

In the Sky Garden

MARK LUDMON EXPLORES THE DRINKING AND DINING AT THE TOP OF LONDON'S WALKIE TALKIE SKYSCRAPER

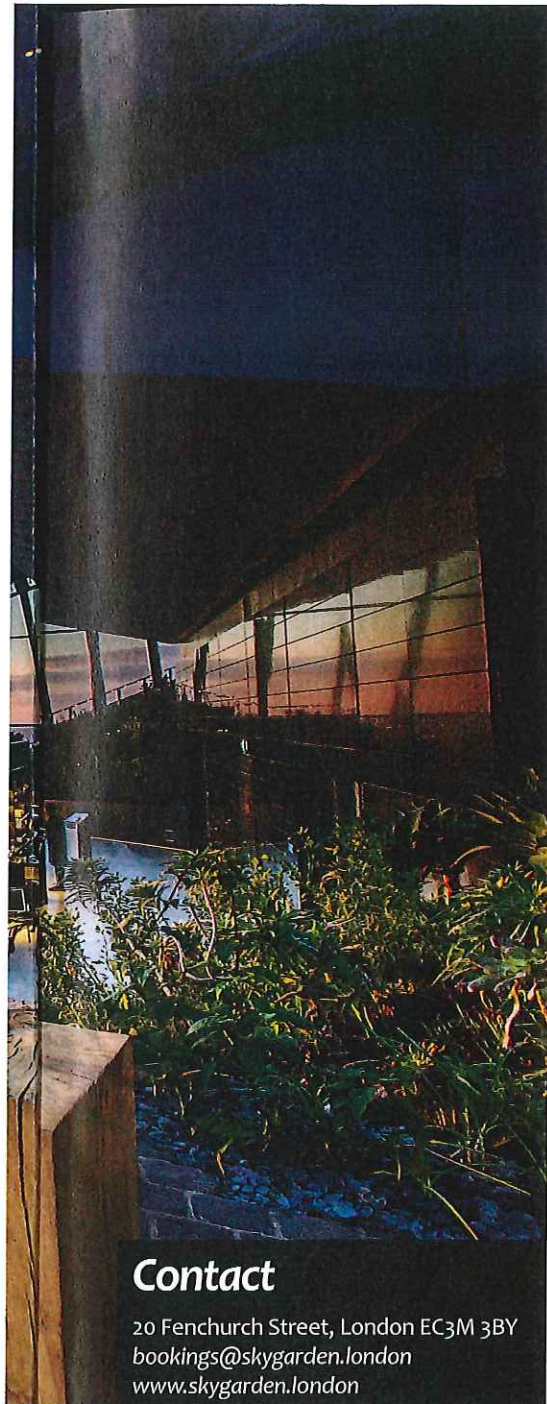


Sky Pod

Sipping a cocktail beside beds of flowers, herbs and trees, you could almost forget you were 35 floors up in the middle of the City of London. The Sky Garden is the new attraction that has opened at the top of 20 Fenchurch Street – the office skyscraper better known as the “Walkie Talkie”. The three-storey-high space is open to the public for free, although tickets have to be booked in advance, and not only features terraces of landscaped gardens but spectacular 360-degree views over the Thames, the Tower of London and beyond.

Part of its appeal is two restaurants, Darwin Brasserie and Fenchurch Seafood Bar & Grill, and a bar, Sky Pod, which are operated by leading catering company Rhubarb. They are three distinctly different spaces, designed by O1creative, each with their own unique food and drink menu.

After going through airport-style security



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and taking the express lift to the 35th floor, you step out into the main glass-covered atrium, dotted with chairs, sofas and tables. Just off centre is Sky Pod, an island bar serving breakfasts and light lunches from 7am on weekdays, 9am on Saturdays and 10am on Sundays. As evening comes, more tables come out, lit by elegant iPower lamps, as the bar becomes more about cocktails, staying open until 2am Monday to Saturday and till 10pm on Sundays.

The atrium bar area is described as “seasonally changing”. With the temperature close to outside, winter sees the sofas draped in faux furs and cashmere blankets, with front-of-house staff dressed in warm coats and hats. In the summer, they promise deck chairs and alcoholic ice-cream shakes when the temperature becomes more tropical.

The glowing mosaic-and-glass bar has been designed by O1creative with



The view from Darwin

Cantilever Bars to complement the surrounding gardens and architecture and suit the transformation from daytime visitor attraction to a cool and stylish destination in the evening. Sky Pod’s cocktail list is still evolving, presided over by bar manager Alvaro Romero, previously at D&D London’s Royal Exchange Grand Café in the City, and head bartender Bastien Guillou.

For the opening, the menu features a range of classic and original cocktails using a range of spirits, but mostly gin, priced at £11.50 each. Flavoursome options include the London Tea Party, which mixes gin with Aperol, camomile tea and fresh lemon juice, topped with a camomile and orange foam and grated orange peel. The Espresso Martini is guaranteed to perk you up with not only a shot of espresso added to the Kahlúa liqueur but vodka that has been infused with coffee for 72 hours. A list of champagne cocktails includes the Rhubarb Viñoly, named after the building’s architect Rafael Viñoly – a twist on a Bellini made with homemade rhubarb and lemongrass syrup.

