

2018, done. T&K greatest hits. What sold.

Baby it's cold outside...The year draws to a close. Parties are in full swing and it is time to consider the lessons 2018 taught us.

The hardest one is that we must be doing something right as the numbers of meals we have served and the money you have all spent on them is strongly ahead of last year. But we don't know exactly what it is. Certainly people are travelling further to visit us and seem to be avoiding the high street chains whose woes are splashed all over the newspapers. Thankyou all for making the effort. We LOVE serving you.

After a long debate, here are the lessons, trends and surprises of 2018;



Hearts & livers on toast

Pigeon. Always a warm starter served pink, whether on a salad, a bowl of noodles or a bowl of lentils or really anything strongly flavoured enough to be paired with such rich meat, pigeon breasts flew out (sorry) all year. And the hearts and livers on sourdough toast sold out as soon as they appeared.

Jerk Marinated Halloumi on smashed avocado took over in the autumn from the ever popular smashed avocado with a poached egg and became a real favourite. There have been reports of avocados being banned in some restaurants as not being local enough. It won't happen here; trust us.



Jerk marinated halloumi & avocado

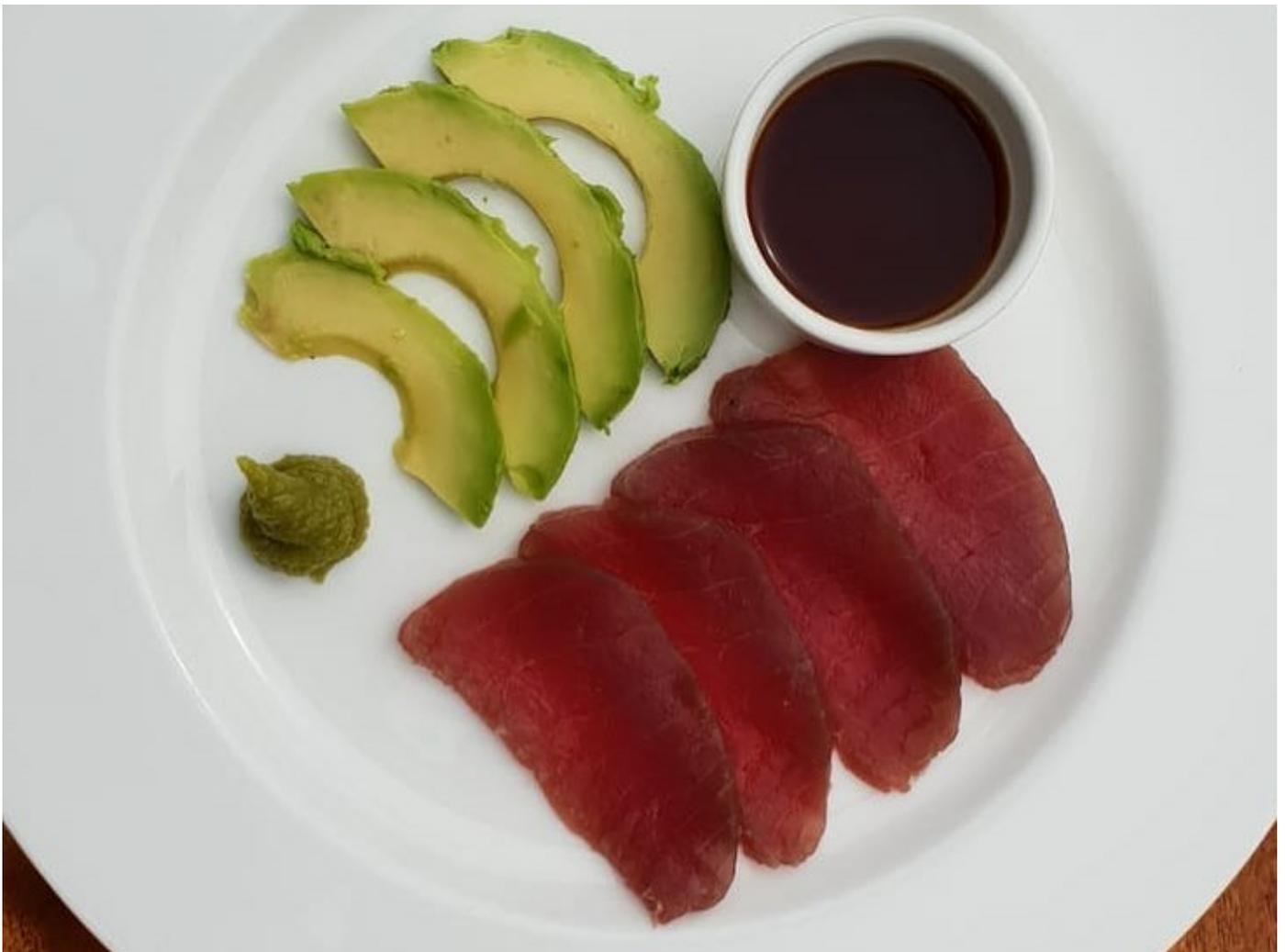
When we started out in 2014, we had Welsh Rarebit, made with NVB, on the menu as a 'savory' alternative to puddings. It's fair to say neither our staff nor the customers really got it. It moved onto the main menu but was a flop. Even using Henderson's relish as a gluten free alternative to Worcestershire sauce it was a commercial dud. And then one day Chef Chris popped a fried egg on top and... boom. It is a hugely popular comfort dish. Maybe we will try a savory again. Scotch Woodcock anyone?

