

REMAINS OF THE ENTRÉE

Main courses are falling off course and that's not appetising.



In the golden age of the celebrity chef and Michelin-starred restaurants, the original reason diners went to restaurants in the first place—to eat and be satiated by said act—have been unceremoniously cast aside. It is now more likely than not that diners are compelled to join an unthinkable long waitlist in order to be dazzled by the prodigious skills of cooking's Next Big Thing, rather than to leave with bellies filled with honest, earnest food. In the same fashion, another horrifying truth has insinuated itself into the gastronomic culture of fine dining restaurants: that of the untimely demise of the main course.

Pay attention—if you haven't already worked it out—the next time you're in a fancy restaurant. Chefs bewitch, casting delectable spells on unsuspecting diners, first with a cunningly minuscule amuse-bouche—compliments of the chef—that's designed to make you hanker for more, and then with an assortment of unbearably clever appetisers. Delicious indecision ensures you will end up ordering way more than you intended to, and as you and your dining companion(s) *ooh* and *ahh* about how amazingly clever the chef is, the anticipation for an even more sterling display during the main course has invariably built itself into climactic overdrive.

Which is why, when the entrée does finally arrive, disappointment is almost certainly inevitable. It is as if the chef and his team have expended so much time and effort creating their magical trove of appetisers that there just isn't that much love left to



BY FAY KHOO

bestow upon the main course, which beggars the sad but relevant question: since when did the main course cease to be the main course? How did the entrée become the runt of the litter, meagre, malnourished and unloved?

Interestingly, the more *haute* the restaurant, the higher the likelihood is that the main courses will be insipid and overshadowed by the appetisers. It's easy to understand that appetisers are ideal platforms for chefs to tell their stories. Invention and creativity go hand in hand with these little plates after all, which is why El Bulli used to serve more than forty courses of said starters to each diner. But why would you go to such lengths to beguile only to expose your enamoured audience to such bitter disenchantment? Why bother to dress up in a tuxedo if you're planning to wear flip-flops instead of the best spit-polished leather shoes? Why not just abolish the main course instead of leaving it in such deplorable disrepair?

The truth is the only places where the main course remains the big Kahuna are the old-fashioned steakhouses that have remained defiantly traditional in the onslaught of trendy eateries. Here, at least, appetisers have no room to usurp the entrée's rightful place as the leading lady. They are unpretentious, the suitably inferior opening act for the star of the show. And it is here that you can dine in the peaceful knowledge that things are as they should be: the main course remains the *main* course of your meal.

ALEX JAMES

ALL CHEESES GREAT & SMALL



This month, our man on the farm will mostly be eating cheese on toast.

Experts argue whether the world's best cheese is parmesan or gruyere. My favourite, however, is cheddar. The best British farmhouse cheddars—Montgomery's, Westcombe and Keen's—are among the finest cheeses in the world. One of the many reasons I like this style of cheese so much is that it melts so beautifully, particularly on toast. In the same way you wouldn't use a single-malt Scotch in a cocktail, you needn't use anything expensive when melting cheddar. Add some egg yolks and cream for the ultimate indulgence, but even simply grating and mixing Britain's two most popular cheeses—cheddar and mozzarella—and grilling them produces exciting results. Tomato ketchup and salad cream are surprisingly effective cheese on toast additives, too. The sugars in the condiments caramelise under the grill and produce a lovely golden finish.



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