

TATLER

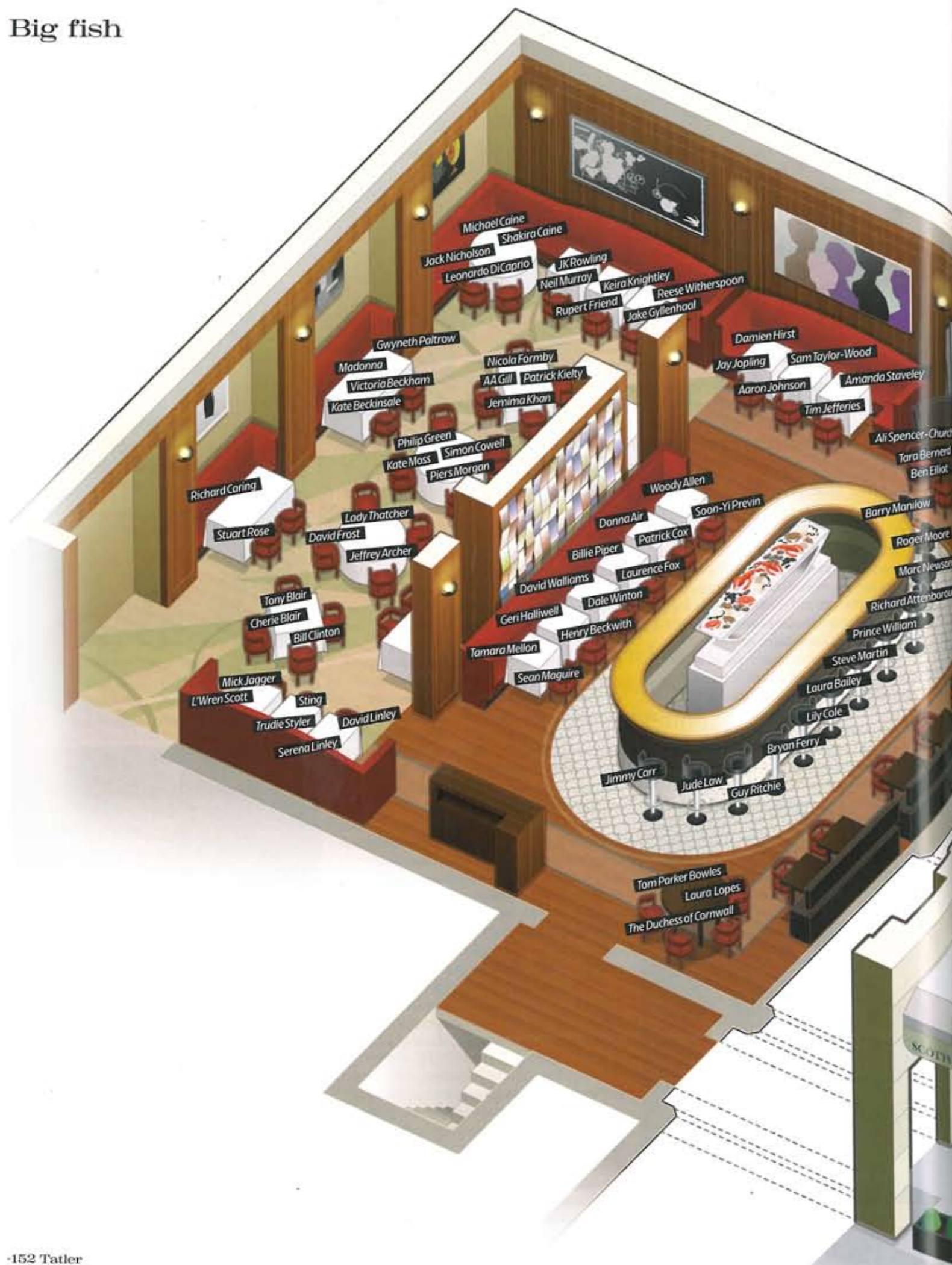
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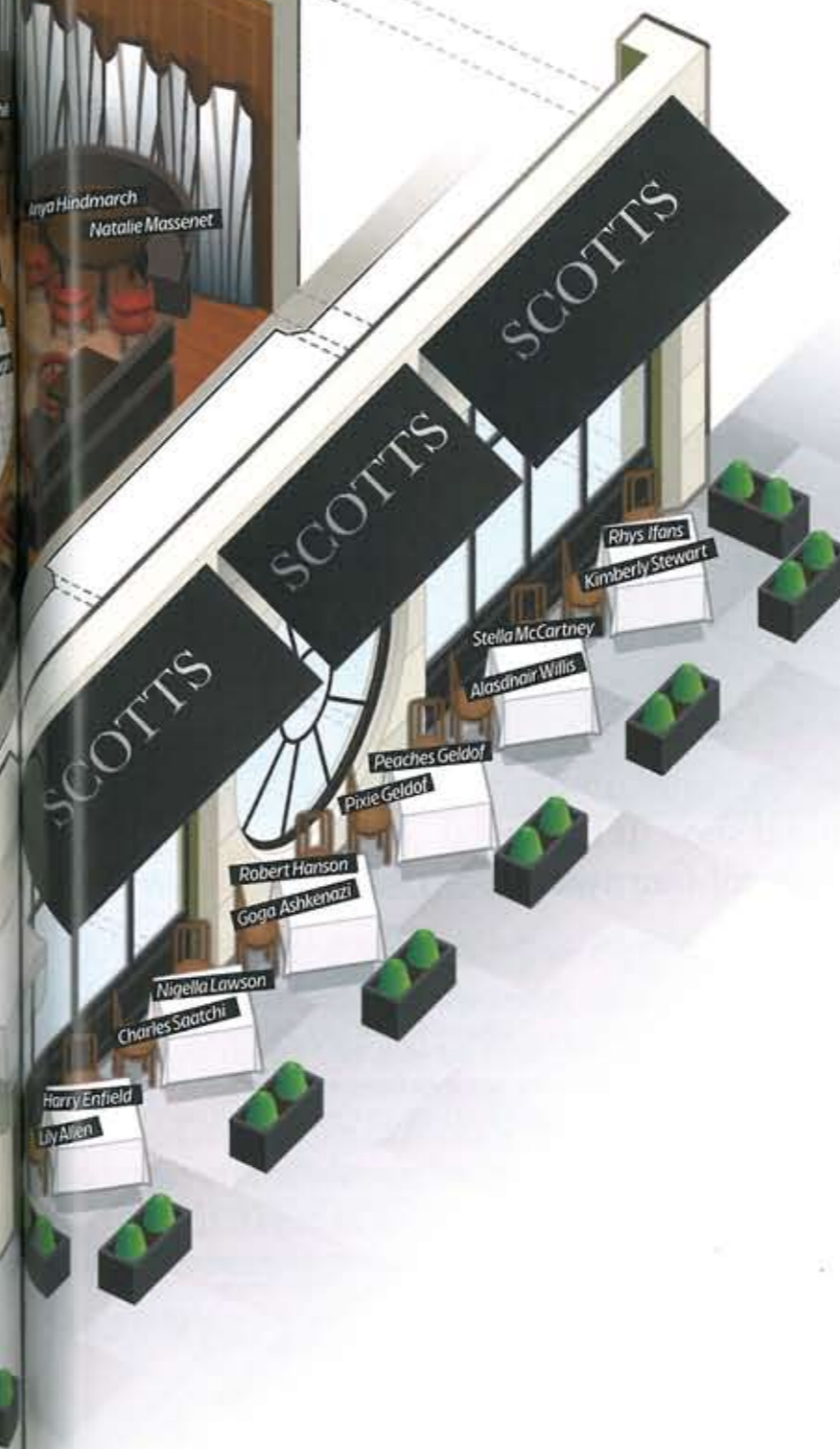
Special
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Dynamic dynasties, raving beauties & buccaneering billionaires



