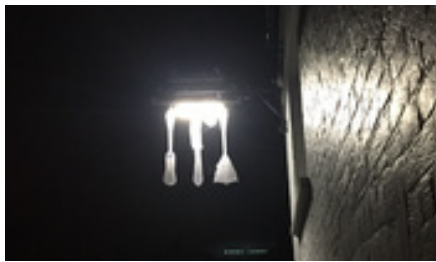


Restaurant review: **The Fat Duck** by Guy Laffan

As it's my first restaurant review, I thought I'd start with a bang. The Fat Duck.

Located in Bray and the mother ship of the gastronomic genius Heston Blumenthal, the 3 Michelin Starred Fat Duck is housed in an unsuspecting 16th century building, that you could easily mistake for someone's home. Bray itself is a quaint little town and the lavish cars lining the side streets say it all.



I don't want to give too much away because the thing that mesmerised and intrigued me most was the sheer unknown. You can only buy 'tickets' for The Fat Duck – which I have to admit was a little tedious and a tad on the degrading side. Although, realistically it's such a popular restaurant I don't think they could handle a standard phone based booking system. I likened it to the release of Glastonbury tickets that sell out within hours, but in this case all the available sittings are released online on the first Wednesday of every month. Needless to say they sell out. Fast. We secured ours after some patient and mind-numbing click, wait, repeat, and paid a heart stopping £500. If I had to give you a downside for the evening, I'm sure you wouldn't be surprised to hear it was the cost. But alas we work hard to make money and what's the point in having it if you can't enjoy life to its fullest. Soon after we received our tickets we had to answer a very intriguing questionnaire that evoked memories from all parts of our childhood, such as favourite holiday and fondest memories. This was enjoyable in its own right and I sense it would evoke the same feeling in everyone. It was a really nice touch.

On the evening there was already a sense of occasion and excitement in the air, while my wife and I reminisced over the aforementioned questionnaire – each trying to work out how our answers would be incorporated into the evening.

The outside of the Fat Duck is incredibly discreet and simple. After walking through a simple wooden door, you find yourself in a silent glass box with a hologram fireplace and the Front of House stood there as if they had been waiting for you all night. Of course she already knew our names and of course treated us like royalty

from the word go. Our coats were taken and we were politely escorted to our table. The interior was just fantastic. Unspoilt, unassuming, proper country pub, crossed with wild 60s furniture and a royal blue carpet. The background drone, flow of the staff and general flow of the whole place is simply perfect. We've all been to stuffy restaurants where you can cut the atmosphere with a knife and it can sometimes be the unfortunate lasting memory, but the atmosphere in the Fat Duck is perfect.

The food menu itself is a map with which you are supplied with a magnifying glass. The map included clues and pictures, which were all loosely based around Alice in Wonderland. It really was unique and inventive – unsurprisingly!

Lets just say there were a lot of courses. At least 10 I can remember – but I honestly lost count after that. They were all so seamlessly served, explained devoured and cleared away that it really was impossible to count. We tried not to have our phones out constantly throughout the meal, but it really was hard to resist. The couple on the table beside us Facetimeing their daughter in the US really took it to a new level!



If you choose to use the magnifying glass provided, you can read the smallest writing on the map, which gives a detailed description of the dishes provided,

(If you read the smallest writing on the map – and I mean, it's tiny, then you can read the exact explanation and ingredients of the dish.) Or you can leave the magnifying glass on the table and dine into the unknown. The big kid in me was all over this map within minutes and I just couldn't resist reading every square millimetre. As the dishes start to arrive, you can't help but feel a complete sense of joy. They are all immaculately

presented, and in many respects like works of art. It almost seemed a crime tucking in. Everything is precisely placed with an inventive purpose

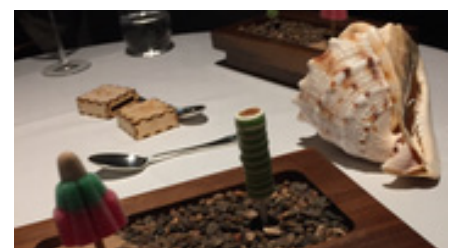
and artistic flare, but trust me when I say that it tastes just as sensational as it looks. I mean WOW. You know when you don't want something to end? Well multiply that by 3 hours and that's how I felt that night. I'll refrain from any major detail about the dishes because I don't want to spoil the surprise, but I will give you a few sneaky pictures. Let's just say your senses are constantly tricked. Sweet is savoury, hot is cold and up slowly becomes down.

The sense of theatre and wonder is ever present and the attention to detail from the staff is just superb. Each course is as impressive as the last and you slowly start to realise that the price is fully justified. At the

very end of your meal they wheel out a miniature Fat Duck doll's house that, after being wound up, delivers your petits fours into a small bag to take home. A lovely little keep sake that eludes to a sense of fun, class and finesse to finish off the evening. To give you an idea, one of mine was a beef-flavoured mars bar. Yep – and it was delicious. Moments before leaving we were invited into the kitchen to see behind the scenes. Everything was stainless steel, sleek and immaculately clean. The army of staff was the most impressive thing – they all had their own jobs that they were executing with military precision. It would have been a privilege to say that the man himself had been in there cooking for us, but needless to say, he wasn't.

The whole night could only be described as a captivating, gastronomic and sensory journey that evoked all sorts of emotion and stimulates every sense you own. I have to be honest; this was the best eating experience of my life and I'd go back in a heartbeat. Everything about it screams luxury and fun – and lets be honest, anything described with those two words has to be onto a winner.

Yes it could be cheaper, and yes I wish it were more accessible to everyone. But that statement alone defines why it's so exclusive and so special. It is what it is, and that is exceptional. It's clear why many critics have referred to it as the best restaurant in the world and so until we meet again Fat duck, I bid you adieu.



They are all immaculately and satisfyingly well presented, and in many respects like works of art.