

INTRODUCING PLU RESTAURANT: A MOMENT WITH ELLIOT MOSS





By [Luxuriate Life Magazine](#)

Elliot Moss runs [PLU Restaurant](#) with wife Helen where he alone in the kitchen spends a total of around 34 hours for each guest to enjoy the PLU multi course experience.

PLU is an esoteric double entendre: it is both the past tense of the French verb “Plaire” to please or to enjoy, it is also an acronym for People Like Us. The idea being that, like the old lady/young woman picture that did

the rounds by email a few years back, you will see what you want, depending on your perspective PLU is a “micro restaurant” serving a seasonally changing tasting menu to a maximum of four tables per night. They offer up an internationally inspired, contemporary style menu with a strong backbone of French techniques, in an informal environment and with a fun approach.

We caught up with Elliot to talk about PLU and all things food.





What was that like growing up around cars and the racing world?

The expression “double edged sword” goes a good way towards summing it up. Firstly you have to remember that cars and racing are so intrinsically linked to everything I’ve ever known as for those worlds and my life to be one and the same. I’m sure that’s somewhat true for every child born to a professional racing driver, but in my case, my father wasn’t just a racing driver, he was “Mr. Motor Racing”.

As an adult I’m not immune to the surge of visceral excitement one can get from the sight or sound of a truly wonderful car, but nor can I separate the fantasy of ownership for the practicality of the same. I suppose the episode of Friends sums it up best. The one in which Rachel tries to date the gynaecologist and he responds with a comment about working at a coffee shop all day long, coming home and not wanting to see another cup of coffee!



Tell us what inspired you to open PLU?

Following a life altering meal that I didn't even want to have at le Georges Blanc (a restaurant in France that

has held 3 Michelin Stars since 1986) as a nine year old, I resolved that I would one day have a restaurant or hotel of my own. I trained as a chef and spent several years working in restaurants around the country, but following a couple of family deaths in quick succession, I had a kind of existential crisis, in which I decided that life can disappear in the blink of an eye and that I didn't want to have any regrets come the time of reckoning. I resolved to spend more time with my father. I wanted to "get to know" my father so I made the bittersweet decision to quit the kitchen and to start to work with him, managing his properties (he was a landlord to some 40 odd tenants). This I did for a decade before the pull of the kitchen became too strong.

I spoke to dad about it and asked if he could loan me the money to open a restaurant. He enthusiastically agreed and we set about planning PLU, which was at the time, going under the working title "Stirling's on Queenstown". However, he fell ill before we could get started and my mother didn't want to be involved so I had to find the money another way. I decided to sell my car, an Aston Martin DB2 from 1952. It had been given to me in 1990 by the then owner of Aston Martin, Peter Livanos. The likes of such overwhelming and misplaced generosity have probably not been seen again. I sold a car that I certainly wouldn't have ever had, had it not been for my father, for a price that it certainly wouldn't have realised, had it not been for his involvement in its story, by an auction house that certainly wouldn't have given me such reasonable terms, had it not been for their ability to use his name. So you could say that Dad still managed to find a way to help me set it up.

And the rest, as they say, is history...



Why did you decide to open in leafy St.John's Wood?

After much searching, Helen & I were out walking our dog, Satchmo, one day and walked past a bakery in St John's Wood that was on the market. We took down the number, called the agent and visited the next day, without Satchmo. There were so many good things about the place... it had a large outside area, it was walking distance to home and it had cellar space. We waited a little and with no one in situ, we were able to get the site with no premium, we viewed it one more time and we were sold! 12 Blenheim Terrace was to become my dream restaurant.



Tell us about your tasting menu.

By design, what we endeavour to do is give our guests what we consider to be the very best expression of a

restaurant experience. In order to do that we feel we need to take control of the entire meal. And that meal that should take you on something of a journey. Intriguing, sensory, even sentimental, but without becoming overwhelming. Complex without ever being complicated. To achieve that, I feel as though it makes more sense to split it up over a number of courses, to break the adventure up into bite size pieces (pardon the pun). Also by removing menu options we can endeavour to keep our food wastage to a minimum which is very important to us (both financially & morally), that in part accounts for our bookings only policy also.



We need a good night out. What makes PLU Restaurant different?

Like many restaurants, our menu goes through various seasonal metamorphoses, however I think the thing

that separates us from the crowd is our desire, throughout, to keep it fun, light hearted & humorous. And to offer original takes on what are fundamentally unoriginal concepts.

My approach is not to rewrite the rule book, but rather to keep it as is and just break some rules as I see fit. By that I mean that at PLU, you're highly unlikely to find anything you've never heard of before, but extremely likely to find it presented to you in a way you've never seen. By taking classical flavour combinations, delivered in new, fresh & modern ways, we aim to delight the diner's palate rather than to challenge it. It is my firmly held belief that while, as a society in general, we go through fluctuations in fad and fashion, swiftly, almost whimsically, it takes generations, epochs even, for our core tastes or beliefs to change.

We endeavour to offer a product in line with world class restaurants but with a less formal approach. For example, we have a dish on the menu called "The Polished Turd Paradox".



Tell us about some of your dishes

I trained at Le Gavroche many years ago, so while finding my own culinary voice meant changing the processes they use somewhat, the pillars of French cuisine informs everything I do. Classic dishes are classics for a reason: they have a broad, almost universal appeal. Why try to force a change there? Why put out something that one diner might love for its novelty, while their companion might find abrasive, even downright disgusting? Far better then, to my mind, to run with what people know and love and look to find a way of giving it to them in a manner which causes excitement and intrigue, while retaining familiarity and harmony. For instance, one of our signature dishes is a well known, classical European soup but rather than being served in a bowl with a spoon, is served on a tile which you are encouraged to pick up and lick. We call it the “pick and lick.” Oh, and it’s also painted onto the plate in the image of one of Andy Warhol’s Monroe screen prints! I am quite artistic, so it seemed like a good idea to play to my strengths.

