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HIGH TEA AT THE MANDEVILLE

Let's be honest: for decades, the French were the culinary supremacists of Europe. If a dish did not make you sigh, 'Aah, oui!', it was about as useful and exciting as a plate of over-boiled cabbage.

So it is understandable that there was a backlash. Le Cordon Bleu? Forget it. We had younger, ruder, more energetic chefs who made it all up as they went along and we were proud to follow in that bumpy, modern path.

Times change, though, and we change with them. Do we want to waste expensive ingredients in dishes which turn out to be tasty but unattractive, or worse, just a soggy mess?

The thought occurs to more and more foodies that they would like to experiment from a solid basis of technique, and that is how Le Cordon Bleu, a small cookery school in London with a big reputation from France, has fought back to regain fashionable status.

Most of its students are would-be professionals who graduate to instant employment within five star hotel kitchens. Some are enthusiastic amateurs. One course in particular

attracts cooks with a certain artistic flair: patisserie.

Does it seem quaint to you to feast on choux pasty swans or glossy cubes of dark, rich chocolate? Or does the thought of raspberry mousse with a fruit topping and curls of chocolate like a hat made for Ascot fill you with mouthwatering gourmandise?

Either way, an event at the Mandeville Hotel on Wednesday 27 April is your chance to indulge. 'High tea' prepared by the graduating students of Le Cordon Bleu around the corner is a rare opportunity to sample the work of the school. There is definitely a frisson in the air: after all, these are the potential cookery stars of the future parading their talents. And what talent! Tiered plates of patisserie are accompanied by menu cards describing each confection. Proper leaf tea is poured by waiters from china pots into delicate porcelain cups and the only limitation on cake consumption is the width of your waistband. Don't eat lunch! This is a lovely occasion which may just inspire you to take up the piping bag and hone your own skills.

To book, call The Mandeville on Thayer Street, W1 on 020 7935 5599.

SEASONAL FUSION AT THE BARBICAN LOUNGE

The Barbican Lounge has revived and extended its menu with a new selection of dishes to put a spring in your step.

There is something for everyone with new meat dishes to include glazed pork belly with green apple puree and braised ox cheek with curly kale and mash potato, whilst line caught mackerel, tiger prawns, monkfish and Spanish chorizo are added to the selection of fish. Those with hearty appetites will enjoy the new 'not so small' plates, including smoked haddock fishcake, pea puree and hand cut chips and glazed belly of pork served with apple puree and fondant potatoes.

The Barbican Lounge is in Silk Street, EC2 on Level 1 of the Barbican Centre. Call 020 7382 6180.

LA SOPHIA

La Sophia on Golborne Road opened its doors back in May 2010, a family restaurant run by chef Ali and his wife Sousan, named after their baby daughter Sophia. Chef Ali has a pedigree going back 20 years including spells at Boxwood in Knightsbridge, a Gordon Ramsay establishment, and he has worked at some of the top restaurants in the world in Tel Aviv, Switzerland, France and Amsterdam. Ali was brought up in the Palestine countryside where 300 different types of herbs grow wild and feature heavily in local cuisine, a major contribution to Ali's cooking philosophy.

La Sophia offers sophisticated French dining with strong Mediterranean influences at affordable prices. The menu is basically French with influences from Ali's Mediterranean and Palestinian heritage and they take pride in using fresh, seasonal ingredients.

For reservations, call 020 8968 2200. La Sophia, 46 Golborne Road, W10.