrations. *Various London locations (www.sohohouse.com)*



THE BEAUMONT

The indisputable heavyweights of the London dining scene have done it again, expanding their horizons to include a Mayfair hotel. Corbin and King – beloved for such institutions as The Wolseley and The Delaunay – this month open the doors of The Beaumont. In an imposing '20s building, the five-star hotel will invoke the Golden Age of hospitality – with the possible, exciting exception of Anthony Gormley's artwork-cum-boudoir, ROOM. If you can't justify a sleepover, book in for dinner at The Colony Grill Room. So far, all we know is the hotel eatery will recall "the era of Grand Hotel grill rooms" – but with a track record and sumptuous setting such as this, we're sure it'll be *the* place to wine and dine this season. *Brown Hart Gardens, W1K (020 7499 1001; www.thebeaumont.com)*