I have run kitchens for people before who have insisted I put items on the plate that have no earthly place being there and forced to change the names of things on menus. I have, in the past, been told by the owner of one place not to use white chocolate because “we need chocolate on the menu and that’s not real chocolate”. Well here not only have I used white chocolate, I made a dessert that was purely an exploration of white chocolate. It was an assiette with seven different approaches, or matters, if you will. And the name of the dish? WCM: White Chocolate Matters. Freedom...



What is it like working alone in the kitchen? How do you manage it all?

In all honesty, being the sole chef in the kitchen was not my intention. In fact, my original business model for the place had us working with four chefs. However, it never quite worked out like that because, initially, I couldn't find suitable staff and didn't want to delay opening any longer.

It was bloody hard, particularly at the beginning, while the entire team was still just finding their feet and I was stretched too thin to take on as much of the managerial stuff as I might have liked but it's really proved a blessing in disguise, because had I had to cover wages, national insurance etc on the extra staff during lockdown, we certainly wouldn't have survived 2020.

Working in the kitchen alone is occasionally lonely, intermittently hectic, but I manage by limiting the number of diners and opening nights. Every week, I work at least one extra day, of approximately 15 hours, just doing preparatory work. Then each service day, I work from about 8:30 straight through to service, for a total of around 34 hours of work for each guest. I guess, when all is said and done, it's not so bad because I am, rightly or wrongly, a dreadful control freak.



What about the wines and cocktails?

It was very important to us that our wine list and bar be as unique and impressive as the food offerings, so for such a small restaurant, we have a quite astonishing cellar. We were recently flooded, which caused tens of thousands of pounds worth of damage and took a terrible toll on both our bar and cellar.

However, despite that we still have a very large selection of wines, with over 20 different Champagnes among them, we offer two different wine flights to accompany your meal: the “Bacchus” at £95 and the Dionnysis at £245, which includes grands crus from some of the World’s most renowned Chateaux and should you so wish, you can still start your evening off with one of our PLU-nique cocktails, such as our “Plasma Mary”, which is analogous to our entire concept: a riff on a classic Bloody Mary, the same flavours, but completely clear.



Top 3 restaurants and bars in London?

I haven't been out a lot since lockdown and haven't yet tried Core by Claire Smyth but here are my top 3:

Hide – It is a tremendous place, innovative in terms of food, drink and design, with an astonishing wine list and great staff. It is spread over three huge floors.

Le Gavroche – Partly because it is where I trained and I'll forever be loyal perhaps to the point of bias, but mainly because, despite its age and reputation as the Grande Dame of British fine dining institutions, I still don't think there is anywhere in the country that has overtaken it in terms of the ideals of service or pure sense of occasion. Going there is what I imagine it must have been like to have dined as the guest of the viceroy at the time of the Raj.

The Lecture Room and Library at Sketch – The Lecture Room and Library at Sketch is not to be confused with the Gallery downstairs which was not for me. Sketch is apparently the World's most Instagrammed restaurant; a very fun place, with astonishing and exciting design, but it is also the most chimeric restaurant I've ever been to. To go to The Lecture Room and Library (the three Michelin star restaurant upstairs) would be to go to what could very well be considered the best restaurant in the capital.

I would also like to give a special mention to Cakes and Bubbles on Regent Street which is quite extraordinary. Wonderful pastries served with a fabulous cocktails and Champagnes. It's the best thing of its kind I've ever experienced. It is sort of an innovative patisserie that is neither a restaurant nor a bar where their famous cheesecake is made of Baron Bigod cheese.



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What is your life motto?



of his most prized racing memorabilia, after his death. Sadly, for very unpalatable reasons I have yet to receive the items he wanted me to have, but luckily for me, I did get the letter, which felt like a life affirming pep talk from beyond the grave by someone who is held by thousands, if not millions, as a figure of great inspiration. In it he uses those words and they felt so poignant to me, especially at the time (during lockdown and at an emotional crossroads in my life when I was questioning my choices and the value of the restaurant, indeed really its very existence) that I wrote them on the wall leading down to the kitchen, so that I would see them every day and take time to consider exactly what they mean. So that’s my motto.



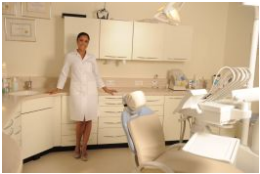
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What is the future of the London restaurant scene in London?

Our entire industry has had a bloody torrid time of it and I'm not sure what the future holds. What I do know is that PLU will be here, and hoping to charm guests with our mix of fun dining and fine dining, for a few more years yet. However I'm fairly certain that we will never be representative of the industry as a whole. At least I hope not, because while I like to think of us as one of the best eating experiences money can buy, I can tell you now, we'll never amount to a very good business model.

What is next for PLU Restaurant?

More of the same. Every day we look to build on what it is we're doing, trying to chase an unattainable goal. Pursuit of perfection. We're overhauling the staff uniforms a bit and I'm looking to add a "by the numbers" element, to really try to get people to think about the process. I believe it could be quite fun and exciting. Also I'm working on a few new dishes, including an homage to my late father, which is a dessert involving some flavours he really liked, under the working title "The White Helmet" or "Le Casque Blanc." And with any luck, our first Michelin star won't be too far off either...

To discover more, visit: plurestaurant.co.uk

Imagery courtesy of PLU Restaurant



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