

## restaurants

Away from his kitchen, our chef prowls the room like a caged panther



in the City in the old days, everyone would have been dead long ago. Cor-o-nary!

The very name L'Anima, which means soul in Italian, would be ironic in the disembowelled streets behind Liverpool Street station were it not for the fact that L'Anima has breathed life and soul into the anodyne, characterless grey. On the outside, like a swathe of white mink, it alleviates the brutality and the harshness. On the inside it is bright but also soft and sensuous, a large chrome and white room designed by the architect Claudio Silvestrin, once described by Terence Conran as 'an artist of space, a great artist in the same way that Mondrian, Rothko and Arp are great artists'.

Tables are covered with the snowiest linen and there are vases full of blousy cabbage roses. For Olga and me it was love at first sight (with L'Anima) – it's such a strikingly beautiful restaurant that the food would be almost irrelevant were it not so spanking good. The best bread in an EC postal district comes with the grassiest olive oil and the fleshiest olives. When he's not gesticulating like an overwrought lover in his kitchen – open to the restaurant

# SQUARE MILE HIGH CLUB

*Sexy white L' Anima is washing away the City blues, says Jeremy Wayne*



Four years ago at the *Tatler* Restaurant Awards, a good-looking Italian by the name of Francesco Mazzei skulked at the back of the Dorchester ballroom wondering what (award) he might pick up for Franco's, the Jermyn Street restaurant he had just launched for the Hambro family.

His luck was out that evening – with the awards, anyway. A year later, when the prize should have been his, he had upped whisks and gone to head Chris Corbin and Jeremy King's kitchen at the newly opened St Alban, the Wolseley's lower Regent Street sibling.

Even the kudos of working for London's most celebrated restaurant duo couldn't hold him. He left St Alban, raised a lot of money and before you could say cavatelli with sea urchin, turnip tops and bottarga, he had opened L'Anima in the City – an act of hubris or, more likely, madness because historically, people who make (serious) money in the City don't eat lunch there, they take a cab to Wilton's.

My lunch companion, Olga – who'd been practically the last Russian employee at Moscow Narodny Bank's London branch – put it another way. 'Darlink,' she said, lifting a spoonful of the creamiest, curdiest burrata and wood-smoked aubergine to her Rouge Allure'd lips, 'if they had had a restaurant like this

along the entire back wall – Mazzei prowls the room like a caged panther and comes over to suggest the tagliolini with porcini, topped with black and white truffles.

Bring it on, I say. ('No, take it away,' says Olga. 'I will die.' She is fixated with death.) A spit-roast leg of lamb, blushing pink, is perfumed with rosemary and comes with cannellini beans and the kind of roast potatoes you can only make in a cast-iron pan on top of a stove in southern Italy. Which is to say crisp, almost burnt outside, submissive within.

When you thank the waiter for a small service rendered – the clearing away of a plate or the filling up of a water glass – he says with a smile and a gracious half-bow: 'It's a pleasure.' What is definitely a pleasure is wood-roast pineapple for pudding, sweet and warm, fantastically exotic, singing of the islands. They serve it with smooth, intense caramel ice-cream.

All the big rollers (the ones still rolling, anyway), are here. 'He is SG Hambros,' says Olga, nodding towards a neighbouring table. 'And he is Morgan Stanley – or was this morning.' Although most of the tables are taken by suits, a few are in mufti and there are even some leather-jacketed trendsters at the bar.

A restaurant like this couldn't happen in New York. Over there you go to work, make money and go home – financial districts aren't made to have fun in. Eating on Wall Street is like loitering or staying too long at a wake – not on L'Anima, on the other hand, is right on. And on and on, let's hope. □  
L'Anima, 1 Snowden Street, EC2 (tel: 020 3147 7200; lanima.co.uk).



### TATLER TIPS

#### How much

Lunch or dinner for two, about £130, Monday to Friday

#### What to eat

N'duja – spicy Sicilian sausage, cavatelli with sea urchin, anything from the wood oven

#### What to drink

Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Jeio Bisol (NV), £6 a glass

#### What to wear

Suits, Nudie jeans

### SPOTTED

Laura Bailey at Scott's. Bill Nighy at the Wolseley