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TRAVEL

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LAST SHADOW PUPPETS STAR MILES KANE

Award-winning chef Tom Brown interviews his rockstar friend, talking Michelin stars, authenticity and the joys of wrestling

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Left: Bone marrow and whipped butter;
Above: Sorrel ice cream with strawberries;
Below: Mussels with courgette and almond



Da Terra is rubbish! Got you! But it's not. It's excellent. Technically brilliant, flamboyant, playful, the kind of place you'll find yourself daydreaming about days later, slumped at your desk, staring into the middle distance, idly curling a lock of hair around your fingers. The tasting menu – there are two only choices here, 'short' or 'long', of which I obviously go for the latter – is a masterclass in how to negotiate a 12 course meal. It leaves you sated, but without that feeling that perhaps you should get your stomach pumped.

It's a nightmare to write about, because each apparently simple dish contains an absurd number of ingredients that have all had terribly complicated things done to them. There are single-bite dishes you could write a thesis on.

Take the cod head croquettes with burnt chives, a carry-over from Aulis, which are made through some alchemic combination of dehydrated tapioca and potato broth. All you need to know, of course, is that they're delicious, with a shell that crackles between your teeth, giving way to heavy, aromatic fish.

Or the scallops, arranged into a neat little rose in the centre of an organic-looking bowl, which makes use of garlic koji (rice or soya beans inoculated with a fermentation culture), barbecued fennel and dainty little marigold leaves. It's mind-boggling the amount of time and effort that's gone into this single fleshy, crispy, ever-so-slightly smoky mouthful.

It isn't just a gustatory delight but a visual one, too. Chicken liver parfait comes in a baby-blue duck egg, which is in turn placed in an extravagantly woven nest. Scallop roe mousse is served in a pebble-like shell, which is hidden in a bowl of actual pebbles, beside a Lego scuba diver, a tiny treasure chest and a little shark; a later bread course comes with Lego-shaped blocks of butter.

There's a lot of Rogan's influence here. One of the desserts – an elegant puck of sorrel ice cream – features ingredients foraged from outside the restaurant. Try telling the last remaining East End geezer propping up the bar at the Salmon & Ball that people would be eating stuff off the ground in Bethnal Green and you'll make his day. Tell him how much you paid for it and he'll keel over. The only meat courses are a tiny morsel of chicken served with a golden egg yolk, all stashed beneath a canopy of brittle chicken skin; and a perfect cube of pork belly, so soft and uniformly cooked it could only have come out of a sous vide, then barbecued in black bean sauce.

Occasionally Cagali emerges from the kitchen to issue instructions: "Eat this dish in one bite, then mop up the sauce with the bread". I like this, not because I need to be told how to eat, but because the menu is so meticulously planned out that the chef knows how it should be tackled *right down to how many bites it takes*. This is the attention to detail I expect in a meal that costs £90 before I've even looked at a wine list.

There are dishes I don't have space to write about. There are dishes I've outright forgotten. But I ate enough to know that Da Terra is a worthy successor to Viajante and The Typing Room. Bethnal Green Town Hall has now been home to *three* of my favourite restaurants.

📍 To book, go to daterra.co.uk

REVIEW

DA TERRA

BETHNAL GREEN TOWN HALL

Three's the dream for this storied dining room, says **STEVE DINNEEN**

Bethnal Green's Town Hall Hotel has been home to two of my favourite restaurants. When I moved to London in 2010, Nuno Mendes had just opened Viajante, his Portuguese-minded take on world cuisine.

It was his first proper restaurant – and his first Michelin star – after running lauded supper clubs and gastro pubs. It was also the first London restaurant that really blew me away, somewhere a few minutes walk from my flat that could be mentioned in the same breath as the world's top restaurants. If there's one chef who tempted me down the rabbit hole of the London food scene, it's Mendes, which means he has a lot to answer for – just look at my bank statements.

When he packed up four years later to set up every paparazzo's favourite restaurant

Chiltern Firehouse, I was genuinely gutted.

In moved young chef Lee Westcott, who, with the backing of Jason Atherton, rebranded the place The Typing Room. And it was brilliant. Not *quite* as good as Viajante, but not far off. I'd pop back from time to time (Westcott once recognised me as "the critic who didn't like my scallops"), and I never failed to be impressed.

Then, just over a year ago, it closed *again*, apparently for good.

Until this month, when it opened *again* again, this time as Da Terra. So in I walked through that quietly grand entrance hall and into the dining room that feels as close to home as any in London. While the walls have changed from sage green to duck egg blue and now to pale grey, the rest remains unchanged, from the sweeping arches dividing the space in two to the open kitchen that spills into the restaurant.

I was also greeted by a familiar face: that of Rafael Cagali, the chef who cooked one of my top meals of last year in Simon Rogan's eight-seater 'development kitchen' Aulis. Da Terra is his joint venture with Paulo Airaud, who will continue to run his Michelin starred San Sebastian restaurant Amelia.

"He's from Argentina and I'm from Brazil, so you know how that goes," says Cagali. "We're the perfect partnership, as long as he's in Spain when I'm in the kitchen." I'm sure there's an aphorism for this...

Ideally, this would be the point in my review where I introduce a dramatic twist.

