

Left to right: seared snapper at Asia de Cuba; Aqua Kyoto interiors; their Kenji summer rolls; dining up high at the Sky Garden

Left to right: Asia de Cuba's dumplings; Enoteca Turi's Pamela, Michele and Giuseppe; its classic dining room; and fresh plates. Below: inside and out at Flocons de Sel



Restaurants

This month, we try out a fusion restaurant in Covent Garden, three places with cocktails as good as their food, a French three-star and Putney's Italian stalwart



Asia de Cuba Covent Garden

When Asia de Cuba announced its refit, it brought a groan from all the sharing-plate-suspicious, Americana-apatetic diners all but fed up of ill-conceived fusion cuisine. But the flagship restaurant of St Martins Lane hotel – while featuring all of the above – comes with genuine pedigree. 'Concept chef' Luis Pous's plates are delicious and worthy of the effort. Ceviche is the ideal, palate-awakening way to start, with the red snapper with Thai chilli, red onion, coriander and plantain. A string of small plates almost too good to share are best ordered in threes: crispy octopus *al ajillo* with vegetable escabeche, lychee and garlic chips; casabe cakes with barbecue pork and onion mojo; and spring rolls with slow-braised short rib are must-haves. The main plates are just that, don't be tempted to over order (this is Americana done right, after all), so pick the mojo duck confit with brown rice and Thai basil and leave room for the Cuban classic, *tres leches de chocolate* with Szechuan pepper – ultra sweet and tongue-tinglingly moreish. *MS. 020 7300 5588, stmartinslane.com*

Three for dinner with great cocktails

Aqua Kyoto Regent Street

Chic and sexy best describe this ultra-glossy West End bar. Contemporary Japanese cuisine is paired with Eastern cocktails like Yuzuana Bellini (banana with mint-infused sake). Paul Greening's food is as pretty as it is delicious. Sesame seeds are pounded at the table before being poured over spinach salad, while black cod glistens with yuzu curd. However, it's the Wagyu gyoza that steals the show: twists of beef topped with pearls of ponzu sauce. It's the playful approach, combined with a roof terrace, that makes this the femme fatale of festive destinations. *IL. 020 7478 0540, aquakyo.co.uk*

Dandelyan South Bank

This cool riverside bar headed up by cocktail maestro Mr Lyan is a great spot to toast botanical blends and grab a bite during the social season. On the ground floor of the stylish Mondrian hotel at Sea Containers, opt for a pink leather banquetta at the back of the room and settle in. Order an Elder Lyan teeming with Grey Goose Le Poire, strawberry wine, apple acid and elder wine and eat the likes of savoury duck and asparagus terrine, crispy cod cheeks with citrus aioli and venison sausage rolls. A cheese board from Neal's Yard Dairy rounds it off. *BG. 020 3747 1000, morganshotelgroup.com*

Fenchurch Aldgate

Set within the 'Walkie-Talkie' building's Sky Garden – with its engulfing size and lush plants – Fenchurch literally stands out among its peers. Beneath a greenhouse-esque dome, sip on an apricot liqueur, basil and lemon gin cocktail, and attempt to drink in the 360-degree views. Up on the 37th floor it's surprisingly relaxed, and the menu showcases British produce with the likes of Highland game ragout, Cornish halibut and Eccles cake. For us, slithers of smoked Lincolnshire eel with a chilled cucumber and horseradish sauce was the real *talking* point. *KS. 033 3772 0020, skygarden.london*

Reviews by Blossom Green; Imogen Leeper; Mark Sansom; Kelly Satchell; James Williams. Enoteca Turi photos by Steve Joyce

Global gourmet

Flocons de Sel Megève

Along a winding mountain road ten minutes from the ever-stylish ski resort of Megève, you'll find Emmanuel Renaut's three-Michelin-star Flocons de Sel. With a modern log cabin vibe, it's the perfect alpine destination restaurant. The natural surrounds merge effortlessly with the calm design of the dining room – think top-to-toe wooden panelling, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a healthy scattering of cow hides – making the ideal backdrop to a knockout meal.

The kitchen is headed up by ex-Claridge's chef, Renaut, who makes excellent use of regional mountain ingredients like wildflowers and herbs. Beautifully presented plates flow from the kitchen: a steady stream of parsnip and beetroot consommé with Beaufort cheese and Garden Tart followed by the likes of fresh pike with pleasingly pungent onion sauce and lemon balm, venison with a blueberry puree and grouse with ceps and tangy red cabbage jus. Go for the heady smoked chocolate tart to close, served with an ice cream flavoured with woodland timbers and delicate meringue. Fragrant petit fours moulded to the shape of the spice they're packed with – cinnamon, star anise and nutmeg – are a charming end to the meal. *BG. 00 33 4 50 21 49 99, floconsdesel.com*



Timeless classics

Enoteca Turi Putney

Just ask the loyal locals – it's the focus on regional Italian flavours with originality that's the winner here

This family-run Putney institution has been feeding the bodies and souls of its riverside locals for 25 years. Its authentic flavours and easy charm raise it head and shoulders above the other restaurants that smatter this affable south-west London borough.

Still run by founder Giuseppe Turi and his wife Pamela, the restaurant oozes Mediterranean charm. Walls are painted in varying hues of terracotta, the wooden floorboards are scrupulously polished and white tablecloths create an ambience that wouldn't be out of place anywhere in Tuscany. There's always a buzz in the dining room no matter the day of the week and the clientele have such a relaxed, proprietary air it quickly becomes clear that most are regulars.

When Turi arrived in London in the Eighties he trained as a sommelier at the Athenaeum Hotel before moving to the Connaught and his passion for wine is tangible. His cellar now boasts more than 300 bins from every wine-producing region in Italy, a collection that has been lovingly curated for a quarter of a century. He prides himself on offering good value by buying wines from great vintages and laying them down until they're ready to drink. Look out for the Col Vitoraz di Valdobbiadene, a small-label sparkler produced among the steep hills of Cartuzze (considered Italy's prime prosecco region); or, if you're feeling celebratory, a bottle of Barolo Falletto di Serralunga from 1996 that is definitely worthy of a special occasion.

The menu delves deep into the pantheon of Italian cooking, uniting the different regions with a lightness of touch that reflects Giuseppe's Puglian upbringing. Puglia's cuisine is characterised by simplicity and freshness and these attributes abound in the restaurant's food. Herbs and olive oil take priority over creamy sauces, making the traditional four courses a comfortable quantity.

Head chef Michele Blasi proves a deft hand when it comes to balanced flavour pairings: sharp lemon juice pierces velvety fava purée, sautéed mackerel gains depth from fennel and well-textured cantuccini biscuits cut through a glass of vin santo for a satisfying dessert. Authentic regional flavours in a fine dining format – bravo Enoteca Turi. *JW. 020 8785 4449, enotecaturi.com*