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Another peak year for London's restaurant openings, but closures are rising too

New restaurants opened in London at a faster rate in the last 12 months than at any time previously recorded, according to the latest, 26th edition of Harden's London Restaurants, published on 23rd November.

Two hundred (200) newcomers are recorded in the new edition, easily beating the previous record, set only last year of 179.

However the rate of closings was also high, at 76 – the third highest in the last 26 years, and significantly up on last year's level of 56.

Taking this level of 'churn' into account, net openings of 124 (200-76), stood just 1 higher on last year's 123 (179-56), so were effectively 'flat'.

The ratio of openings to closings (2.6:1) declined quite significantly on last year's figure (3.2:1), which was the 2nd highest in the last quarter century. Although this year's figure is relatively high, the year-on-year decline is suggestive of a peak being past.

The guide's co-founder, Peter Harden, said:

"Londoners are in a true golden age of dining out, as this year's record openings show. But, as many restaurateurs will tell you (and as these figures bear out), competition, heightened by the sheer weight of new restaurants, is increasing and starting to risk an oversupply, as shown by the rising number of closures."

In relation to the effects of Brexit he added:

"Given a gestation period of 9 months or more for any given opening, these figures don't reflect any post-Brexit robustness. Our view is that Brexit poses a high risk to the restaurant trade, which – like the rest of the hospitality industry – is terrified about staff recruitment with tougher immigration rules."

East London still where the action is

After central London, "E" postcodes remain the destination of choice for new restaurant openings, although West London narrowed the gap this year with $\frac{3}{4}$ the number of openings out East.

Two new openings in East London achieved the guide's top 5/5 rating for "outstanding" value of cooking: Pidgin and Som Saa; achieving 4/5 (or "very

good" value of cuisine): Canto Corvino, Oklava, Darbaar, Gunpowder, Galvin HOP and Anglo.

East London openings are disproportionately likely to feature meat-based cuisines, which are the most popular choice for new openings in "E" postcodes. For London as a whole Modern British and Italian cuisines are most popular. To a striking extent, the most poorly represented major cuisine amongst newcomers continues to be Chinese.

Winners & losers in the 2017 Harden's Annual Restaurant Survey

Ratings and reviews in the guide are based on one of the UK's most detailed annual polls of restaurant-goers, with some 7,500 people contributing 50,000 reports for the 2017 edition.

Winners (▲)

▲ **The Araki** The UK's most expensive restaurant, run by three-Michelin-star chef, Mitsuhiro Araki, also achieved the highest average food rating for: a *"stunning, intimate, authentic and completely unique experience" – "bliss... if at a cost"*.

▲ **The Ledbury** and chef Brett Graham secured the highest number of votes for being where reporters had their "Top Gastronomic Experience", regaining the No. 1 slot from Michel Roux's Le Gavroche to whom it narrowly lost out last year. *"Absence of snob factor is key: dishes are sophisticated and elaborate without being pretentious; utterly charming staff are much more easy-going than at many Michelin-starred peers; and the well-spaced interior lacks grandiosity while being calm and relaxing."*

▲ **Chez Bruce** was voted Londoner's favourite restaurant for the 12th year running. (Chef/Patron Bruce Poole, was the winner of the lifetime achievement award at Harden's London Restaurant Awards on September 12th). *"...6/5 for value. The modern British cuisine is unfailingly outstanding, but never over-elaborate: it just tastes intensely of what it is"*

▲ **Anchor & Hope** won the nomination as London's top pub, also for the 12th year in succession. *"The gastropub against which all others are judged!" – the survey's No. 1 boozer, a short walk from Waterloo, continues to wow with its "confident, robust, mostly meaty cooking"*

▲ **Gelupo, Kappacasein, The Rib Man, Smokestaak, Yum Bun**, each of which achieved the survey's top 5/5 rating for food at a formula price of below £10.

Losers (▼)

▼ Richard Caring's **Sexy Fish** overtook The River Café, attracting the most votes as London's most overpriced restaurant. Reports were scathing: *"... a big, brash and ridiculous glitter ball, serving uninspiring, knock-off fusion dishes to D-list celebs and ecstatic wannabes taking selfies; and given the inattentive service and humungous price tag –utterly disappointing"*.