In a similar vein, the farmers' secret that one year old lamb, aka hogget, tastes five times better than lamb and is still perfectly tender seemed not to be a view shared by our customers. So we reverted to lamb but there was always a nagging doubt.

If we know hogget is better and we either raise it ourselves or know the fields where it has been, should we not redouble our efforts to convince our diners to try it and be wowed by it? We did and you seem to be. The last two hoggets disappeared in double quick time. Eight more, fattening at Wigsthorpe, will be ready as soon as the new grass comes through.

We had seen goat in a number of London restaurants and decided to give it a go; it would be curry if it failed to sell. You loved it and we were back to our supplier in Keythorpe for more almost as soon as it went on the menu.

It sounds like everything we tried worked out but it is never that easy. Wonderful sashimi grade tuna loin from our supplier convinced us to try raw fish and the opening dish with spring onion, sesame seeds, avocado and a dressing got the thumbs down. But once we served the fish on its own with soy sauce, wasabi and sliced avocado on the side, the sashimi eaters flocked in. Flush with that success we served the scallops raw and, frankly, turned one of our best sellers into a flop. Perhaps the serve was too heavy but what we learned was that grilled scallops and raw tuna are massively popular. So they are back on the menu.



Sashimi grade Yellowfin Tuna

Finally, what are the food trends? Easy. More and more of you eat vegetarian and vegan meals and you don't want to be fobbed off with a token dish or two. We try to have two or three dishes of super fresh fish delivered most days from the Peterhead trawlers, our salads have become more adventurous and meals in themselves and we always have at least one vegan dish on the menu too. We like to think that it is enlightened self interest; in most groups of 6 and many of four, one person is likely to want to avoid meat and may well not want to eat fish either. And they tell us that they are sick and tired of goats' chees and beetroot tart or some veg and rice rustled up in the kitchen.

This trend isn't going away and we aim in 2019 to produce more varied and interesting food for those who would prefer not to have meat on their plate. Watch this space. Our recipe books are well thumbed.



Pumpkin salad & whipped feta

If we could, we would sell keged wine. Packaging costs are extremely low and it is eco friendly. But the wines we found were not good enough so we settled for boxed wine from St John in London. Careful to be sure that everyone knew the wine was from a box and that we were proud of it, the reaction was better than we could ever have expected. Great wines cheaper as a result of their packaging is a combination that has few enemies in Oundle. We will move to keg as soon as we find wines that justify it but, for now, these are wine list stalwarts.

All of us at T&K like to listen and learn and pride ourselves in having firm views without being stubborn. Our better halves agree on this totally. But we also have Red Lines (no, I did not mention Br**it). Ours are patronising rubbish food on a 'Kids' Menu', bags of crisps behind the bar, and nasty lager from a chemical factory. We are a Walkers, Fosters and Stella free zone. Our solutions were to have great food that children and adults seem to like, a plan to make our own veg crisps that has yet to be followed through and a couple of better made, quality lagers on the taps. But then the boys at NVB worked away and created Heisenberg and Kellerbier, a lager and Pilsner respectively. Both have been really well received and it has been interesting showing lager drinkers that their chosen tippel doesn't have to be flavour free.

Best wishes, see you at the wharf.

TK