

BEST NEW CAFE **Lantana**

This excellent café is always a joy to visit. It has an overflowing sense of Australian bonhomie; the owner, Aussie Shelagh Ryan, set up the place after bemoaning the lack of decent cafés in the capital. Though it's been nearly a year since it opened, the food remains inspired and, more importantly, delicious. We've enjoyed sunny breakfasts here, such as corn fritters with rocket, smoked salmon and lime aioli; lunches have featured steak sarnies, or full-flavoured tarts such as sweet potato with chorizo, asparagus and feta with innovative salads. As for sweets, the typical Aussie almond-meal cakes, friands, are moist and moreish. *3 Charlotte Place, W1T 1SN (7637 3347). Goodge St tube. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £30.*



Runners-up

Fleet River Bakery

Chainstore Holborn is not the sort of place you would expect to find Fleet River Bakery, where the breads are all freshly baked on-site, the lemonade is own-made and little else is outsourced or bought in. Sandwiches are simple, with classic combinations such as roast beef and horseradish, but the quality of the bread elevates them above the norm. Some of the salads could do with a course in presentation, but are packed full of distinct and cleverly layered

flavours. The labyrinth of rooms makes sure there's enough space for everyone, but we were perhaps slightly bored by the notable lack of atmosphere. *71 Lincoln's Inn Fields, WC2A 3JF (7691 1457/www.fleetrivərbakery.com). Holborn tube. Lunch for two with wine and service: around £18.*

J&A Café

This café makes the most of its secluded location down a Clerkenwell alleyway, and its former incarnation as a Victorian diamond-cutting factory. The look is therefore industrial-meets-comfort –

exposed brick walls are juxtaposed with rustic baskets of fresh vegetables and blackboards with chalky scribbles contrast with piles of pastel-coloured cupcakes. The food revolves around simple sandwiches, quiches and soups (the same at dinnertime), but it's the sweet treats and coffees that really show – the apple and maple cake was a triumph of classic dessert-making. *4 Sutton Lane, EC1M 5PU (7437 2992). Barbican tube. Meal for two with wine and service: around £30.*

Luca's Bakery & Café

One of the slicker-looking places in Lordship Lane, this continental-style café is known in the neighbourhood for its freshly baked breads and pastries. Brunch is pretty good, too, with two poached eggs on excellent sourdough bread and a choice of William Rose (meaty and intense), Moxon's smoked salmon (oaky and not overly smoky) or spinach with hollandaise, which our visit was slightly too gloopy. The coffees aren't bad, but the piercing shriek of the milk steamer suggests slightly amateurish baristas. One day, bask in the peaceful bamboo alfresco seating out back, or relax through papers at the large wood communal tables. *45 Lordship Lane, SE22 8BX (740 6161). East Dulwich rail or 40 185 bus. Meal for two with wine and service: around £25.*

BEST SPANISH RESTAURANT **La Paix**