



## The boy from little Rock done good

**This week:**  
**Outlaw's,**  
**London SW3**

**CRATING 9/10**

*Outlaw's at the Capital, 22-24 Basil St, London SW3 1AT (020 7591 1201; outlaw@capitalhotel.co.uk). Three courses with wine about £80 per head. Set lunch, £20/£25 for two/three courses.*



**W**hile there are other reasons to turn the attention to the chef featured today, not least his luminous talent for cooking, the most compelling is his name. It may well be the coolest in history.

The name is Nathan Outlaw, and it has no place in a kitchen. It belongs, in my view, to the title character of a Fifties cowboy series in which the young Clint Eastwood plays an innocent man driven out of town, with a \$5,000 dead or alive bounty on his head, by false allegations concerning moonshine made by the Clanton brothers shortly before their contretemps at the OK Corral.

Disappointingly, the real thing is a young seafood specialist who has quickly acquired two Michelin stars in Cornwall. He is an alumnus of Rick Stein in Padstow, where he met his wife, Rachel. I mention this purely as a prelude to offering sympathies to her family. Being the Outlaws' in-laws must be a little trying at times.

I had been meaning to visit his eponymous restaurant in Rock for years, and still am. Procrastinate long enough, however, and the mountain will come to Mohammed, the prophet represented here by the Capital Hotel in Knightsbridge.

Joining me there was the boxing promoter Frank Warren, a non-meat eater who adores his fish, and a colleague from the world of sport with worryingly impressive foodie knowledge. The

three of us gushed continually like Our 'Enery's face spouting blood after his meeting with the then Cassius Clay.

Since I last ate at the Capital, the dining room has been de-formalised. Under another two-starred chef, Eric Chavot, it was as pompous and sombre a space as ever reduced this Brian Blessed sound-alike to uncomfortable murmuring. The new look – blond wood panelling; loads of mirrors for the illusion of space; drawings of sea horses; glass plane on to the kitchen (no Outlaw this day, though he cooks here twice a week) – is such an improvement that the room now has a bit of a buzz.

After lavish freebies and some astoundingly good rosemary bread, Frank ramped up the rhapsodising over his lobster cocktail. "Wonderful sauce, like a bisque," he observed, "and the lobster is so fresh it feels cleansing."

M'colleague had a quartet of scallops with hazelnuts, watercress and smoked oil. "Och, that's brilliant, the way the flavours reveal themselves," he enthused. "First the hazelnut, then the sweetness of the scallop, finally this fantastic smoky bacon twang from the oil."

My lemon sole with a sliver of deep-fried oyster, oyster sauce and cucumber, was a delectable

medley, though it came in third due to the marginal dryness of the fish. This was the only technical flaw in the entire meal.

Our plates were being cleared when a chap at another table popped over and claimed to enjoy this column. "He didn't seem drunk," said my colleague, "so he must be connected to the restaurant." Our suspicion of a cynical charm offensive deepened when a second "fan" did the same during the puds; and any lingering vestige of doubt

was removed by the arrival, over the coffee, of a third. "Forgive me, but are those two gentlemen associates of yours?" I asked the last of the trio, "and might you by any chance own the hotel?" "As it happens, they are," he replied, "and I do."

His taste in reviewers, however expedient, is matched by his commercial acumen. Our main courses confirmed that he has hired a chef with an amazingly light touch, rare mastery of textural contrast, and the inventiveness to compliment his technique. Frank was wild about his cod with scampi, rosemary butter and courgette fries. "Beautiful fish with an incredibly light battered crust. Superb." My colleague was hoisted to fresh descriptive heights by his plaise fillet with "chestnut mushrooms"

(puréed mushroom reconstructed in the shape of chestnut) and parsley dumplings in a lemony garlic sauce. "Very restrained, very refined, again the little explosions of distinct flavours... Everything is here for a reason, which is great with something as bland as plaise. Genius."

My wreckfish (a bass that lives in shipwrecks) came with a red wine tartare dressing, anchovy-infused potato gratin styled after a skate wing, and halved sprouts deep fried into crisps. Another magnificent dish.

A funny Spanish waitress had proselytised a treacle tart with orange syrup and clotted cream, which needs ordering well in advance, and with excellent reason. A chocolate mousse, slightly overpowering in itself, was leavened by pear and a glorious honeycomb and caramel ice cream. A dark chocolate sponge with lime curd and a pleasingly sharp peanut ice cream, was sensational.

Once the hotelier had departed, we lingered over coffee and the dregs of Spanish godollo (at £46, one of the cheaper wines on a very grand list), and Frank turned his fecund mind to the commercial possibilities. "Is he a big lad, this chef, do you know?" he mused. From the online pictures, I'd say he is, but why do you ask? "Well, the name's wasted on a cook, isn't it? Tyson Fury versus Nathan Outlaw... now there's a heavyweight clash that would look good on the posters."

Your table is ready