Alongside bottled beers such as Camden Pale Ale and Notting Hill Stout, there is a good list of wines and champagnes. Bar food is sharing boards such as charcuterie, seafood, vegetarian and a Neal’s Yard and Goodwood Estate cheese platter as well as plates of Carlingford rock oysters.

Up a flight of steps through the sloping gardens is Darwin Brasserie on level 36 – also accessible by lift. Open for breakfast, it is a relaxed restaurant for all-day dining, offering dishes such as fish and chips, Caesar salad, Goodwood Estate pork belly, braised ox cheeks and venison pie. Named after the naturalist Charles Darwin, it is furnished with light wood and buttery leather in a palette of colours inspired by nature and volcanic islands, mixed with



Classic cocktails at Darwin

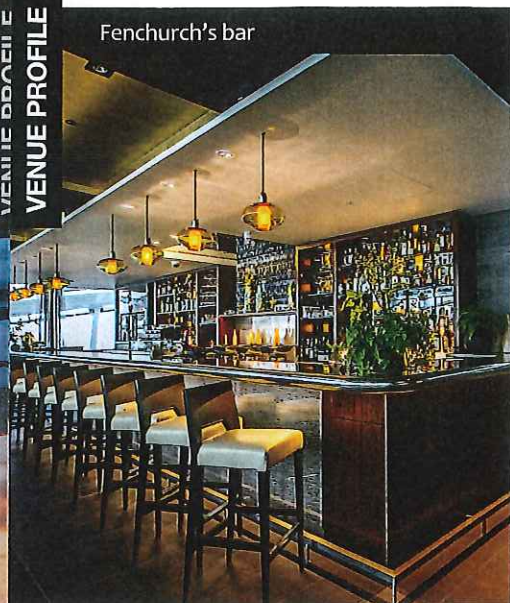
organic references and forms. Enclosed in its own structure within the Sky Garden, it still offers plenty of fine views.

Several of the cocktails in the botanically-themed menu are punningly inspired by Darwin, such as the NatuRum Selection, Survival of the Figgest and the OriGIn of Spices which combines Plymouth Navy Strength Gin with house-made ginger syrup, pineapple chunks, Angostura Bitters and lemon juice, topped with soda. The H&MS Beagle, named after Darwin’s ship, the HMS Beagle, contains Havana Club rum and



Darwin

Fenchurch's bar



Fenchurch

manzanilla sherry plus sugar syrup and fresh lime juice, topped with mint and grapefruit.

Up another flight of steps in the garden – or a quick trip in the lift – is the top level, home to Fenchurch Seafood Bar & Grill. Whether sitting at the bar or at tables on leather banquettes, this is a stylish, slightly more formal restaurant where executive head chef Jeremy Brown and head chef Zac Whittle display their greatest creativity. Signature seafood dishes range from Duchy Native oysters and Cherrystone clams to Oscietra caviar and dressed crab, or red meat lovers can enjoy a three-bone rack of lamb or a 10oz sirloin steak on the bone. Guests can also order snacks at the pewter-top bar such as pig's head croquettes with piccalilli and Welsh rarebit.

The design, inspired by the surrounding cityscape, uses a rich, dark palette with highlights of gold and cream leather. It features hand-blown double-skinned glass pendants by Curiousa & Curiousa, dark

oak chevron timber flooring and large-format anthracite porcelain tiling on the bar surround. "It was important for the style to be aspirational and glamorous with design details that underpin its position as a refined dining space," says O1creative director Derrick Power. "Being situated right in the heart of the city, diners look out over a spectacular sea of lights and architectural forms, particularly in the evening. The glittering matrix of patterns is reflected in the design of the restaurant bar, with the backdrop featuring a series of rear-illuminated tiles and mirrors to represent the view of the cityscape." Fenchurch also has a 16-cover private dining room, with a liquid-crystal glazed partition that can be clear or opaque, and an outside terrace overlooking the atrium and Sky Pod below.

Classics and elegant original cocktails feature on Fenchurch's drinks menu alongside a broad range of premium

spirits, especially whiskies. The Fenchurch Street Fizz sees Sipsmith gin shaken with a rhubarb and sage shrub, fresh lemon juice, single cream, egg white and strawberries, topped with soda. British aperitif Kamm & Sons is the base of the Herbs of Hyde Park, mixed with green tea, elderberry syrup, celery bitters and fresh lemon juice.

The cocktail lists will change seasonally and, like the food, are set to use ingredients freshly picked from the gardens such as rosemary and lavender. At present, the gardens look rather bare but, as the months pass, they will grow into a verdant, aromatic sea of foliage. As Derrick at O1creative points out, "The Sky Garden truly is a unique environment, created with the changing seasons in mind, offering visitors a rare chance to experience London from a different viewpoint."

Behind the scenes

Design: O1creative
Main contractor: WFC Contracts
Catering and bar equipment: Cantilever Bars, Catering Projects
Lighting: Artemide, Shoplight, Holloways of Ludlow, Curiousa & Curiousa
Timber flooring: Havwoods
Ceramics: Solus Ceramics
Furniture: Dawnvale, Inside Out Contracts, Vitra, Nest
Specialist joinery: CAB Joinery
Decorative finishes: Robert Fox
Sound system: Marquee AV
Sprinklers: RMD
Electrical contractor: TEI Electrical
Quantity surveying: Alford Porter
Mechanical: Wildens
M&E consultant: Thomas Lehd Associates



Seafood at Fenchurch



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