▼ **The Oxo Tower** regained its position as the restaurant most-often nominated for "Most disappointing meal of the year" from **The Chiltern Firehouse**, who slipped to number 2. About the former: *"Urrggh, why can't they get it right?... dreadful standards make it the survey's perennial No. 1 disappointment"*. About the latter: *a "beautiful-people hangout [with]...relaxed cool [but]...totally overhyped, astronomically expensive [with]...prosaic cuisine"*.

▼ Tom Sellers, as ratings at **Story** slide across the board on complaints of *"gimmicky and ill-concieved meals"*, and Restaurant **Ours** makes a rocky start: *"despite the amazing interior, and friendly, solicitous service, it's marred by some very clumsy and overpriced cooking"*.

▼ Ratings at **Gordon Ramsay Royal Hospital Road** have dipped noticeably since Clare Smyth's departure, with numerous attacks on *"...modern French cuisine that's rather blah, fine-dining-by-numbers and way, way, way too expensive. The chasm between reality and Michelin's three stars has never looked greater here."* Both Michelin's current London three star choices are dismissed by the guide with a stinging review for **Alain Ducasse at The Dorchester**: *"3 stars... not in my eyes!... corporate... inspiration-free... and you need to bring ALL your money!"*

▼ Overpriced, famous American-owned steak-houses as both Wolfgang Puck's **Cut** and **Smith & Wollensky's** score 1/5 for the value of their food.

Price continue to rise in real terms above inflation

The average price of dinner for one at establishments listed in the guide is £51.37 (compared to £50.51 last year). Price have risen by 1.7% in the past 12 months. This continues a 3-year trend of a slowing rate that nevertheless exceeds the very low rate of inflation generally. This year's level of above-inflation price rises is very similar to last year's.

Notes for editors

For further information and images, or to arrange an interview with Peter Harden, contact Clare Burnage on 020 7839 4763 or email editorial@hardens.com.

1. Harden's is the UK's original 'user-generated content' restaurant guide. The Harden's survey of



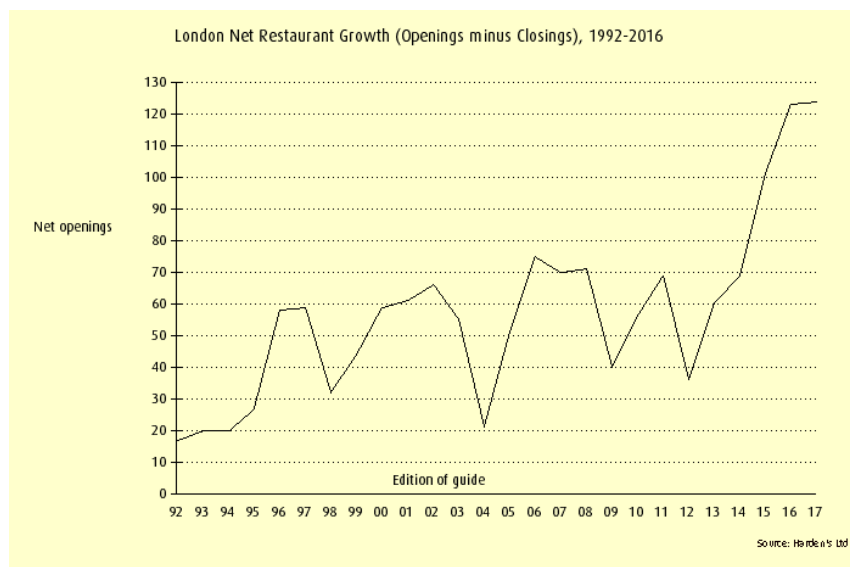
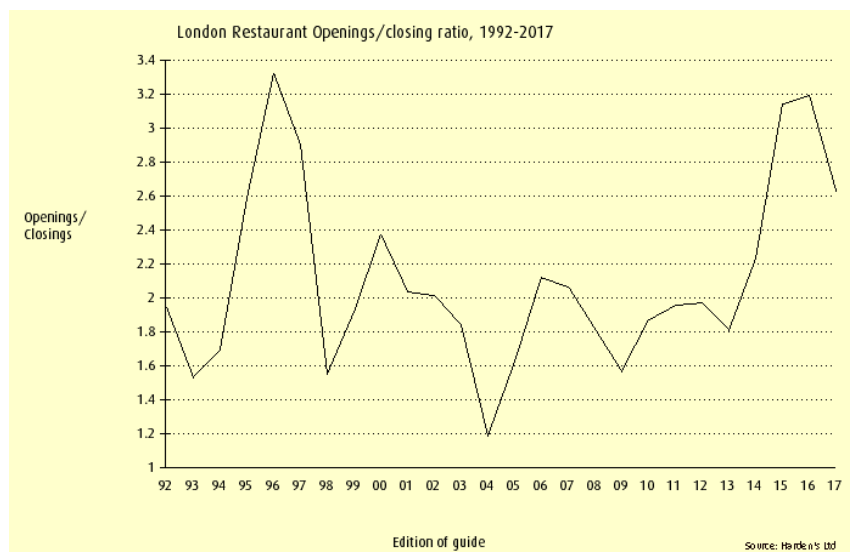
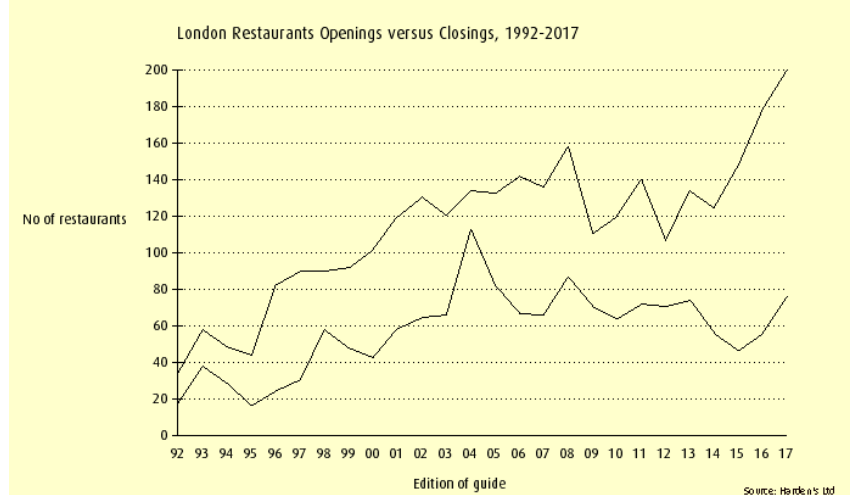
regular restaurant-goers is now in its 26th year. It has been national in scope since 1999. Harden's is the only established detailed annual survey of restaurant-goers across the UK.

