

FUSION FLAVOURS

THE DEFINITION OF FUSION IS "THE PROCESS OF JOINING TWO OR MORE THINGS TOGETHER TO FORM A SINGLE ENTITY." IF FUSION WERE AN ART FORM, CHEF JAMES COCHRAN WOULD BE ONE OF THE GRAND MASTERS. GISELLE WHITEAKER TANTALISES HER TASTE BUDS AT JAMES COCHRAN EC3.



Just like the chef's heritage, the menu at James Cochran EC3 in London is a mix of things. Dishes like the much-lauded Jamaican Jerk buttermilk chicken with scotch bonnet jam, maize and coriander make it evident that Cochran tips his hat to his Jamaican-Scottish heritage in his dishes, but the flavour fusions crafted in the restaurant's kitchen go well beyond unusual pairings. They are magnificent creations; things of beauty, both visual and sensual.

James Cochran EC3 is set on the rather oddly named street Bevis Marks, sandwiched between office blocks. Open only on weekdays - and nights - it caters for the eastern fringe of the City crowd. Lunch is a busy affair, while evenings are quieter - for now. Once word gets out, that's likely to change.

Cochran's pedigree is testament to his talent. He honed his skills with a lengthy stint at the two-Michelin-starred The Ledbury and played with pop-ups in Soho, Hackney

and Camberwell before putting his name above the door here. And while the décor is simple, the food is far from it.

It's a Thursday night when my friend Dionne and I settle into a cosy corner, ready to tackle the seven-course tasting menu. We prepare our palates with an East London Spritz, a fusion cocktail in which Aperol Spritz meets Pimms, and a shot of blood-orange Cointreau livens up the party. Then the real entertainment arrives.

First up is sea bass tartare with blood orange, sesame, thinly sliced lychee and a hint of chilli. "That's not a dish I would have ordered if I read it on a menu, but I would drink that in a glass," says Dionne, spooning up the juice. "Just bring me a splash of rum." I'm of the same mind. The fish and lychee are tender and sweet, the sesame gives it a nutty edge, and the chilli adds a dash of intrigue. It's light and refreshing, a perfect summer dish, and a prime example of mixed influences.

| TOP Fermented heritage tomatoes.



The next plate looks something like an artist's palette, with pink cubes of compressed watermelon, matcha tea, mint, shimeji mushrooms and a thick smear of green pistachio puree, not a combination that naturally comes to mind. Individually, the elements taste alright; together they turn into something fabulous.

The third course sees smoked Cornish mackerel paired with a deep chorizo marmalade, fennel and the most surprising element of the evening, bisque ice cream. The scent is mouth-watering and the flavours are dark and sultry, with a sudden cold breeze courtesy of the bisque. In this dish, France joins Spain and the UK, to make an international headline worthy of worship.

One of the highlights is a pan-fried fillet of brill, a firm, slightly-sweet fish, served with orbs of cantaloupe melon, lemongrass and ginger, and girolle mushrooms. It is the melon that makes the dish, lifting it from the sea to the land and into the realms of legend.

The final savoury dish is a roast loin of Middle White pork, plated with a dollop of red pepper puree, burnt feta, baked sweet potato and a Roscoff onion. A thin layer of crispy crackling adds height to the plating and a satisfyingly crunchy texture to oppose the tender meat.

| TOP Jamaican Jerk buttermilk chicken, scotch bonnet jam, maize, coriander.

Much to my delight, the tasting menu comes with two sweet dishes. The pre-dessert is a deliciously crispy Kataifi pastry roll, filled with sweet lemon cream, with almond crumbs and yoghurt sorbet. I could have stopped there, I should have, but I can't resist anything with white chocolate. The finale is walnut parfait, white chocolate, sesame toffee and frozen raspberries. It resembles one of those paintings you make as a child, where you dollop paint onto paper then fold it in half to make an abstract butterfly. Naturally, it tastes far better, with the berry tang lifting the creamy parfait to the heavens.

So where does this food come from? While James Cochran EC3 has Britain at its core - Cornish mackerel, Ragstone goat's cheese, Herdwick lamb, British courgettes - the rest of the world is knocking on the windows, with hints of Spain, France, Greece, Jamaica and Asia. If there's such a thing as localised global fusion, James Cochran EC3 is it.

James Cochran EC3 is open Monday to Friday for lunch: 12pm - 3pm and dinner: 6pm - 10pm. The tasting menu is available on request (48 hours in advance) for lunch Monday to Friday and without prior request, at dinner Thursday and Friday. See www.jcochran.restaurant.