



# DOWN *by the* RIVER

*Kim Woodward makes her mark at Skylon on the Southbank with an impressive new menu*

Words MADELEINE HOWELL



**M**odern European restaurant Skylon is blessed with a truly stunning location. On the first floor of the Royal Festival Hall in the Southbank Centre, the views from the huge floor-to-ceiling windows are a great spot in which to appreciate the cityscape.

Newly appointed Executive Chef Kim Woodward can't contain her excitement about her new post when we catch up. 'I'm shouting about it,' she grins. 'Skylon is about reliving a great restaurant in a great area. The London Eye is right next to us. Location, great food, atmosphere, it's all here.

Come along and enjoy it! I mean, who's coming for New Year's Eve to watch the fireworks?' Despite the pressure of running two 100-seat restaurants simultaneously (in the informal grill and main restaurant), Woodward is down with the pressure. 'A kitchen is a pressured environment but it's what I'm used to. I've been cooking for 18 years now and the pressure comes and goes.'

Her dishes are a celebration of exceptional seasonal ingredients, and for her it's a chance to get creative. 'The menu itself is very important to me,' she says. 'It's about cooking the food I love and

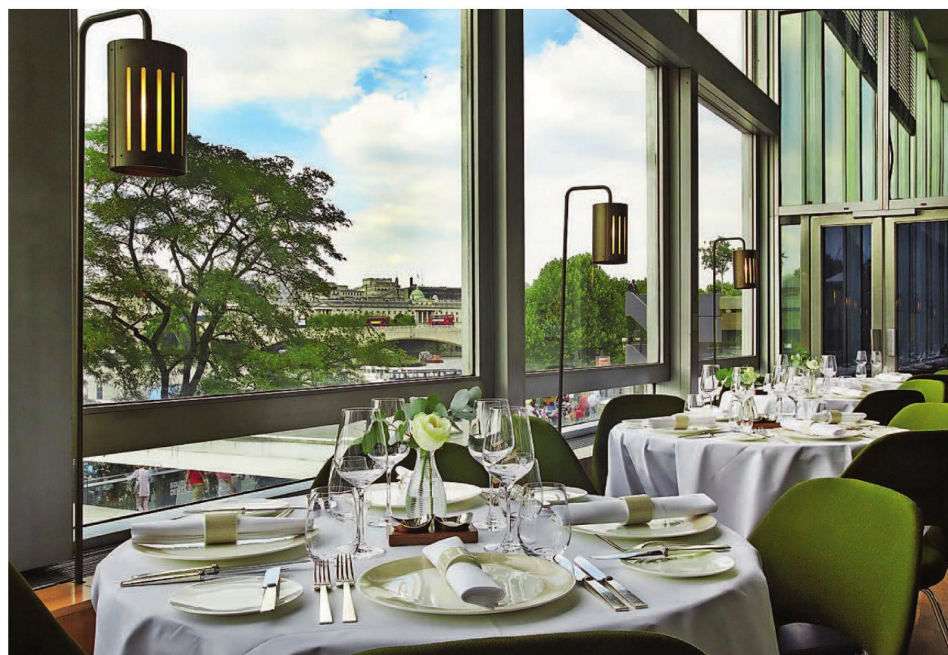




translating it onto the plate for everyone to enjoy. I want to experiment and try things that I've not done before. The grill is simple – you can order great rib-eye steak or classic tuna niçoise. The main restaurant is where I can play with seasonal food, done very well – but also let the produce speak for itself.'

It's the next chapter for a chef with an impressive career history. Woodward joins Skylon from the Savoy Grill, where she was the first female Head Chef in the restaurant's 126-year history, having worked with the Gordon Ramsay group for ten years prior (notably at the Big Cedar Lodge in Missouri). You may also recognise her from appearances on *Saturday Kitchen*, the BBC's *Great British Menu*, and from her role as a chef mentor on ITV's *Yes Chef*.

As an unusually formidable female chef in a male-dominated industry, Woodward takes her role as a mentor seriously. 'You can only make other chefs as good as you are if you spend time with them,' she explains. 'I love helping people to learn and develop and grow.' Other chefs among the



many she admires include Michael Caines ('a legend'), Tom Kerridge ('you can just see that he loves the food he cooks') and Hélène Darroze at The Connaught. She herself is ready to make her mark on London's restaurant scene, and wants to be known for 'delivering great food – not just fancy food'.

Her personal favourites at Skylon include a distinctively delicate hand-dived Orkney scallop ceviche starter served with pink grapefruit and heritage radish, cucumber and truffle, followed by a bold Scottish Angus Cross beef fillet with wild garlic, grelot onions and crispy shallots. Though rooted in British produce, European influences are in evidence in treats such as roasted veal sweetbreads with French white asparagus and toasted almond foam and the rather indulgent iced cappuccino soufflé with Baileys chocolate bon bons. 'I have a lot of fun with desserts,' the Cheshire-born chef laughs. The cherry blossom parfait with pistachio crumb and cherry sorbet is a visually stunning case in point.

'As a seasonal chef, I think about food all the time,' she admits. 'I'm always thinking about my next menu. Game season is coming up very soon and in September I'm thinking about grouse, monkfish, plums and figs... Autumn is a great time of year for colours and that warm feeling of comfort.'

Meanwhile, the grill will champion traditional dishes such as Cumberland ring sausage with spring onion mash and sage and onion gravy, alongside beer battered cod fillet with triple cooked chips, minted peas and curry aioli. The desserts have a nostalgic feel, with old-school favourites like Knickerbocker Glory on offer. 'I wanted to bring back much-loved classics that are often forgotten with my own, more refined approach,' she says. 'I also wanted to showcase the quality of ingredients available across the UK and in Europe. We're so lucky to have such an amazing, unrivalled choice nearby.'

In addition to the a la carte menu and the grill, there's also a six-course tasting menu, spectacular roast dinners on Sundays, a theatre menu, a set lunch and a fabulous weekend brunch to which you can add on unlimited Prosecco and Bloody Marys. Think devilled lamb kidneys and mushrooms on toast, and brioche with crispy bacon and maple syrup. I come away from a chat with Woodward with my love of great food, and of London, well and truly affirmed. Her suggestion of a New Year's Eve booking has stuck with me, too... **T**

**Royal Festival Hall, Lambeth**  
SE1 8XX; 020 7654 7800;  
skylon-restaurant.co.uk

