



James Sherwood's

DISCRIMINATING
GUIDE TO
LONDON

*An unabashed companion to the very
finest experiences in the world's
most cosmopolitan city*



FOREWORD BY
James B. Sherwood





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 **Thames & Hudson**

About the Author

James Sherwood is the archivist at Henry Poole & Co. and a consultant for Anderson & Sheppard at the Savoy hotel. He is editor-at-large for *The Rake* and contributes to the *Daily Telegraph* and *World of Interiors*. He was the BBC fashion critic at Royal Ascot for eight years and regularly appears as a royal style and fashion critic on British and American television. His previous books include *Bespoke*, *The Men's Style of Savile Row*, *Fashion at Royal Ascot*, and *The Perfect Gentleman: The Pursuit of Timeless Elegance and Style in London*.

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Foreword

What a coincidence that the new *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* should be written by a James Sherwood who is not me!

I am an American who came to Europe in the 1960s and established a shipping company called Sea Containers. I was based in Paris initially, and as a stranger there I relied on the excellent Gault-Millau guide to the city. When I shifted my office to London in the 1970s I found there was no truly discriminating guide comparable to Gault-Millau.

I met a talented journalist, Susan Blackburn, a fellow American. We commiserated with each other on the lack of such a guide, so I decided to commission her to write one. Susan had many friends among important journalists of the day, so she assigned them restaurants to review, their only payment being the cost of the meal. When it came to ranking the establishments by stars, both she and I sampled them. I said I got tired walking the long corridors of huge museums and wanted a shortlist of 'must-see' things on display. When it came to shops, Susan asked her socialite lady friends to recommend the best ones.

I then approached William Heinemann, the British publishers, to publish the book, and they agreed to print 5,000 provided I bought 20 per cent. I did so and sent copies to my customers, friends and associates around the world. That was in 1975. Much to my surprise, Heinemann said the books had sold out, and asked me to produce a new edition, which both Heinemann and Grosset & Dunlap in New York published in 1977. This time 50,000 copies were printed, and they sold out as well. I had visions of Susan continuing to produce the guide, updating it every two years, but she tragically died and with her my guide – until now.

In 2014 I received two handsome books published by Thames & Hudson, which seemed to be dedicated to me on the dust jackets. But a few days later my namesake James Sherwood contacted me and identified himself as the author of the books. He said that Thames & Hudson wanted to take up the reins of my original guide, with him as the author. I readily endorsed the project.

In 1976 I had bought the Hotel Cipriani in Venice, which later became the flagship of a company founded called Orient-Express Hotels (now called Belmond). Partly because of the success of my *Discriminating Guide* I decided to create a group of hotels and travel experiences that would appeal to discriminating travellers. I brought back into operation the famed Orient-Express train in 1982. Eventually, the company owned fifty properties in twenty-five countries, and it continues to prosper under the name Belmond. We own the Manoir aux Quat' Saisons in Oxfordshire, and that would have been included in James's restaurant list had it been in London.

Producing the new *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* must have been an enormous task for James. I recall all the galleys that had to be proofed in Susan's day, and the debate about which places were to be included or excluded. Of the twenty-five starred restaurants in the edition of 1977 only eight remain, thanks to the Roux brothers and their sons (Le Gavroche), Richard Caring (Scott's) and a few hotel owners (Connaught). Le Gavroche charged £28 for dinner for two in 1977, plus wine, while Scott's was £22 plus wine. Today, the appetizer alone costs more than that.

In the years since 1977 some restaurants have drifted away from French towards Italian and from Chinese to Japanese, although there are still excellent examples of the former. Brasseries have become increasingly popular. 'Show-biz' cuisine has emerged, with unusually shaped plates, bizarre food combinations, frothy emanations, *amuse-bouches*, pre-desserts, cloches (silver domes) on plates and often so much noise that it is impossible to hold a conversation. I predict that much of this will pass, and the survivors will be those establishments with consistent track records of preparing delicious

cuisine and serving it unostentatiously in a pleasing environment. James's recommendations meet these criteria.

Whether it be for food, museums or shopping, I think you will find the new *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide* of great assistance, whether you are a visitor or a Londoner. I will certainly be using it myself.

