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## Launceston Place

By Tim Epps

Last month, on leaving the superb Japanese restaurant in Japan House, I idly speculated whether our culture could produce such exquisite food, so beautifully presented. This month, I have the answer. It can. Having been deposited by our red limo (no 49) to High Street Kensington, my companion and I sauntered south past stucco palaces, very neat villas and converted coach houses, and wandered down a back alley. We found ourselves in a vestigial village green with a cluster of shops and businesses at the confluence of what must have been old country lanes, Launceston Place.

Warmly welcomed by Mr Alessandrini into a comfortable modern décor, we were about to be presented with creative culinary concepts. We were led through the intriguing menu of dishes depicted by brightly coloured emoticons of our experience to come. Our introductory snacks were not just *amuse bouche*. We chuckled aloud at the creative ingenuity; tiny flower pots containing slivers of *crudit * in lovage cream, nestling in a slightly larger mossy flower pot with a miniature garden



spade alongside, to extract the last morsel. Then a cigarette sized tube of pastry with a powerful haddock mousse contained therein; small banana and shallot tartlets, with a mist of 39 months aged parmesan.

Next our "toast and soldiers" confirmed that we were maybe experiencing the nursery; but what a sophisticated one. Our miniature eggs were presented in a quirky bird's foot eggcup and the eggs were filled with an egg foam to be dipped with beautifully toasted batons of sourdough bread to reach the *foie gras* beneath; a very naughty nursery.

Our *sommelier* had suggested tastes of wine to accompany these beginnings. He continued to recommend with unerring expertise throughout the meal. Not surprisingly, he was one hurdle short of Master of Wine. Every home should

have one.

Our main courses of milk fed lamb and pink slices of iberican pork were as immaculately cooked and presented, in the most artistic ways to tease the eye as well as palate. Again our *sommelier* surpassed himself.

Sweet wine from Tokai and D'Arenberg accompanied the souff  with pistachio ice cream, and strawberry lime and verbena tart as a sublime combination.

His final unusual selection to accompany the choice of 20 artisanal cheeses from England, Wales and the Continent was an aged Malmsey; an inspired choice.

My companion and I knew we had been privy to a rare experience. The levels of knowledge, good natured and cheerful service, sheer inspiration and taste orchestration from chef Ben



Murphy were outstanding.

Regulars know: One regular comes in once a week to his usual table for the pigeon breast. There is nothing like having something hand made for you and of course this will never be cheap.

However more good news to accompany this very good news, is that set lunches are available through the week at much more modest prices; but with the same levels of creativity, attention to detail and service as our wonderful evening experience.

I urge you to tell only your very best friends, and keep this a closely guarded secret!

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