

The Sunday Telegraph

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# Stella

## **DARK DESIRE ANNA PAQUIN VAMPS IT UP**



### **AND THE CROWD CALLED OUT FOR DIOR**

The moment when  
fashion changed for ever

### **SASHES AND TIARAS**

What becomes of  
bygone beauty queens?

### **QUIET FASHION**

Why librarian chic  
is where it's at

**FOOD**

**PERFECT FRENCH**  
Exclusive recipes from the  
legendary Pierre Koffmann

## WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

When Avista's good it's very, very good, says ZOE WILLIAMS.  
And when it's not, it's just plain peculiar

I suppose all restaurants in smart hotels have the glamour of transience, their clientele exotic and mysterious by definition, with their best togs and imminent travel plans. This is beyond a joke in Avista, where diners have stepped straight off the pages of the great Euro bonkbuster Jilly Cooper never wrote. The dining-room was full of stylish groups of four or five, dressed in taffetas so bright and starchy they could have slipped home naked and left their collarless jackets manning the conversation. Me and A felt underdressed, but I believe we'd have done so in anything less than wedding dresses. Whereupon we would have felt eccentric. We got our heads down, and concentrated on the food.

A had the melon and parma ham (£11), which was perfect: the melon was ripe and tasted of melon, the ham was extremely refined. It didn't take much skill, but then some things don't. It augured well for the meal ahead; there are probably schools of gastronomy that say that's the entire point of a starter. I, meanwhile, had deep-fried mozzarella with anchovies and Pachino tomatoes (£9.50). This was totally delicious, but I think would have gone down better, as a high-class experience, if it didn't so incredibly strongly

resemble a toasted cheese sandwich. Seriously, it was even cut in triangular quarters and deep-fried. It looked like something your auntie might give you when you'd just had bad news. And having said it was delicious, I have to admit to a little confusion around these anchovies: some were your classic, salted taste explosion, others were the silvery, vinegar-preserved kind. They don't go particularly well together, and I wondered whether they hadn't just run out of the first and chucked in a few of the second. This is pure conjecture; obviously I was too polite to quiz them.

I triumphed in my second course, with the warm veal with tuna-fish sauce and sweet-and-sour vegetables (£20). That 'sweet and sour' referred to a sweet pickle

(rather than some idiosyncratic Chinese fusion), and the veg – teeny baby turnips and carrots – were eye-poppingly tangy and lovely. The meat was as smooth as velvet and – because it is true, not because I'm trying to tease out a theme – the tuna sauce glistened like silk. This pairing will be familiar to the classier villa-holidayer (imagine you're a Blair), being authentic enough that it's obscure. I've only had it once before, also in London, so when I say this tasted profoundly right, verily sang

## Avista

Millennium Hotel, 39 Grosvenor Square,  
London W1 (020 7596 3399)

Three courses: £35-25 Stella rating: 7/10

## MORE GLAM HOTELS

**Cucina Hotel Missoni** 1 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh (0131 220 6666) Decorated floor to ceiling Missoni-style, with splashes of bright colour. The Italian menu treats design junkies to *agnello arrosto* – saddle of lamb with honeyed vegetables (£18)

**Vyse Room Stoke Place, Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire** (01753 534790) A William and Mary house, Capability Brown grounds, and a surprisingly groovy restaurant – think feature walls of baroque wallpaper and black vinyl design-y chairs. Roast pork belly comes with puy lentils and baby leeks (£15.50)

**Hotel Tresanton** 27 Lower Castle Road, St Mawes, Cornwall (01326 270055) The restaurant at Olga Polizzi's super-elegant hotel draws stylish weekenders with unbeatable sea views and dishes of local fish. Try whole lemon sole with crab cakes and saffron mussels (£42 for three courses)

