

# EATING IN ETON

**GILBEY'S ETON SOUNDS LIKE A BERKSHIRE GIN VARIANT, BUT DINING IN THIS TOWNHOUSE RESTAURANT IS ARGUABLY MORE REFRESHING THAN A COOL G&T ON A HOT SUMMER'S DAY. GISELLE WHITEAKER EATS OUT.**

**G**ilbey's Bar, Restaurant & Townhouse sits unassumingly on Eton High Street, just a stone's throw from the pedestrian bridge that spans the River Thames, separating Windsor from Eton. From the outside, it looks like a tiny bistro, a hole-in-the-wall kind of place. Look a little closer though, and you'll notice the façade stretches across two buildings. Inside, the vibe is fun and funky, with bright colours – sunny yellow walls, wooden floors, turquoise lamps and orange cushions. Eye-catching artworks depicting creatures of the sea hang from the walls and light streams through the windows.

Gilbey's is something of a Tardis. From the central entrance way, there's a casual bar area with tables off to the right and an open dining room to the left. Down the corridor, past the kitchen, The Gallery – one of two private dining areas – has its own courtyard garden area. Next door, the light-filled conservatory leads onto the garden, where punters are making the most of the warm afternoon. My boyfriend Elio and I snaffle a sun-soaked table to re-energise after our walk along the river.

When evening rolls around, we move to a window table in the front dining room to peruse the menu. Gilbey's describes its food style as Modern British, but with a French Head Chef in charge, we're anticipating a French twist. What we get is an intriguing blend of innovation with classic flavours.



Left: The façade of Gilbey's Eton.

Take the duck liver pâté. It's not unusual to find pâté on a British menu these days and a fig pairing also doesn't push the boundaries – although this comes in the form of gel, rather than jam. The unusual ingredient, though, is the pickled shimeji mushrooms, which alert the taste buds that this is not going to be an ordinary meal.

Scallops served with black pudding is another one of those matches made in heaven that often graces menus. It's rarely served with pea purée, and the radish shavings add a nice touch of peppery flavour, but it's the chicken skin crackling that delights. The wafer-thin wedge explodes in the mouth in a salty burst and all I can think is "more".

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The décor is colourful and fun.



The artworks add vibrancy.



Chicken liver pâté and fig gel, pickled shimeji mushrooms, mizuna cress, caraway toast.



Seared scallops and black pudding, pea purée, spring radish, chicken skin crackling.



Lychee crème brûlée with mango gel, meringue drops and crystallised pistachios.



Lemon tart with cranberry and orange sorbet.



Top: Fillet of farmed sea bream is served with a prawn and scallion fritter, oven-dried plum tomatoes, sea-salt baked aubergine and turmeric chickpeas. Above: Dark chocolate and hazelnut praline dome.



Take a seat by the window and watch the world pass by as you dine.

Chef Amaury de Oliveira's finesse also shows in the mains. The fillet of farmed sea bream is served with a prawn and scallion fritter, oven-dried plum tomatoes, sea-salt baked aubergine and turmeric chickpeas. Elio takes a delicate mouthful and beams. "I feel privileged to be here," he says, as he scoops a second flake of firm fish flesh onto his fork.

The tenderloin of outdoor-reared Suffolk pork leaves me feeling the same. Three ovals of light pink meat rest on a bed of cider and apple savoy, a strip of crackling on top. This is paired with mustard potato boulangère – a lighter version of dauphinoise – but the highlight of this dish is the tender pork cheek with walnuts, served almost as a loaf. It's rich and earthy and simply delicious.

Dessert is also a delight. Unable to choose just one to share, we settle on two after a brief negotiation. Our first pick is lychee crème brûlée with mango gel, meringue drops and crystallised pistachios. The sweet lychee adds pizzazz to the dish, while the other elements provide colour and texture as we crack through the glazed crust.

Breaking through the chocolate dome into its hazelnut praline interior, I wonder if this could be the dish that stays with classic flavours, but the accompanying pear sorbet sets me straight, along with the Amaretto gel that I scrape up with the feuilletine.

Gilbey's Eton puts the fun back into food. It's more than the décor, the relaxed ambience and the friendly waiting staff: it's the flavours that excite, that elevate each dish to be that little bit more. There's a science to food pairing, but there's also an art. Gilbey's is the gallery. ■

#### INFO

For more information about Gilbey's Eton or Gilbey's Old Amersham, see [www.gilbeygroup.com](http://www.gilbeygroup.com). Gilbey's Eton has also recently launched three new stylish guest bedrooms to complement the extra-spacious Studio Suite.

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#### HERE ARE SOME RESTAURANT PICKS OFFERING UP UNUSUAL FLAVOUR COMBINATIONS:

The chef from Zheng in Chelsea has gone all out with a best-selling dish of 'Crispy Cereal King Prawns'. This modern Malaysian-Chinese creation is an unusual combination of breakfast cereal and seafood. [www.zhengchelsea.co.uk](http://www.zhengchelsea.co.uk)



Michelin-starred L'Ortolan in Shinfield, Reading has partnered with the Rare Tea Co and developed a sumptuous goose liver parfait with mango coconut and smoked duck ham, with the duck cold-smoked over Nepalese Himalayan spring tea and oak woodchips. [www.lortolan.com](http://www.lortolan.com)



YOPO in London's Fitzrovia serves a modern European menu with influences from South America. For something completely different, try the 'Potato Churros dish with Coffee and Bottarga'. [www.yopo.london](http://www.yopo.london)



The Cosy Club, with outlets across the country from Exeter to York, serves a 'Pan-fried Hake and Nduja' dish. It comes on a smoky chorizo, cannellini bean and turmeric giant couscous stew with cavolo nero, lovage pesto and freekeh. [www.cosyclub.co.uk](http://www.cosyclub.co.uk)



Beck at Brown's in London is running AperitEAvO, a light tea pairing menu, in collaboration with Lalani & Co. There's a delectable dish from Executive Head Chef Heros De Agostinis that matches rock oysters with blackberry, hibiscus tea jelly and beetroot cream. [www.roccofortehotels.com](http://www.roccofortehotels.com)



Filipino restaurant Romulo Café in Kensington, London has put together a palate-pleasing combination of young jackfruit and coconut in a stew. It is a delicious medley of tropical flavours. [www.romulocafe.co.uk](http://www.romulocafe.co.uk)

