

SAUCE BY SUSY ATKINS

If the spirit moves you, gen up on gin

not to overcook pigeon; I didn't realise that this basically meant not cooking it at all. The cauliflower came two ways: teeny cooked florets and very thin raw slices, which mixed things up a bit and kept it crunchy and fresh (it can taste a bit institutional). The quinoa was, as ever, totally unremarkable except in the fact that anyone would think to eat it. The gravy was magnificent.

I had the apple and quince millefeuille with chilled orange-blossom sabayon (£6), and this alternated between great and good. The heap of what looked like squirry cream and was actually sabayon was fabulous. The fruit was nice (what kind of a churl would dislike fruit?), but the pastry was a bit thick – not so much a thousand leaves as four planks. B's ice cream (£5.50), ditto. A scoop of cherry was mind-expandingly good, sharp but creamy in perfect balance, with a squidge of cherry jam sticking it to the plate, as if it might make off somewhere more glamorous. The Valrhona chocolate was brilliant. The piña colada was only so-so.

But who would moan about one scoop of ice cream not exactly to her liking? I am obviously trying to compensate for my giddy friend; I've gone too far in the unenthusiastic, ungrateful direction. In fact, this place is brilliant. ●

News arrives that Plymouth Gin is offering 'private distillery tours', with a chance to be 'mentored through the distilling process using your own personal micro gin still'. Which, honestly, sounds brilliant. I've been to Plymouth Gin before (yes, in Plymouth), and been led through a proper tasting with its master distiller, Sean Harrison. As someone who generally prefers wine, I was

amazed by (a) the intricacies of the gin-making process, (b) the sheer range of 'botanicals' used to give each its own style (juniper, lemon peel, orris root, angelica root, cardamom etc), and (c) the differences between the brands, when tasted blind.

Decent gin is a complex creature indeed, and deserves to be better understood. Give the cheaper and/or weaker labels a wide berth, as gin needs to

have a strong base in order to suck up (not strictly a technical term) the flavours of the botanicals. Buy a powerful one at over 40 per cent ABV. Second, there is certainly a gin for everyone, whether you prefer the richer juniper and citrus of Tanqueray, the floral and cucumber notes of Hendrick's, pure and mineral Martin Miller's etc. It certainly pays to try out different brands, perhaps getting a taste of each in bars when out and about.

Best tonic is Fever-Tree, which has revolutionised the G'n'T in recent years, delivering a much more natural flavour than the big-brand tonics. Buy in small bottles to keep things fizzing, and try adding a slice of fresh, ripe lime for a change. Private tours of the Plymouth distillery cost £40 per person, including a bottle of mother's ruin to take home. See you there.


TIPPLE TIP
The annual *Stella* search for spring's perfect sauvignon blanc has turned up the irresistible Castillo de Molina Reserva 2009 from Chile – perfumed and fruity with tangy flavours of lemon and lime and a mineral finish. Available at Majestic at £7.49, but on special offer from the end of the month. Not sure we can wait...'

TRY THESE...

TANQUERAY NO TEN (SELFRIDGES, WAITROSE, SAINSBURY'S, £29.99) The premium version of the hugely popular Tanqueray, made with fresh rather than dried botanicals, giving a refreshing, crisp, citrus appeal

PLYMOUTH (WIDELY AVAILABLE, ABOUT £14) A true classic, with a smooth but rich flavour, complex and holding a hint of sweet heather honey

BEEFEATER LONDON (WIDELY AVAILABLE, £14.68) Looks more traditional, of course, but this always tastes great – smooth and subtle, and perfect for martinis. You can visit the Beefeater distillery, too, in south London