James B. Sherwood
Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Belmond Ltd
(formerly Orient-Express Hotels Ltd)

Preface

London is a city of echoes: one that does not repeat itself, but often rhymes. When my writing career in London was in its infancy, a dinner-party guest arrived at a kitchen supper in Clapham with a curious book, published in 1977 and entitled *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London: Fine Dining and Shopping, with a Special Section on Museums and Art Galleries*. I was familiar with my coincidental namesake, the man who single-handedly saved the Orient Express, chaired the charity Venice in Peril and owned the historic Orient-Express Hotels portfolio, including the Cipriani in Venice, the Hôtel du Palais in Biarritz and the Copacabana Palace in Rio. I was not aware, however, that Mr Sherwood's discriminating guide was the 1970s jet-set bible for dining, drinking and dancing in London.

When Louis Vuitton first asked me to contribute to the company's City Guides in 2004, I began following in Mr Sherwood's footsteps around London. At the time of writing I still am, as we begin work on the Louis Vuitton Guide to London 2016. Occasionally, when lost for words, I turn to Mr Sherwood's book for amusement and inspiration. I now know that the authoritative, witty and occasionally caustic tone of *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* was largely thanks to the late editor Susan Blackburn, who could, like the Dowager Countess of Grantham, produce a withering quip with admirable brevity and accuracy.

It is nearly forty years since the last edition of *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* was published in the UK and the USA. I wrote to Mr Sherwood, enclosing my previous Thames & Hudson books, in early 2014. We met and he kindly allowed me to use the title and shamelessly copy the compact hardback format that fits into a deep pocket, attaché case or handbag. He also agreed to write a foreword to the edition of 2015. Although all the text is new, we have kept Mr Sherwood's amusing etymology of London restaurants, such as 'Where to eat when you've come into an inheritance', 'Where to eat with your lover' and 'Where to eat in the company of beautiful people'. When Mr Sherwood wrote the original guide, the few smart addresses that allowed such informal attire as blue jeans merited their own special section. Today restaurants in which blue jeans are not acceptable are sadly few, so we have instead included a section entitled 'Where to eat in evening dress'.

Susan Blackburn's note to the *Discriminating Guide* of 1977 begins 'Critics rarely agree,' and, in the spirit of full disclosure, explains that Mr Sherwood and his spies visited well over 300 London restaurants, adding the caveat that 'they don't go in fur coats.' Only half passed the *Discriminating Guide* test. Rather than ignore the also-rans, the *Discriminating Guide* holds the disappointing doors account in a section titled 'Not for us'. I have retained this section in a reduced format for the new edition, with the proviso 'But should be'. I share Mr Sherwood's particular prejudices on London's culinary landscape – cheek-by-jowl table placement, excessively loud music and oleaginous or arrogant service – and feel it my duty to warn of such hazards, which can imperil a perfectly decent lunch or dinner.

The new edition of *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* is entirely subjective and entirely written by me. As the original Mr Sherwood cautioned, reviewing a hundred restaurants in a relatively short time would be time-consuming, ruinously expensive and punishing on the waistline, so my equally discriminating friends have reported on the occasional restaurant that I haven't revisited. While we're on the subject of budget, the new edition is not an oligarch's guide to London, although I do, of course, visit some swanky places. Rather, it aspires to be a very particular Londoner's guide to living elegantly without the benefit of a banker's bonus or sovereign wealth fund.

Mr Sherwood's original guide concentrated largely on fine dining, with briefer entries about shopping and a superb guide to museums, including 'Not to be missed' lists collected from the directors of each institution. I have decided to mirror the original format, but have added a new Hotels section and a Drinks Cabinet exploring London's supper clubs, public houses, cocktail bars and cabarets. The original *Discriminating Guide* was a huge success in America, and it is clear that adding hotels is vital if the book is to be as useful to London's guests as to its natives.

Although I endeavour to avoid repetition, there is no disputing that London's social life revolves largely around hotel restaurants, bars, cabarets and ballrooms. So, as well as their listings in the Hotels section, you will find such addresses as Claridge's, the Dorchester and the Savoy in the Drinks Cabinet and Restaurants chapters. I cannot claim to have spent the night in every hotel listed. However, I have visited more London hotel rooms than some ladies and gentlemen for hire, having been invited to attend fashion and fine jewellery press days or private views for the Vuitton Guides over the past decade. I guarantee that I have viewed, if not stayed in, all the hotels listed.

