

# BIG APPETITE

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**An increase in cultural food experiences in recent years has led to a host of dining experiences, adding theatre to eating out.**

London will soon welcome its first avocado bar on Henrietta Street in Covent Garden. Designed around a relaxed Californian vibe, avocado lovers can expect living plant walls, natural materials and high quality fresh ingredients. As restaurateurs think of new niche dining experiences, many quirky concepts are popping up.

Sybarite has revealed images of YEN, a restaurant specialising in soba overlooking the River Thames at 190 Strand. YEN will follow in the footsteps of its sister restaurant in Paris and will offer traditional Japanese cuisine. Guests will be able to enjoy the art and theatre of the twice-daily noodle preparation thanks to a bespoke glass space on show to all the restaurant.

Chinatown has welcomed ICHIBUNS, boasting an eclectic Tokyo rock 'n' roll interior designed by Noriyoshi Muramatsu of Tokyo's Studio Glitt and inspired by 50s and 60s Japanese subcultures and the all-American diner. Walls are lined with working Japanese pachinko machines and craft beer cans. Displays include Japanese Manga comics, vintage newspapers and traditional fishing flags, whilst a DJ takes the stage within a converted Daihatsu micro van.

'We are currently in discussions with a number of exciting home-grown and international brands with the aim to transport the very best experiences to Chinatown London and across the Shaftesbury villages,' says Julia Wilkinson, group restaurant and strategy executive at Shaftesbury.

Central Cross, a new 4,459 sq m mixed-use development, is a key space currently being curated in Chinatown. It will include three large restaurants fronting Newport Place, all with external seating, as well as four smaller café units.

This year, Seven Dials has welcomed independent coffee shop, Boki; a new English café concept from Barbary and Palomar founders Layo and Zoe Paskin named Jacob the Angel; and iconic American burger concept, Shake Shack at Cambridge Circus.

'In recent years, we have witnessed an increase in cultural food experiences, driven by London's inherent cultural diversity as well



as its growing status as one of the restaurant capitals of the world. Shaftesbury's villages are great examples of this and cater to a vast range of tastes. Each area places a greater focus on experience and creative dining that take you beyond other restaurant offers in the capital. Popular dining experiences at these locations include enjoying a Whole Fry Sunday roast at Chick 'n' Sours in Seven Dials, barbecuing fresh cuts of meat at the table at Olle in Chinatown, or watching a traditional Taiwanese tea brewing ceremony at XU on Rupert Street, all offering customers a unique dining experience, which is now almost as important as the food,' says Wilkinson.



London has welcomed Bloomberg Arcade, a new food hub at Bloomberg's new headquarters in the Square Mile, designed in collaboration with Foster + Partners. The new food hub features 10 eateries and spans across two buildings.

Shoreditch Village is a 13,935 sq m mixed-use and public realm scheme, which when complete will provide warehouse-style office space, flexible retail space and a street market, all surrounded by an open and inviting, south-facing public realm. Mamarosa has signed up for the development, following its location beneath the W Hotel in Barcelona.

Further afield in Oslo, dockside dining, dim sum and DJs are all on the menu at Hakkasan's new Nordic venture called Ling Ling, with a lighting scheme by Nulty Lighting.

'Long-drop pendants hang over tables for intimacy, and a prominent preserved tree is brought to life by a backlit coffer above that accentuates its height and creates dappled shadows through the leaves. Outside, lighting has been integrated into the planting and the pergolas to create a cosy atmosphere,' says Emilio Hernandez, associate lighting designer at Nulty Lighting.

of the scheme. DesignLSM worked on the scheme, injecting the brand's playful persona into the scheme.

'The F&B industry has evolved rapidly over the last few years. Dining has become much more social and the traditional rules and times of day associated with eating no longer apply,' says Jennifer Burns, lead designer on the Fancy Crab project by DesignLSM. 'Recently we have seen an increase in the number of 'experience-led' concepts or pop-ups, tie-ins with brands or media "institutions" - Game of Thrones banquets or theatrical dining pieces such as Dinner with The Twits.'

'People are looking for dining experiences that engage all of their senses, enhance their knowledge and satiate their curiosity and sense of adventure,' says Burns.

Lewis Allen, director at Portland Design agrees: 'We're seeing more concepts where the dining experience has been made in some way extra-ordinary as brands seek ways to attract and engage customers in future relevant ways. Multi-sensory experience is key to this. Whether in fine and casual dining formats where food preparation is entertainingly open and dishes are more visually

Left: Opening this month, YEN will specialise in soba overlooking the Thames at 190 Strand in London. Right: The mixed-use Shoreditch Village development will include a host of restaurants.

Below from left: ICHIBUNS in Chinatown boasts an eclectic Tokyo rock 'n' roll interior: Designed by DesignLSM. Fancy Crab in Marylebone features a huge wall graphic that captures diners as soon as they walk in: Dockside dining, dim sum and DJs are on the menu at Ling Ling in Oslo.



'Back indoors, a galvanised metal conduit installation is a real eye-catcher. Punctuated with light it forms a framework and feature throughout the dining space.'

He notes the increase in contemporary versions of classic or retro designs as a trend. 'This involves darker palettes with the occasional colour to "pop" and a lot of brass, bronze and stone finishes being used. Whilst these may be passing trends, the use of classical materials means that they are likely to have longevity.'

Fancy Crab seafood restaurant in Marylebone encapsulates the provenance of the Red King Crab into the interior and branding

seductive, or fast casual concepts like Pret A Manger where despite the need for speed the customer service is always engagingly warm and friendly. Also, digital tools are creating new challenges and opportunities. As many customer shopping missions move online, the question of what will attract customers to shopping malls, high streets and department stores is becoming urgent. The evidence is that customers want less shopping and more experience from their shopping journeys. F&B experiences are now key to retooling commercial spaces by helping to attract customers who are hemorrhaging to online services.' >

