

# How to spend it

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## THE GANNET sweet talking

If there is one course in a meal to which the Gannet is least attached – and this, I may add, is only relative – it is pudding. Do not misunderstand me: I can force down a crème brûlée (as long as it is flavoured simply with vanilla, not passion fruit or liquorice) or a slice of lemon tart as easily as the next trencherman, but the pulse rarely quickens at the sight of a dessert trolley.

Perhaps this is because, as a chef, the black art of patisserie was always a mystery to me. Pastry chefs actually follow recipes and weigh things out, a form of multi-tasking to which I am peculiarly ill-suited. I left the job, instead, to a rather grumpy French woman who would occupy a marble-topped corner of the kitchen and grunt “Non!” at me from time to time.

I am aware, however, that many people take pudding very seriously indeed. You could, for example, attend a meeting of The Pudding Club, which convenes every week at a hotel in the Cotswolds. A perfunctory savoury course is followed by huge tumuli of nursery puddings: Sussex pond, jam roly-poly, and (playground innuendo being a perfect match for suet and sugar) spotted dick with lashings of custard. The record, apparently, is 23 bowlfuls, which is 22 bowls more than I managed.

I must admit a rather effete preference for desserts on a less heroic scale. The best I have eaten were in the affluent, dine-out-three-times-a-week city of Boston where, 11 years ago, two graduates from Harvard Business School opened Finale, a dedicated dessert restaurant (above). Executive chef Nicole Coady and her team create fabulous desserts in a calm kitchen with angled mirrors demonstrating the black art to entranced diners.

Finale’s philosophy is that grand desserts should be available to everyone. Liberated from the tyranny of a conventional menu, where they are a mere frivolous afterthought, puddings are given room to breathe – the description of one dessert, Fantasia, runs to 44 words, and includes such rococo details as “peach-chardonnay torte” and “white-chocolate flower petals filled with butter-crumble cake”. The list of dessert wines is stunning, and the whole concept evidently works: the partners have taken the idea back to its roots and opened a branch in Harvard Square.

News reaches me, too, of a good reason to stay at the Barbados resort Sandy Lane; more compelling, even, than the chance to spot Michael Winner on a sun lounger. Claire Clark, who cut her teeth at The Wolseley and then worked as pastry chef at The French Laundry, Thomas Keller’s fabulous Californian restaurant, has joined Sandy Lane as executive pastry chef. Even the mildly saccharophobe Gannet might fly in for a quick peck at pudding. **BILL KNOTT**

FINALE, 1 COLUMBUS AVENUE, BOSTON, MA 02116 (+1617-423 3184; WWW.FINALEDESSERTS.COM) AND BRANCHES. THE PUDDING CLUB, THREE WAYS HOUSE HOTEL, MICKLETON, CHIPPING CAMPDEN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE GL55 6SB (01386-438 429; WWW.PUDDINGCLUB.COM). SANDY LANE, ST JAMES, BARBADOS (+124-6-444 2000; WWW.SANDYLANE.COM).