2. Unlike restaurant review sites like TripAdvisor, Harden's has never published its surveyees' raw reports online, to prevent ballot-stuffing. Having no access to raw user reviews makes it much harder to "game" the Harden's system, because it is impossible to gauge how much false data to submit to do so. What's more, Harden's longstanding core of reviewers – some of who have been participating for over 20 years – provides a control group by which to access reports from newer respondents.

3. Harden's content is available in guidebook format, and in apps for iPhone; and also at www.hardens.com.

4. Harden's London Restaurants 2017, £12.99, is available in all good bookshops, including Waterstone's and Amazon.com, and from www.hardens.com!

Openings & Closings 1992-2017





SURVEY RESULTS

Most mentioned

- 1 J Sheekey (1)
- 2 Clos Maggiore (2)
- 3 Le Gavroche (3)
- 4 Chez Bruce (5)
- 5 The Ledbury (4)
- 6 Scott's (6)
- 7 Gymkhana (7)
- 8 The Wolseley (10)
- 9 Brasserie Zédel (11)
- 10 The Cinnamon Club (13)

- 11 The Delaunay (8) *
- 12 Fera at Claridges (9)
- 13 La Trompette (16)
- 14 Gauthier Soho (22)
- 15 The River Café (18)
- 16 Andrew Edmunds (33)
- 17 Pollen Street Social (14)
- 18 The Ivy (-)
- 19= Galvin La Chapelle (15)
- 19= La Poule au Pot (19)

- 21 Bocca Di Lupo (-)
- 22 Medlar (28)
- 23 Benares (26)
- 24 Gordon Ramsay (20)
- 25 Marcus (32)
- 26 Pied à Terre (25)
- 27= Galvin Bistrot de Luxe (27)
- 27= Bleeding Heart Restaurant (31)
- 29 The Square (17)
- 30 Le Caprice (23)

- 31 Dinner (12)
- 32 Moro (35)
- 33 The Palomar (24)
- 34 The Ivy Chelsea Garden (-)
- 35 Zuma (30)
- 36= The Berners Tavern (-)
- 36= Sexy Fish (-)
- 38 Murano (-)
- 39 Amaya (29)
- 40 A Wong (-)

