

REVIEWS ALAIN DUCASSE

STARS COME OUT AT NIGHT

One of the world's finest chefs cooking in a world famous London hotel is a knock-out combination. **MARK HEDLEY** sees stars at Alain Ducasse at the Dorchester

IF YOU'VE EVER been to the Dorchester spa you'll know that it's a rather labyrinthine affair. One wrong turn and you could be down there for days. In that sense, it's not actually the most relaxing place in the hotel.

That accolade must be awarded to Alain Ducasse. The three Michelin-starred restaurant is the most calming dining environment

you'll ever have the pleasure to experience. Deep-pile carpets, mood lighting, and seats so comfortable you could "curl up and go to sleep in them" (according to my wife, anyway).

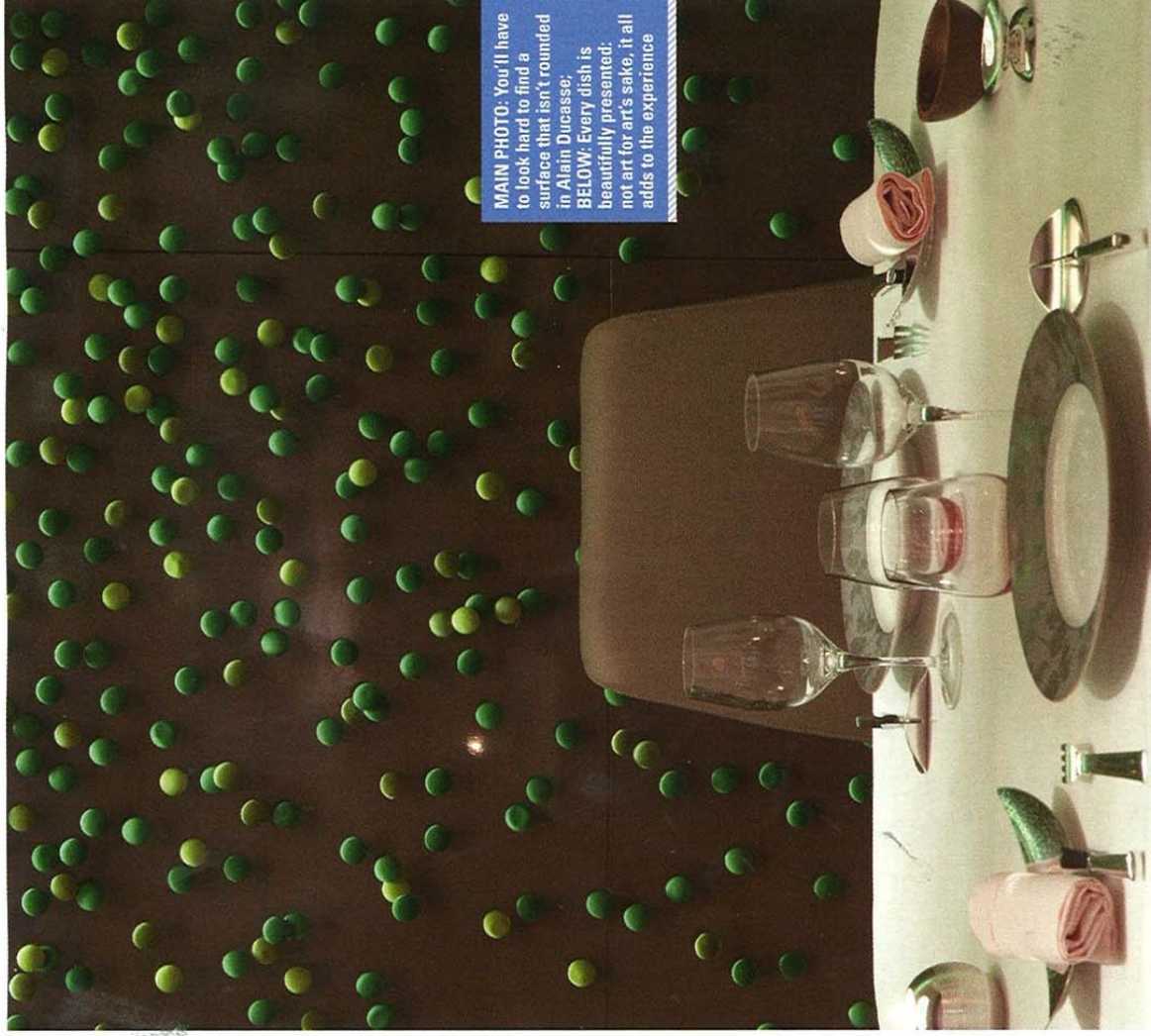
The interior design has been very cleverly engineered to this end. There are no harsh edges; from the arms on the chairs, the speakers in the roof, even down to the candles and the pepper dish, everything is rounded. The overall effect is incredibly welcoming.

As is the champagne trolley that wheels its way over as soon as you sit down. Alain Ducasse's own label is the house champers and with Lanson behind it, a lively aperitif. Laurent Perrier's elegant Grand Siècle is there by the glass for special occasions, too.

It was at this point that Nicolas Defremont – the restaurant manager, and surely the winner of 'Europe's Most Charming Man 2011' – came over cradling a beautiful cigar box. But inside, instead of a selection of Cohibas was a giant black truffle. Sourced from Périgueux, nothing looks quite so unappetising at the same time as tasting quite so wonderful.

I had some generously shaved over my starter, sautéed lobster with truffled chicken quenelles and homemade pasta. This was a classic example of what elevates a dish to three-Michelin stars: depth and texture. The chicken was seemingly soufflé, and the flavours released themselves in a multitude of stages, like a fine wine.

Talking of fine wines, a Clos Bèru 2009 was one of our favourites of the evening. Served from a jeroboom no less, this tart, dry, razor-sharp



MAIN PHOTO: You'll have to look hard to find a surface that isn't rounded in Alain Ducasse.
BELOW: Every dish is beautifully presented: not art for art's sake, it all adds to the experience



chablis was ideal for cutting through the buttery sweetness of my simmered halibut.

Fillet of beef Rossini might have been a predictable choice for a mains course – but it was worth it just for the sacrastain potatoes. These flawless blonde ringlets (created by wrapping wet ribbons of potato around a dowel) are the haute cuisine of curly fries.

A French cheese course is ingeniously served with matching condiments. There's also a dedicated trolley just for Stilton – now that's respect where respect is due.

But dessert takes the biscuit (as it were). Ducasse's 'Rum Baba like in Monte-Carlo' is a real showpiece. Served in a silver dome, you have a choice of rums with which to drown the feather-light sponge treat cradled within.

After such a feast, curling up for a nap didn't seem like such a bad idea. It would certainly bring a whole new meaning to the phrase 'comfort food'. ■

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