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# CITY GEM:

## ANNABEL TREW RABBITS ON ABOUT HER NIGHT AT THE SAF RAW FOOD RESTAURANT AND BAR

**R**aw food – the description hardly gets you salivating. As a big meat eater and self-confessed cheese obsessive, I raised an eyebrow when I was told that Saf restaurant was also vegan. Glancing down the menu there was caviar, lasagne, sushi and... cheese tasting? Vegan? “Hardly”, I scoffed, let alone raw.

An export of America, the raw food movement has only just managed to nudge its way into the British culinary scene, spearheaded by this trendy restaurant in Shoreditch. Considering we’re a nation of fish and chips, roast beef, Yorkshire puddings and Victoria sponges, Saf certainly has its work cut out.

Nevertheless, the team are determined to shake off any negative connotations, so I decided to put them to the test. I brought along with me my haggis-eating, Aberdeen Angus steak-loving, “Wits this aboot? Nae meat, eh?!” Scottish friend. Bring on the rabbit food, we crowded. We couldn’t have been more wrong.

The entire dining experience is spent talking at your food in disbelief because nothing is as it seems. Ricotta cheese is in fact made from cashew nuts but truly tastes of the real thing (the Scot was left raving at his beetroot ravioli – “It canna be cashews... it canna be!”). Caviar consisted of painstakingly crafted roe-sized balls of chives and cucumbers, which could have been a little saltier (I’m a real caviar

addict), but were deliciously complemented by cashew nut sour cream and a sweet potato base (£6.50).

The lasagne was a real surprise. Far surpassing the good ol’ beef version, a bitter kick of pine nut parmesan set off the meaty walnut Bolognese, giving it a whole new stratum of fresher, lighter and varied flavours (£10.50). But the real star of the show was the pineapple rose sorbet with praline biscuit and goji syrup (£5.50). It is without doubt *the best* dessert I have ever tasted. A flurry of a million flavours, it is truly a pleasure to eat.

Although Saf doesn’t claim to be an ‘eco’ restaurant, all the produce is either organic, locally sourced or simply the best of the best (hence their salt is ‘Himalayan’; with over 800 trace minerals, it is supposedly

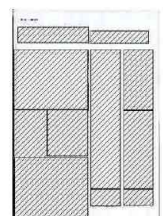
the purest salt on the planet.. and pink to boot). Also tucked at the back of the restaurant is a library of raw food vegan info should a customer be interested, and the staff are trained to answer all manner of inquisitive flotsam and jetsam about the restaurant’s concept.

Those of you who think that all vegans are jaundiced and ill should meet Chad Sarno, Saf’s Head Chef. A world-famous raw food expert and full-time vegan, Chad is a veritable advert for the food practice being happy, healthy and not at all sickly pale.

My friend and I had joked about getting a curry after the meal – but neither of us were hungry. Not stuffed full of bulk but pleasantly satiated, by the end of the evening two cynical carnivores were now licking their non-cooked vegan dishes clean. It was clear: raw food was officially

fun. Saf had succeeded. ■

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