Survey results, based on number of nominations per category

Top gastronomic experience 1 The Ledbury (2) 2 Le Gavroche (1) 3 Chez Bruce (3) 4 Fera at Claridges (4) 5 Gauthier Soho (-) 6 Pollen Street Social (8) 7 Pied à Terre (7) 8 La Trompette (-) 9 The River Café (-) 10 Story (9)	Best breakfast / brunch 1 The Wolseley (1) 2 The Delaunay (2) 3 Cecconi's (7) 4 Caravan N1 (-) 5 Duck & Waffle (3) 6 Roast (5) 7 Balthazar (10) 8 Providores (Tapa Room) (-) 9 Riding House Café (4) 10 45 Jermyn St (-)
Favourite 1 Chez Bruce (1) 2 Le Gavroche (4) 3 The Ledbury (9) 4 J Sheekey (5) 5 Gauthier Soho (6) 6 Moro (10) 7 The Wolseley (3) 8 La Trompette (8) 9 Medlar (-) 10 River Café (-)	Best bar / pub food 1 The Anchor & Hope (1) 2 Harwood Arms (2) 3 The Ladbroke Arms (4) 4 Bull & Last (3) 5 The Camberwell Arms (9) 6 Pig & Butcher (8) 7 The Jugged Hare (5) 8 The Guinea Grill (-) 9 The Wells (-) 10 The Lighterman
Best for business 1 The Wolseley (1) 2= Bleeding Heart Restaurant (10) 2= The Square (3) 4 The Delaunay (2) 5 Scott's (9) 6 City Social (4) 7 The Don (8) 8 L'Anima (6) 9 1 Lombard Street (-) 10 Galvin Bistrot de Luxe (-)	Most disappointing cooking 1 Oxo Tower (Rest') (2) 2 The Chiltern Firehouse (1) 3 Gordon Ramsay (7) 4 Pollen Street Social (3) 5 Benares (-) 6 Sexy Fish (-) 7 The Ivy Chelsea Garden (-) 8 The Ivy (-) 9 Dinner (6) 10 Dabbous (9)
Best for romance 1 Clos Maggiore (1) 2 La Poule au Pot (2) 3 Andrew Edmunds (3) 4 Bleeding Heart Restaurant (4) 5 Le Gavroche (6) 6 Galvin at Windows (-) 7 Gauthier Soho (10) 8 Le Caprice (9) 9 Chez Bruce (5) 10 Gordon Ramsay (-)	Most overpriced restaurant 1 Sexy Fish (-) 2 The River Café (1) 3 Oxo Tower (Rest') (2) 4 Gordon Ramsay (4) 5 Marcus (6) 6 The Chiltern Firehouse (3) 7 Pollen Street Social (8) 8 Le Gavroche (-) 9 Alain Ducasse, Dorchester (7) 10 Hutong (-)

Survey results, based on average marks awarded for food, service, ambience

Food £95+ 1 The Araki 2 The Ledbury 3 Le Gavroche 4 The Clove Club 5 Pied à Terre 6	Overall £95+ 1 The Ledbury 2 The Ritz Restaurant 3 Le Gavroche 4 Sketch (Lecture Rm) 5 The Araki
£70-£94 1 Hunan 2 The Five Fields 3 HKK 4 Gauthier Soho 5 Chez Bruce 6	£70-£94 1 The Five Fields 2 Gauthier Soho 3 Chez Bruce 4 The Guinea Grill 5 Scott's
£54-£69 1 Sushi Tetsu 2 Chotto Matte 3 St John 4 Zelman Meats 5 Café Spice Namaste 6	£54-£69 1 Sushi Tetsu 2 Oslo Court 3 Chotto Matte 4 Quo Vadis 5 Café Spice Namaste
£40-£54 1 Honey & Co 2 Jin Kichi 3 Taberna Do Mercado 4 José 5 Potli 6	£40-£54 1 The Lighterman 2 José 3 Jin Kichi 4 The Palomar 5 Andrew Edmunds
£39 or less 1 The Begging Bowl 2 Silk Road 3 A Wong 4 Blanchette 5 Tayyabs	£39 or less 1 The Begging Bowl 2 Blanchette 3 A Wong 4 Department of Coffee 5 Paradise Hampstead