

Restaurant etiquette

the Better Foodie adores eating out

We experience a frisson of excitement, with senses on full alert, as we're seated and handed a menu. But it must be the right sort of restaurant, which doesn't mean we only deign to expose our highly sophisticated palates to the swishest, starred restaurants; we'd just rather cook at home than be force-fed mediocrity. Although we may appear nonchalant about our choice of restaurant, we research meticulously; we have all the guides and are more than adept at digesting between the lines. We have favoured critics who share our discerning tastes and quirks – although we maintain a healthy disrespect for hype and largely trust our own finely tuned instinct.



WE'RE PROBABLY DISTINGUISHABLE AS BETTER FOODIES to the restaurant manager and other diners. Beyond exuding a palpable air of expectancy – without any small talk – we get down to the serious business of cross-examining the menu. Each dish is minutely discussed with irrepressible glee and we're unable to refrain from a discreet whoop when we identify a rare ingredient or a favourite producer (we're most approving of producer and regional name checks). Inevitably a pair of Foodies will hone in on the same dishes: perhaps the puntarelle salad followed by grilled Paine Farm squab with spiced pears, celery root blinis and garden lettuces. Intense negotiation will follow as to who is owed first choice.

WE'RE ALSO SAVVY ABOUT HOW MENUS WORK – we're aware that in less scrupulous establishments handwritten specials are one of the oldest ruses in the book to move slow selling dishes. Although tasting menus appeal to our adventurous spirit, we're slightly iffy about what's fundamentally the equivalent of ordering the Chinese set menu, and don't always want our palates to have to perform too many somersaults. We know our tastes and the chef's strengths and often would really rather savour more fully a couple of formidable and complementary dishes, or even confidently order our favourites off-menu.

FOODIES ARE NOT AVERSE TO EATING OUT IN LARGER PARTIES – preferably if all share similar gastro-sensibilities and play the game with questing forks to sample each and every dish.

WHAT WE REALLY ENJOY ARE DISHES THAT READ WELL AND EAT EVEN BETTER – managing that high-wire balancing act of layered (but not overly intricate) flavour, texture and technique that have you in will-it-or-won't-it-work paroxysms until the last morsel.