GREAT SCOTT'S

At any point, there's a London restaurant where it's all going on. For now, it's Scott's, where the bold and the beautiful feast on fine food and gourmet gossip. What a recipe for success, says Jeremy Wayne



Tf you could bottle glamour,' I wrote in the *Tatler Restaurant Guide 2009*, 'it would smell of Scott's.'

A year and a credit crunch on, a table at Scott's is still the hottest ticket in London – no mean feat in a city that, let's be frank, often values hip and new above trad and tested. If, for some unfathomable reason, it isn't already on your radar, you need to recalibrate pronto.

Originally opened in Haymarket in 1851 as an oyster warehouse by fishmonger John Scott, Scott's can claim to be the third oldest restaurant in London, after Rules and Wiltons. No one knows for sure whether Oscar Wilde really did make that darling throwaway remark, 'I can resist everything except temptation,' while dining here, but it's a fact that Ian Fleming was a regular in the Fifties and Sixties, reportedly drinking martinis 'shaken, not stirred' at the bar. Now, that was style.

In 1968, the restaurant moved to its present home in Mount Street, Mayfair and, after the buzz of >

Illustration CHRISTIAN TATE

Big fish

◁ Haymarket, its new setting must have seemed almost demure. In those days, you could still count the decent restaurants in London – Snooty Fox, Le Boulestin, the Savoy Grill and Mirabelle among them – on the fingers of two hands and Scott's was up there with them. Absolutely.

