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## Man of the Hour: Inside Acclaimed Chef Jason Atherton's New Clocktower Restaurant

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The most tasteful aspect of the New York Edition–Ian Schrager’s latest boutique hotel collaboration with Marriott–is clearly its second-floor restaurant, The Clocktower, run by Michelin-starred chef Jason Atherton.

The 43-year-old Atherton, like the best Wagyu cattle, was bred for this moment. He spent his formative years in kitchens with Marco Pierre White and Ferran Adrià, then did an extended tour of duty under Britain’s culinary drill sergeant, [Gordon Ramsay](#). Like Ramsay, Atherton has since built a restaurant [empire](#) extending to all corners of the former British Empire–first with Pollen Street Social in London’s Mayfair, then Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore and Sydney. (He now has 16 restaurants and three Michelin stars, for Pollen Street Social, Social Eating House and City Social.) He did not, however, inherit Ramsay’s much-televised intensity. Atherton, slim and stubbled, instead exudes a studied cool, down to his slim green-and-yellow plaid trousers and Tom Ford wingtips.



(David Yellen for Forbes)

After opening the acclaimed Berners Tavern at Schrager's London Edition hotel in 2014, Schrager offered Atherton a chance to bring his talents to the new Edition in the landmark Metropolitan Life Tower. "If you don't get excited about New York," he says, "you don't have blood running through your veins."

In May, The Clocktower opened, with Philadelphia restaurateur Stephen Starr coming in as Atherton's 50-50 partner to run financial and business operations. His plan for the restaurant is less a full-blown British invasion than a modest nod to the Queen's cuisine. "We'll cook with the sensibilities of back home, with techniques like roasting, braising, slow cooking," says Atherton a few days before the restaurant's opening, seated in one of The Clocktower's three mahogany-lined dining rooms. "I'm not going to come here and put toad in the hole on a menu." Nor will he ship in any ingredient from England, he says—except the [Dover](#) sole.



*(David Yellen for Forbes)*

As in other Atherton establishments, The Clocktower eschews any nose-in-the-air stuffiness. “We create restaurants for the public. Whatever you want to do, you’re welcome,” he says. It’s a line, but a refreshing one in a city of strict come-and-be-served \$300 tasting menus and \$16 lobster rolls that are more mayonnaise than crustacean.

In the David Rockwell-designed Clocktower, dim lighting on 90 seats gives off an intimate vibe. Gold-framed pictures of celebrities adorn the walls, offering a chance to redefine the game Hollywood Squares—and guess the portraits’ subjects with your dining partners. Ornately carved moldings and a marble fireplace make the space feel elegant. A purple-felt pool table in the room adjacent to the bar adds to the loose feel in the restaurant.

Belly up and order any number of pleasant cocktails, all with a jigger of Atherton’s penchant for wordplay—including Dill or No Dill (Beefeater gin, fresh dill, smashed cucumbers) and Give Peas a Chance (gin again, but with Chartreuse, mint and salted pea cordial).



*(David Yellen for Forbes)*

Among the more memorable starters, a none-too-timid hand-chopped beef tartare with a thin slice of toast and bone marrow, scooped from its skeletal casing tableside. Atherton studied America's carnivore cathedrals, like Peter Luger in Brooklyn, before his breakout role opening Maze for Ramsay in London; steak impresses at The Clocktower, too, with a funky juiciness that comes from aging 40 days on the bone. Thick, crisp french fries cooked in beef fat are a nice complement. Another winning dish: an appropriately gelatinous pork belly, brined, slow-cooked for 36 hours and caramelized in apple cider vinegar. It arrives with a twee touch (fennel pollen) on a bed of mashed potatoes possessing the right balance of cream and well-roasted heritage carrots the size of half-smoked cigars. Dinner concludes with a tin of sweets—crunchy peanut brittle, buttery shortbread—with a tiaraed Queen Elizabeth on its lid.

Soon after its opening, a rumor about The Clocktower rang out: Not only can you shoot pool on that purple table, but on the condition of reasonably good behavior you can dance on it, too. All true, Atherton affirms. "You just can't take your clothes off."

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