By its very nature, *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* isn't for everyone. Although there is more than a smattering of addresses where it is fun to slum it, this book is unashamedly a celebration of the finest the city has to offer. I have, however, endeavoured to include delights that do not require you to pawn the family tiara or sell a kidney. I hope *James Sherwood's Discriminating Guide to London* will play a role comparable to that of Her Majesty The Queen in relation to her numerous prime ministers: 'to consult, to encourage and to warn'. I might add 'to amuse' but humour, like criticism, is also entirely subjective.

I have tried to make this mammoth task more manageable by choosing addresses that are unique and/or characteristic of London. A restaurant, hotel or shop that also trades in New York or Dubai (the Ivy, J. Sheekey's) will at the very least have been born in London. Actually, I'm much keener on restaurants that fly solo in London and trade abroad than on those that expand and open doors in every fashionable neighbourhood of the city.

Finally, a note on those neighbourhoods: you will notice that the *Discriminating Guide* is extremely fond of Mayfair, Piccadilly and St James's, postcodes that constitute the heart of London's West End and tend to monopolize the attention of natives and visitors alike. We will, of course, be visiting Knightsbridge, Notting Hill, Marylebone, Bloomsbury and Clerkenwell; we might even venture into what's become known as 'fashionable Hoxton, Shoreditch and Spitalfields' (although we'll make a note to leave our best jewellery in the hotel safe). What I won't do is send you to 'up and coming' neighbourhoods unless they have upped and come. I firmly promise never to take you anywhere that I haven't personally visited, vetted and thoroughly enjoyed.

James Sherwood

www.james-sherwood.com

Note

It is a compliment to the loyalty of London's diners and shoppers, and to the excellence and tenacity of select addresses, that a respectable number of restaurants and shops applauded in this *Discriminating Guide* were trading in 1975, when Mr Sherwood wrote his original edition. Those hardy perennials are annotated **&JS**.



I.

Restaurants

Where to eat ... to breakfast like a king

CARAVAN £

Exmouth Market is a scene: a pedestrianized Clerkenwell walk where the Margaret Howell- and Grenson brogue-wearing male of the species turns up his jeans to mid-calf, affects tortoiseshell spectacles and cultivates a beard that would make the Amish think twice. Former Market resident Joseph Grimaldi (the clown, not the Monégasque royal) would fit right in. Caravan, a glass-walled corner site with wooden benches spilling out among the food stalls, is where the beards who hot-desk in Clerkenwell's creative agencies come to refuel of a morning. It is thoroughly enjoyable to whip a copy of the *Financial Times* out of your laptop case and watch the puzzled looks on the faces of men who cannot break their fast without the company of an open MacBook Air; it's still more amusing watching trendy dads trying to spoon-feed granola into the mouth of a caterwauling little Mavis or Hector.

Breakfast is not so much served as art-directed to appeal to healthy urban trendies. The 'eggs any style' fry-up is served on a rustic doorstep of sourdough bread with layers of brittle streaky bacon, slow-roasted tomatoes that explode like a love bomb of flavour, and meaty thyme-roasted Portobello mushrooms. Green (read ethically grown, harvested and shipped) coffee is roasted on the premises, earning Caravan 'best in show' for a velvety, rich flat white ... no mean feat in a city that has more funky little indie coffee shops per square mile than it has banks. Caravan is a local treasure for serving robust, Dickensian breakfast fare such as baked eggs and smoky black pudding with maple-roast apples. The restaurant seats 48, but I like to perch on a bar stool facing the reclaimed-timber counter all the better for placing an order with the uniformly fresh-faced and cheerful waiting staff and baristas.

“Caravan is a local treasure for serving robust, Dickensian breakfast fare such as baked eggs and smoky black pudding ...”

Healthy breakfasts can be rather joyless, so applause is due to Caravan for serving peanut syrup porridge with cream and orange-scented pancakes with blueberries and vanilla butter: cheerful option

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