

The Perfectionists' Café brings the romance of air travel back to London's Heathrow Airport.

BY ROXY KIRSHENBAUM

Back in the 1960s, it was a rare luxury to travel by airplane—quite a contrast to the present day. In an effort to return to a time when air travel was more synonymous with glamour, designer Afroditi Krassa has created the new Perfectionists' Café—operated by celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal—inside Terminal 2 at London's Heathrow Airport. To inform their design process, Krassa and her team watched movies like *Catch Me If You Can* and the TV series *Mad Men* to experience the optimism that air travel promised in previous years. “We thought it was a perfect inspiration point for our design,” she says.

The restaurant sits on the edge of an atrium overlooking the lower level with views of the landing strip. Patrons are lured into the space by a prominently placed ice cream parlor. Situated at the front of the restaurant, it invites guests to try Blumenthal's famously theatrical treat: liquid-nitrogen ice cream. “It's a bit of an eye catcher that you can see from far away,” Krassa says. Black and white Corian stripes reinterpret the classic red and blue swirls of old-fashioned parlor awnings, while stainless-steel equipment and liquid-nitrogen smoke add to the allure of the visual spectacle. “It's almost this crazy scientist look, like a laboratory,” she says.

Anchored between the entrance and a bar and deli area of the restaurant is a propeller-shaped communal table that stands on a custom-made hexagonal floor inspired by the runways of Heathrow in the '60s. “From an aerial perspective, the airport looked like a hexagon,” she says. “We thought it would be interesting to locate that at the heart of the restaurant to reference its history.”

Within the open kitchen, a wood-fire oven surpasses standards of air-travel eateries by being one of the world's few—if not only—to be installed in an airport. Its presence allows Blumenthal to realize a menu involving his favorite comfort dishes from childhood, like burgers and pizza.

The restaurant is divided into three zones. The first possesses a casual ambiance, and features a lounge area with George Nelson-inspired banquettes and stools upholstered in red-orange leather by Sekers Fabrics. The space slowly transitions into a more formal dining area, and then into a proper sitting space. To the left of the latter section, spacious booths in turquoise leather by Agua Fabrics are divided by backlit perforated metal shelves and Eames-esque hooks on which patrons can store luggage. At the furthest end of the restaurant, two outward-facing, hexagonally shaped booths overlook the runway—another celebration of the restaurant's location. “We were lucky to be given this prominent site,” Krassa says. “We designed it so we wouldn't obstruct the views.”





Dish by Seamus Mullen

INSPIRED BY THE PERFECTIONISTS' CAFE AT LONDON'S HEATHROW AIRPORT

Grilled beef short ribs marinated in miso, salad of shaved radishes, lamb's quarters, and grainy mustard vinaigrette

Heston Blumenthal's The Perfectionists' Café could not be more timely, at least for me, as I've been traveling back and forth from New York to London quite a lot these days for my new restaurant at the Mondrian London. Traveling always takes a toll on my eating habits, which I try to keep as healthy as possible, and airport dining is not typically known for the quality of its food, to put it lightly—or the quality of its design. The Perfectionists' Café proves that beautiful food and thoughtful, impressive design can indeed exist in the confines of an airport.

Afroditi Krassa's design is at once bold, sophisticated, and playful. To me, it's very British, that balance of elegance and whimsy. There's this incredible kitchen on full view, lots of marble, plush caramel-colored leather stools, and these cheeky pops of red and Pan Am blue in the banquettes.

For this dish, I wanted to create something that was really delicious, hearty, visually playful, and just fun to dig into. While it looks quite simple on the plate, there are multiple layers of flavor and texture happening. I love marinating ingredients with organic, unpasteurized miso, which is chock full of that deliciously mysterious fifth taste, umami. The kalbi-style short ribs are really thin, so they grill very easily and are super

tender. They combine well with the refreshing crunch of radishes and a hint of bite from the mustard vinaigrette. I like to cut my radishes a few different ways to keep things interesting on the plate—they are both thinly sliced and cut into matchsticks, and they don't have to be at all perfect. For a dish like this, feel free to play around with the ratios in the marinade and the vinaigrette until you get a balance that works for you—after all, we all have different palates. Like The Perfectionists' Café, the design of which clearly has a lot of thought and care behind it but doesn't feel pretentious or stuffy, I try to create food that is nuanced and considered, without taking itself too seriously. I suppose that makes me a perfectionist who doesn't mind a few imperfections!

Serves Four

- 2 lbs. beef short ribs, cut "flanken" or "kalbi" style, about ¼ of an inch thick
- 1 cup mixed radishes (breakfast, watermelon and black radish), thinly sliced
- 1 cup lamb's quarters, spinach or watercress
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced
- ≈ salt and pepper
- ≈ olive oil
- 1 lemon, juice and zest
- ¼ cup mixed fresh herbs like cilantro, mint, basil and tarragon

For the grainy mustard vinaigrette:

- 1 cup whole-grain mustard
- ¼ cup Pedro Ximenez sherry vinegar
- 10 cloves of garlic, poached in 1 cup olive oil on low heat for 20 minutes

- 1 cup garlic oil from the confit
- ≈ salt and pepper to taste

For the miso marinade:

- 1½ cups blonde miso
- ¾ cup champagne vinegar
- 1 cup reduced white wine

Process

Cover the ribs thoroughly in the miso marinade and set aside in the refrigerator for at least four hours, preferably overnight. Combine all ingredients in the blender and process until smooth. Combine all ingredients in the blender and process until smooth.

Preheat grill to high. Season the ribs with salt and pepper. Meanwhile, combine the radishes, greens, and shallots in a small mixing bowl. Season with salt, pepper, lemon juice, lemon zest, and olive oil.

Grill the ribs over high heat, about three minutes to a side, until nicely charred. Place ribs on a large plate and dress with the grainy mustard vinaigrette. Finish with radish salad and fresh herbs.

Seamus Mullen is the chef and owner of the restaurant Tertulia in New York's West Village, the tapas bar El Colmado in Hell's Kitchen, and the newly opened Sea Containers at the Mondrian London.