



# Dinner with a big helping of drama

Sometimes three courses just isn't enough! **Emma Freud** develops a taste for theatrical restaurant experiences

The first time I heard of 'immersive dining', I thought it had something to do with swimming pools. In fact, it's a new trend of eating – the logical step on from 'a meal followed by a show', it's 'a meal that IS a show'. On your behalf, I dived into the subject, suspecting there might be a few dotted around the quirkier corners of the country. But it turns out they are everywhere and come in a rainbow of different forms.

At the sweetest end of the spectrum is the 'chef's' pudding at Parlour, a friendly west London restaurant ([parlourkensal.com](http://parlourkensal.com)). It involves your whole table putting on headphones through which an eight-minute mash-up of upbeat tracks are played. During the intense audio experience, chef covers the table in foil and creates an edible work of art in front of you, sometimes standing on the table itself to create the full Jackson Pollock effect.

The end result is like the map of an edible island: swirls of salted caramel and brushstrokes of coulis frame the melting chocolate puddings, real Battenburg cake, torched marshmallows, homemade Rolos, soufflés, meringues and perfect Arctic roll. And all the time songs from Mary Poppins and Willy Wonka are blasting through your ears. It's theatre, an acid trip and a 1970s up-ended dessert trolley rolled into one.

The most fully immersive experience took place at Gingerline ([gingerline.co.uk](http://gingerline.co.uk)) – a pop-up, five-course dinner held in a secret location. A text was sent four

hours before the meal giving us a starting point and walking directions on how to find the venue, without ever revealing the actual address. Every course took place in a different chamber, hosted by a different group of improvising actors, creating five different stories based around the food we were eating.

Secrecy was sworn so forgive me for not explaining more – but it was a mighty adventure involving us taking part in a TV quiz show, travelling by slide through darkness into a basement dining cave, singing a 'laying the table' song while we... laid the table and, at one point, being

*'Chef covers the table in foil and creates an edible work of art... sometimes standing on the table'*

fabulously insulted by a group of hand puppets. If the idea makes you nauseous, you're in the minority – the 5,000 tickets for their last run

of dinners sold out in days.

And in between the extremes, there's a subculture of entrepreneurs and chefs working in dozens of ways to stop a three-course meal being only that. Edible Cinema ([ediblecinema.co.uk](http://ediblecinema.co.uk)) in Bristol gives you a chance to eat the film you're watching. Every customer is given a tray with 10 small dishes, each of which is numbered. During the movie you're discreetly asked to taste a dish at the appropriate time. So as Tony Curtis kissed Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*, I spooned rose & lychee sorbet covered in popping candy into my mouth and I was there with him. So, so there.

At other venues this year, you can attend the wedding vows renewal dinner with Roald Dahl's Mr and Mrs

Twit, where the cocktails have actual stinging nettles in them. There is Steamy Bingo Bottomless Brunch at a retro restaurant in south London ([candlemaker.pub](http://candlemaker.pub)), where comedian Tina Turner Tea Lady is calling the numbers. Or you can be served a meal by 'Manuel' and shouted at by 'Basil' during the *Fawlty Towers* dinner at The Torquay Suite Theatre ([torquaysuitetheatre.com](http://torquaysuitetheatre.com)).

At the Mediaeval Banquet in Coombe Abbey ([coombeabbey.com](http://coombeabbey.com)), diners eat rib of swine while drinking mead and dancing to lutes and lyres – before news of the plague breaking out sends the event into chaos. And at Dans Le Noir ([dansle noir.com](http://dansle noir.com)), a restaurant in central London, you dine in total darkness. The waiters are mostly blind, so their skills mean that the food is on the table, not your lap. And the lack of light leads to a heightened sense of taste, even though you have no idea what you're eating.

It's all pretty quirky, but it may well be a serious trend, as the king of the UK's immersive dining is really Heston Blumenthal. Before eating at his signature restaurant, The Fat Duck ([thefatduck.co.uk](http://thefatduck.co.uk)) in Berkshire, diners now fill in a questionnaire about their early food memories. These flavours are then worked into the meal and accompanied by icons from their past. I ate an incredible raw fish course while listening to the sounds of the ocean on headphones, and gazing at a photograph of the seaside village in which I was raised. Immersive dining is growing up fast, in a gorgeously childish way.

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## Marilyn Monroe's kiss ice cream

For anyone lucky enough to kiss Marilyn Monroe, I'm almost nearly 100% confident this is how it might have maybe tasted.

SERVES 4-6 PREP 15 mins plus 3 hrs freezing NO COOK ✳

425g can lychees in syrup  
10 raspberries  
1 tbsp rosewater or rose liqueur  
300ml double cream  
397g can condensed milk  
popping candy, to serve

- 1 Tip the lychees with their syrup into a food processor, add the raspberries (they are only there to make it pink) and blitz until smooth. Add the rosewater and blitz again.
- 2 In a clean bowl, whisk the cream to soft peaks. Stir in the lychee and raspberry mix and the condensed milk, and give it all one final quick whisk to get rid of any lumps. Tip it into a plastic container with a lid. Freeze for at least 3 hrs – there's no need to churn it.
- 3 When it's ready, spoon into tumblers and sprinkle each one with 1 tsp popping candy. Close your eyes, eat, and dream on.

GOOD TO KNOW gluten free  
PER SERVING (6) 548 kcals • fat 33g • saturates 20g • carbs 57g • sugars 56g • fibre 1g • protein 6g • salt 0.1g



Portrait DAVID COOTSWORTH | Recipe photograph WILL HEAP | Food styling NICOLAS GHIRLANDO | Styling FAYE WEARS