Then came the Seventies and Eighties. My, how London was changing. Apicella trattorias, the Fulham Road, Kensington Place. No one wanted oysters or langoustines any more, they wanted pan-fried foie gras and tiramisu, and wine was sweeping gin clean off the bar. Scott's struggled on, but the gilded oldie eventually fell from grace. A restaurant that had always managed to combine the seemingly impossible – to be simultaneously traditional and stylish – needed a very stylish buyer (and one with deep pockets) to sort it out, and it found one in the form of Richard Caring's Caprice Holdings, the restaurant group that numbers Le Caprice, the Ivy and J Sheekey among its remarkable stable.

When Scott's reopened in 2006 after a lavish remodelling, estimated to have cost between £3 million and £5 million, it was clear from the word go that this was going to be no ordinary restaurant. Prevented from trading in its first week of reopening because of an injunction to do with a complaint about excessive noise by Mayfair resident Glenys Roberts, Scott's opened regardless, honouring its reservations and *simply giving the food away*, an act of defiance that cost the restaurant a cool £350,000, which it would take six months to recoup. Style, again.

The new interior is by Swedish-born designer Martin Brudnizki – 'inspired by the ostentatious glamour of the restaurant's past', according to the restaurant's own literature. It shows. The oak-panelled dining room runs around an eye-poppingly extravagant bar – a bar with a green onyx top and a stingray-skin covered front. Get that! (Most regulars do, and love it.) Crab and langoustine and all kinds of bivalve molluscs lie artfully arranged on the high altar, almost insouciantly, almost as if they were living things (which, of course, they were a few hours earlier, because fish and shellfish at Scott's are nothing if not pingingly

fresh, but we shall come to that in a moment). The burgundy banquettes lining the room are so soft, so seductive that let Miuccia Prada in the door and she would turn them all into handbags. The chartreuse-green marble-mosaic fan motif around the bar and the mosaics in the loos would give some of the grander houses in Pompeii a run for their money. Someone is employed – I'm not sure whether exclusively, but let's just assume so – simply to fold the paper towels by the washbasins in the loos into neat triangles. Very pleasing

present incumbent, Dave McCarthy, has worked at Le Caprice, the Ivy and J Sheekey and has come up through the ranks. The menu is peppered with references echoing down the years: lobster à l'américaine (10/- – or 50p – in 1915, not given away even then, but today a serious £39.50); potted shrimps; a peerless sole meunière; puddings like poire belle Hélène and savouries of herring milts and smoked anchovies. This is great English cooking, food with a track record, although to call it 'retro' is to tar it with a trendiness it neither needs nor desires.

And then there is front of house, authoritative and efficient. And while service, like service everywhere, has the occasional lapse – a dirty sideplate not removed, a finger bowl not brought and, on my last visit, a waiter who had definitely got out of bed on the wrong side – there are little touches, Scott's magic touches if you like, that mean all is quickly forgiven.

One is the reservations system – a crisp English voice (can one say that?) which gives you the info and then connects you, in seconds, to a live operator, no matter what the time of day, no matter how busy they are. And the doorman at the entrance, in his bowler hat, avuncular and reassuring, a throwback to a more civilised age.

'Oooh, I do luv a doorman!' I heard a lady remark recently, arriving ahead of me for lunch, a Scouse accent so thick you could swear it was Cilla. Hang on – it *was* Cilla. I involuntarily took a step back and, as I did so, almost trod on a sequinned shoe. It belonged to the Duchess of Cornwall, who was

kind enough to smile. All are treated equally here, even restaurant writers, not because the staff are impervious to celebrity (Nigella has been spotted here three times in a single week and Michael and Shakira Caine are practically fixtures), and not because owner Richard Caring is a man who has made it on his own, but because Scott's has that highly developed sense of noblesse oblige that only truly 'classy' restaurants have.

No wonder you sigh with contentment at this wonderful restaurant as you sign a bill which, in the words of the late, great film critic Alexander Walker – a Scott's devotee – 'would make you wince elsewhere'. □



Scott's diners: clockwise, from above, Prince William, 2007; Madonna and Guy Ritchie, 2007; Sting and Trudie Styler, 2009



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to the eye. Attention to detail – the slender, weighty silverware, the heaviest, snowiest linen, the great basket of muslined lemons like a grab-bag at a rich kid's party – is key.

Then there is the food – achingly fresh shellfish, properly served, with knowledge and know-how, but (and this is the clever bit) without pretension. Wunderkind Mark Hix, who had cooked at the Ivy forever, designed the original menu and opened the restaurant to applause. (The critics were united. 'One of the most gratifying restaurant rebirths of the last few years,' gushed a usually reserved Fay Maschler.) But Mark left soon after, leaving Kevin Gratton to wear the whites. The