

Tokyo corner
Saké no Hana

Preface

Yorkshireman John Pawson is an architect and designer who has lived in Japan and is known for his stripped-back designs. For his last meal he chooses a seven-course lunch at a Japanese restaurant in London's Piccadilly.

Writer

Alicia Kirby

Photographer

Thom Atkinson



The venue

After teething problems with location and layout, Alan Yau's Saké no Hana was refurbished in April and gained a new head chef (right) from Tokyo's Kikunoi restaurant. 23 St James' Street, London SW1



"I grew up in Halifax and remember mum's Yorkshire pudding and dad serving Romanée Conti wine. I went into my father's textile business after school but when I was 23 he said the company was failing. I was basically fired but by chance I was offered a discounted first-class ticket around the world at a party. I was originally going to stop in Japan for a week but ended up staying four years – three in Nagoya, one in Tokyo.

I was interested in architecture from an early age. I was introduced to *Domus* magazine where I saw Shiro Kuromata's work; it was the first time I had seen something I really liked. When I moved to Tokyo I rang Kuromata and asked if we could meet. It was the early 1970s and there weren't many foreigners knocking

on his door so he agreed and got Masayuki Kurokawa [the celebrated architect] to come too. They were design aristocracy and introduced me to people like Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo. Eventually, Kuromata got fed up with me hanging around and made me enrol at the Architectural Association in London as I hadn't studied architecture.

I like the iconic 1960s Smithsons' building here at Saké no Hana. It has a beautiful piazza, gorgeous Portland stone and inside Kengo Kuma's screens are exquisite. Alan Yau, the owner, and I came up with the idea of communal tables for his restaurant Wagamama [see CV] in 1990. He was initially resistant to people sitting together but I was used to it from Japan. My schoolboy dream would be to

John Pawson's CV

- 1949** Born in Halifax
- 1968** Joins the family textile business
- 1979** Enrols at the Architectural Association, London
- 1981** Sets up his own practice
- 1990** Completes first Wagamama restaurant for Alan Yau, London
- 1995** Designs Calvin Klein's first flagship store, New York
- 2004** New Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Novy Dvur consecrated in Bohemia
- 2009** Designs penthouse apartment for Ian Schrager in Herzog & de Meuron's 40 Bond, New York
- 2010** The exhibition "John Pawson Plain Space" runs from 22 September to 30 January 2011 at the Design Museum, London (designmuseum.org). A book by Alison Morris will be published to coincide with the opening.

have a Japanese chef at home as it's not practical to go to Tokyo for my last meal. I like that I can get a table here. Other Japanese places like Nobu are a nightmare. When a restaurant says it's full, my wife Catherine says I shouldn't be annoyed, I should congratulate them.

Catherine and I got married when I was 40 and had Benedict. I had my other son, Caius, with my first wife Hester. They aren't Samaritans or anything but my children were born with a 'kind gene'. I often get frustrated about small things and they make me see how ridiculous I am. In 2002, I was in a car crash in India that killed my friend. Very few look death in the face and I felt so elated to be alive. I realised life is short and decided to only do projects I really want to do.

At my age you don't think about ideal projects but the monastery in the Czech Republic is the project of a lifetime – the monks are the ultimate minimalists. What's important to me is the idea rather than the decoration. It was the same with my own house and the cookbook that I did with Annie Bell. Caius is manager of a band and when his friends came home before the concert, they couldn't believe how minimalist it was. For me there's far too much furniture in it – that's why I was happy in Japan.

Eating is like reading, there just isn't the time to indulge. Catherine is a great cook, mostly fish as I don't like meat much. It's important for me to eat at home with the family, just like the memory of mum's Yorkshire pudding served whenever I came home from school – or Japan." — (M)

Course 01

Seared razor clam with wasabi and soya dressing



Course 02

Three kinds of sashimi – Otoro, scallop and turbot on a shiso leaf



Course 03

Rib-eye beef tataki with sesame dressing



Course 04

Seared tuna and green tea soba salad



Course 05

Braised aubergine with duck



Course 06

Yellowtail oden with daikon, abura age and egg



Course 07

Miso Chilean seabass toban

