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** But 'lounge' is still forbidden.
Unless you are in an airport*

Restaurants



Basque in the glory of this saucy newcomer, says Jeremy Wayne



The pig is made for us by a lady in Bilbao,' says Vincent Déridet, assistant general manager at **Eneko** at One Aldwych, still one of London's most stylish boutique hotels. He's pointing at a carved pig's head on the lid of a wooden box holding the signature dish, 'Txerri Boda Pork Festival'. Its trio of Ibérico, chorizo and black-pudding buns is good, if not exactly a festival. No matter – some parties take a while to get going.

Eneko occupies the space that was formerly Axis, a basement so deep that after stopping for oxygen, you half expect to find yourself in Australia by the time you emerge from the dramatic, copper-clad staircase. What you find instead is a saucy room, with white-leather armchairs, amoeba-shaped booths and speakeasy lighting – just made for bad behaviour.

Basque chef-patron Eneko Atxa's best-known restaurant,

HOW MUCH
About £200 for two, incl. wine

WHAT TO EAT
Anchoy tempura, hake, seared duck

WHO GOES
Queen Sofia of Spain, right, Eva Green, Colin and Livia Firth



Azurmendi, near Bilbao, has three Michelin stars, and he apparently has grand cuisine in mind for his next opening, in Tbilisi. But he doesn't appear to be chasing stars in London, at least not overtly. This is a blessing. It means a short, accessible menu, with only the occasional silliness. You don't need to come armed with a *Larousse Gastronomique* to enjoy Eneko; descriptions, as offered by the waiters, are limited to 10-second soundbites per dish.

A starter of tempura of anchovies with aioli is a wolf in sheep's

clothing, a batter of innocent airiness hiding a big, salty bite within. A fish soup of grouper, clams and hake has you right there by the sea – maritime Basque Country summed up in a bowl. There's hake – that strapping fish we think of as rather luxurious but is actually a staple in northern Spain – in the mains too, with confit vegetables and a red-pepper sauce; it is as satisfying as it is essentially unsophisticated. If a chicken-liver parfait has not quite set, the slow-cooked oxtail hits the mark. Seared duck breast with oyster mushrooms scores a bullseye.

Txakolí ('cha-koh-LEE'), the sulphury white wine of the Basque country, is heavily promoted (all from the winery Eneko runs with his uncle), but if you're eating meat, I recommend the Guelbenzu, a plummy Zaragoza red that's surprisingly light on the wallet.

Eneko is getting there – already fun and soon, perhaps, to be fabulous. The building, by the way, was once home to – would you believe – *Tatler*, so I feel a connection, even if it's not yet entirely *parfait*. One Aldwych, WC2 (eneko.london).



SIDE ORDERS

NAUGHTY PIGLETS
28 Brixton Water Lane, SW2
(naughtypiglets.co.uk)



One heck of a restaurant, with Lyon-born Margaux Aubry front of house and husband Joe Sharratt wearing the whites. He does almost ethereal burrata with black olives and a knock-your-socks-and-trousers-off pork belly with sriracha. True, Naughty Piglets looks a little like the inside of a sauna, but with food like this – no sweat.

SALON
18 Market Row, Coldharbour Lane, SW9 (salonbrixton.co.uk)
I wouldn't say this 26-seater in Brixton Market is déclassé (I'm far too polite), but a salon it most definitely isn't. Ah, yes – I get it: the name's ironic. Salon does have a schoolroom charm, though. Cheeses and charcuterie are excellent here, and if the no-choice set menu includes 'nduja ajo blanco or grilled cuttlefish with monk's beard, go for it.

DIP & FLIP
64–68 Atlantic Road, SW9
(dipandflip.co.uk)
Love it or loathe it, burgermania shows little sign of slowing down, which is why Dip & Flip has opened a fourth south London branch. Choose a burger in a brioche bun, or topside of beef or shoulder of lamb in a roll, and dip it into the signature house gravy. An acquired taste all right – but oodles of south Londoners seem to have acquired it.

THE BARFLY Cottons Rhum Shack

Jerk chicken, curried mutton, ackee and saltfish – yada yada yada! I mean, I love these things, but when push comes to shove, it's rum I'm after, and I'm after it in large amounts. So where better to drink it than at the new Cottons Rhum Shack, in Notting Hill? They say they



have the largest collection of rums in the UK – around 375 varieties – and I believe them. My recommendation? Jamaica's Wray and Nephew Overproof, used in the Reggae Rum Punch. You'll be jammin' too. 157–159 Notting Hill Gate, W11 (cottons-restaurant.co.uk).