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MUSEUM PIECES

ASHMOLEAN DINING ROOM
BEAUMONT STREET, OXFORD OX1 2PH (TEL: 01865 553823;
ASHMOLEANDININGROOM.COM)

Just what Oxford needed: a very good restaurant on the roof of the newly redeveloped Ashmolean. We were really impressed by the quality of the cooking – salt cod croquettes, pumpkin ravioli, chargrilled seabass with gremolata – and the teatime sandwiches, served on vintage china, were absolutely delicious. OK, we're not entirely sold on the rather anodyne space, but in a town where decent restaurants are thin on the ground, buggers, as Maurice Bowra famously said, can't be choosers. *££*

Barfly
**THE BAR AT
THE EGERTON**
EDWARDIAN ELEGANCE. AND
ANTONIO PIZZUTO'S MARTINIS
MAKE GROWN MEN WEEP.
17-19 EGERTON TERRACE, SW3
(TEL: 020 7589 2412)

GALLERY MESS
SAATCHI GALLERY, DUKE OF YORK'S
HQ, KING'S ROAD, SW3 4SQ (TEL: 020 7730
8135; SAATCHIGALLERY.COM)

The events and catering company Rhubarb runs the café, bar and restaurant at the new Saatchi Gallery on the King's Road. It's an interesting if awkward space, cleverly adapted (and looking especially spruce after a recent springclean) with tables under the colonnades and a large outdoor terrace. The food is simple and well done (pasta, burgers, a cracking Thai beef salad) and cakes and puddings are especially good. They also mix a nice martini – which makes some of the esoteric art way more accessible. *££*

THE NATIONAL DINING ROOMS
SAINSBURY WING, NATIONAL GALLERY, TRAFALGAR
SQUARE, WC2N 5DN (TEL: 020 7747 2525;
THENATIONALDININGROOMS.CO.UK)

If a museum restaurant has to be big, it may as well be like this one: bustling, with a menu that works all day long (fishcakes and treacle tart for lunch, sandwiches and cakes for tea), welcoming to children and granny-friendly. Owner Oliver Peyton, who has done so much to transform the food offerings in our national collections, is passionate about produce and provenance. On the other side of the gallery, Peyton's National Café is smaller, more intimate and lots of fun. *££/£*

PORTRAIT RESTAURANT
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY,
ST MARTIN'S PLACE, WC2H 0HE
(TEL: 020 7312 2490; SEARCYS.CO.UK/
NATIONALPORTRAITGALLERY)

Picture this: an excellent Modern British restaurant, extremely well run by the Searcy's people, on the top floor of the National Portrait Gallery. Baked whole plaice with brown shrimp butter or prawn and leek pie

taste great up here, overlooking Trafalgar Square and with views to the London Eye and Big Ben. Service is occasionally bumpy but usually fine, and when you say goodbye to the restaurant you can say hello to David Beckham and the Queen Mother on the way out. *££*

THE RESTAURANT AT ST PAUL'S

ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, EC4M 8AD
(TEL: 020 7248 2469; RESTAURANTATSTPAULS.CO.UK)
A new restaurant that's unrelentingly, obsessively English and has bags of style (bravo the wishbone oak chairs and the mismatched silver cutlery). This fun spot is run by a very competent team, who religiously source the most delectable produce: mild smoked salmon from the Fulberg family in Chalk Farm, honey from the owners' hives in Regent's Park. The wine list, too, is big on British. In the café, cakes and puddings come straight out of the nursery. *££/£*

THE WALLACE

THE WALLACE COLLECTION, MANCHESTER SQUARE, W1U
3BN (TEL: 020 7563 9505; THEWALLACERESTAURANT.CO.UK)
The food at the Wallace, the restaurant in the covered sculpture garden at the rear of Hertford House, had been feeling a little unloved on our recent visits. Now, suddenly, it's back on form. Boudin among the Bouchers, a fabulous fricassee of poulet noir among the Fragonards. There are also fruits de mers, pâtés and a splendid afternoon tea, the perfect pick-me-up if you've just braved Oxford Street, or are about to. *££*

WHITECHAPEL GALLERY DINING ROOM

77-82 WHITECHAPEL HIGH STREET, E1 7QX
(TEL: 020 7522 7896; WHITECHAPELGALLERY.ORG/DINE)
Sophie Calle and Paula Rego are regulars at this exceptional gallery newcomer, a fresh and vibrant restaurant located in the former Whitechapel Library, where TV chef Maria Elia offers a 'short and sweet menu', particularly strong on vegetables and simply cooked fish and meat. A tip: if you want to treat a few special friends to lunch or dinner, you can book the private library dining room (which seats between eight and 12), with its Christian Boltanski sculpture, and they won't charge you a penny extra for the privilege. *££*



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