

Series: Observer Food Monthly's 20 best restaurants

The 20 best restaurants: part four


The final part of Jay Rayner's choice

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Jay Rayner

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5: Amaya, London



Amaya's scallops. Photograph: Adrian Franklin

The notion of the big-ticket Indian restaurant has never quite worked in Britain. Partly it's our own expectations. There are literally thousands of cheap curry houses in the UK. As a result we find it hard to get our heads around paying serious wedge for curries, whose names we recognise from those budget joints. And then there's the restaurants

themselves. In reaching for ideas of luxe, the kick and fire of the food, the very thing we come for, gets blanded out; it feels like a desperate echo of itself. Sure, you get a better quality of tablecloth. You get more waiters and better lighting, but the rest of it, drawn from the international hotel sector in India where most of the chefs at the top end train, feels corporate, one long exercise in blah.

Amaya, in Belgravia, is an exception. From the moment it opened in 2005, it was clearly something different. Sure, it was night-time shiny. The lights twinkled. The seats were comfortable. But the food still retained its power. Of course, it's Belgravia expensive. But there's no reason why we should be less willing to pay big numbers for Indian food, than say French or Japanese, other than cultural snobbery.

At the heart of the restaurant and the food is an open kitchen with super-heated tandoor ovens and flaming grills. Come here, then, for smokey kebabs, chargrilled seafood, for glorious breads, great chutneys and pickles and some especially good sealed pot biryanis.

Amaya, Halkin Arcade, Motcomb Street, London SW1. 020 7823 1166; amaya.biz. Meal for two £140