

The story that sums up Mya Lacarte for me is about mozzarella, although of course it's really about far more than that.

When you go to a restaurant, choosing from a menu can be a tricky business. It's meant to be, because it's an important decision, like putting a cross in a box at the polling station. The first sweep of the menu is how you rule out the joke candidates, the things you would never eat in a million years. For me that usually eliminates salads, the vegetarian option and anything involving sweetcorn. That's the easy part. Then comes the hard bit: choosing between the serious contenders. It's never the same two times running; what you're in the mood for, what you've eaten recently, what you've always wanted to try are all factors.

It's easy to criticise vegetarians, fussy eaters or the pregnant when you're choosing somewhere to eat, easy to say "There's one thing they can eat on the menu, how many options do they need?" But they're right about wanting more than one choice, because picking what to eat isn't just the difficult part, it's the fun part. It's one of the most enjoyable things about eating out: the decision itself.

Sometimes it's the only enjoyable thing; in disappointing restaurants it's all downhill from the moment you've placed your order. No such worries with Mya, but it remains the only place where my approach to a menu has gone awry.

One evening, I was comfortably settled at my table, taking in the chattering buzz of the room when something happened which definitely wasn't in the script: a waiter went past carrying a starter I had ruled out from the off. "Mozzarella, tomato consommé and basil sorbet" had, on paper, been easy to discount if only because nothing with a face had died to produce the dish. In the polling station analogy I used earlier, this was Screaming Lord Sutch.

Yet the moment I saw it presented smoothly to a happy diner at a neighbouring table which had committed the cardinal sin of not being mine, I knew I had to order it: so pretty, so different, so imaginative. A while later, when the wine had been poured and my polling slip was in the box, no chance of getting it back, my own segment of heaven turned up. It was a long thin slate with a shot glass of consommé, a neat sphere of sorbet and perfect slices of creamy mozzarella, separated only by bookmarks of basil.

If looking at it was a joy, eating it was a revelation. Cheese and tomato, the cornerstones of dull sandwiches in packed lunches around the country every weekday, had been transformed into pure flavour. The consommé was a miniature miracle; how could something so watery-looking taste of quite so much? Whose idea had basil sorbet been and could I shake their hand? And then there was the star, like no mozzarella I'd eaten before. If someone had tried to melt it on a pizza I would have wanted them arrested.

I used to tell foodie friends I'd eaten out and ordered badly and they'd say "in a good restaurant that shouldn't be possible" and I never understood them, but I do now and it's all Mya's fault. That is Mya in a nutshell: there are no joke candidates on the menu.

One last thing about the mozzarella: when someone came to take away my empty slate I told him how much I'd loved it and his eyes lit up. "Really? I'm so pleased. It's from Laverstoke Park, just down the road from here. Great, isn't it?" He absolutely came alive talking about that one ingredient and where it was from, but the best thing is that he didn't tell me because I asked, or because he had to. He told me because he wanted to, and that is Mya in a nutshell too.