

Taste of London 2009

Monday, 22 June 2009

You'd have thought that it was the start a very hungry London marathon, but the crowd herded into the starting grid were all gearing up for this year's Taste of London Festival. The queues filtered round behind some of the restaurant stands infusing the air with delicious smells of dishes soon to be tasted. And having not had breakfast, to ensure maximum hunger and stomach space, my mouth was soon watering in delightful anticipation.

I've been going to Taste of London for three years now and this isn't just any old food show. Here you get the treats. A little taster from some of London's best restaurants. A sort of try before you buy affair. It certainly costs... Crowns in fact, the currency of Taste, from between 6 and 12 Crowns (£3-£6) per taster portion. It was a long day trawling the showground for some exciting and innovative offerings, and here are my thoughts. My first stop of the day, by good fortune, was at Launceston Place, home of Great British Menu contestant Tristan Welch. I had a great chat with Restaurant Manager, Hadi Aknin, who described Launceston Place as old school with a modern twist. The potted shrimp and crab was fresh a vibrant and the rhubarb and custard ice cream, of Great British Menu fame, was divine, considering I'm not a big fan of either rhubarb or ice cream. Launceston Place was my top choice for the vast majority of the day, but then along came L'Anima. At L'Anima chef Francesco Mazzei has transformed Italian cuisine. Wild Mushroom Fettuccine with Black Truffle. Who could ask for anything more. My heart stopped. Simple and so packed with flavour and aroma. Want succulent, sweet, juicy lamb? Then head to Odette's where Bryn Williams certainly has the goods. And one of the most exquisite desserts, Lemon Posset with Strawberries and Basil. And coincidentally Odette's has a beautifully crafted website. I had planned on visiting Tom's Kitchen, where Tom Aiken very kindly agreed to an interview. But my Sunday morning didn't quite go to plan and then there was a Father's Day lunch to cook. However, I heard that his Seven Hour Lamb went flying off the pass. And why shouldn't it – falling off the bone with sweet sticky balsamic onions and a silky smooth puree. One of my all time favourites. So the restaurants done I headed round the numerous exhibitor stalls, and there are two I've singled out for special mention. I love chocolate. My moist brownies have been the sell out of my couple of tours at the UKFBA Covent Garden Real Food Market. But as I bit down into a Sea Salt Caramel Chocolate from Paul A Young Fine Chocolates I went weak at the knees and almost collapsed with pure choco-heaven delight. Paul Young is a chocolate creative genius. Don't believe me. Check out his collection for yourself. After such a long and arduous day of (mainly) culinary pleasure, I thought it would be sensible for offer myself a little treat. And to be honest I couldn't resist. As I walked passed Allens of Mayfair the glowing meats in their display were just screaming at me. A rib of beef for dinner. And pictures really do paint a thousand words, so enjoy!