Le Cordon Bleu
London

The first stop for any aspiring chef with a passion for all things French is Le Cordon Bleu. So intrinsically linked with fine dining and Gallic cuisine is the famed cookery school that, at least in this writer’s home, anything more fiddly than a roast chicken is met with a cry of “what do you think this is! Cordon Bleu cooking?” There is of course a reason for its reputation, as Food and Travel discovered when it attempted to recreate its very own version of Le Cordon Bleu cuisine. At its school in London’s Marylebone (one of 11 worldwide – everywhere from Peru to Korea to Canada), the first task of the day for the class of six was an introduction to patisserie. Macarons, truffles, croissant, pain au chocolat... graduates of the school could whip these up with their eyes shut. For the class it proved a little more difficult. We tackled the art of piping – delicate blobs of chocolate to be rolled, shaped and dusted for the truffles; perfect pairings of macaron batter to create two halves (not too much food colouring mind, or they’ll break). The pastry proved trickier – the croissant triangles were wildly varied and the less said about the pain au chocolat the better – although little blame could be attributed to chef Julie Walsh, as with all the tuition, instruction was concise and to the point. As for the meat side of things, in true alpha-male style, my croutillant of duck breast was the pièce de résistance of my menu, followed closely by the mussels cooked in a curry sauce (aka la mouclade). Throw in my poached pear tart for dessert and I can happily claim to have created genuine Cordon Bleu cooking. While it may not be quite worthy of Julia Child (one of the school’s most famous students), it’s going to impress the family! AM

Le Cordon Bleu now runs short-term courses as well as full-time diplomas. For details visit lecordonbleu.com

THE GOODS SHED
Canterbury

Bringing together local food producers, The Goods Shed is best described as an indoor ‘food hall’. The converted Victorian shed has now houses around 18 different traders selling a variety of wares. Meat is sourced from local farms including Four Elms and Godmersham Game, and is handled by three butchers on hand to offer advice on cooking methods and cuts. Seafood including scallops, lobsters, salmon and mackerel comes from nearby Faversham and the fishing town of Whitstable. The larder is bursting with home-made yoghurt, jams, chutneys, pickles and an assortment of vinegars. Freshly baked bread is still hot from the oven and cider made from apples picked at Pawley Farm is available for sampling. The long tables, loaded with Kentish vegetables and fruit, form the backbone of the food hall. Local growers include Amery Court Farm in Blean, which provides soft fruit as well as apples and pears, and Richard Ovenden’s Farm offers hearty seasonal winter vegetables perfect for soups and pies. Popular chef Patrick Williams prepares and serves food using fresh produce from the market hall. Takeaway snacks and meals include potted shrimps, savoury tartlets and fish pies – and don’t forget the large selection of cakes and desserts. Don’t leave without trying some locally produced creamy Ashmore cheese. thegoodsshed.net KM