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not a
Meet our
best hope
this week's
Olympics

Side orders

● Details of the new venture from the Momo team are emerging. Just when we all expected a big old casbah called Temple, it turns out they're planning to do French food and call it Sketch. The builders are on site in Conduit Street, preparing for a late-April opening. Expect a patisserie, fine dining room, brasserie and bar. The name Sketch apparently refers to the venue's versatility – changing artworks, movable furniture, futuristic DJ booths – though early visitors might be forgiven for dropping in with their dry-cleaning.

● Anyone returning from the Continent with a pocketful of unspent euro coins needn't feel short-changed. Simply get down to Woody's on Wednesdays for Robert Pereno's night, where anyone paying in the Continental currency will get in for €5 rather than £5. A saving of... Oh, you do the maths.

● Hot on the heels of Spearmint Rhino, and Rouge, comes Bada Bing! – a London version of the Manhattan strip joint in *The Sopranos*. Developers plan to reinvent the grubby spectacle of women taking their clothes off by having them do it in a 'sophisticated' setting that appeals to a 'celebrity clientele'. Not to mention stag nights, rugby teams and sleazy City boys.



Mellow, friendly and comforting: Frocks in Hackney

Down the local In a new column celebrating neighbourhood haunts, Kate Spicer heads for Frocks, in the heart of Hackney



Frocks is one of those local restaurants where the scurrilous behaviour that flashier Central London dining rooms might invite would never happen. The details are too personal to the owners. It's their personalities, rather than an interior designer's, that seep into everything: an unusual wine list, Paris daisies on the tables, music from their own collection. No wonder the waitress tells me that sometimes it looks like people visibly relax when they come in, 'Go, sort of, "Fouff".'

The night we went, there were cooing couples, girlfriends drinking dry white, double-dating fifty-plusers, just folk really. My favourites were some trendy intellectual grannies with straight bobs – very Bloomsbury set. I hope I'm as gay and perm-free when I complete my four score and 10. Four edgy Hoxtoners in distressed military gear snuggled by the open fire downstairs in a very unedgy way – it was as if they'd travelled the short distance to Victoria Park for a soothing fashion sabbatical.

The food is the sort of hearty Mediterranean 'peasant' food you would never eat in a peasant's home – lots of fish and lamb and pulses. Victoria Park has a left-leaning, sedate hipness to it. Owner/chef Patrick Britton confirmed my suspicion that, where possible, everything was organic. Except for the fish, because, as he rightfully points out, a truly wild fish caught in

open seas cannot be labelled organic. He goes to Billingsgate and Spitalfields every morning to buy his produce, while his business partner, Glenys Hollingsworth, chooses the wine. Former teachers, they opened Frocks in an old dress shop in 1988, and I guess they were enthusiastic amateurs back then. But they give amateurs a good name. All this attention to detail, all the love, made me realise how rarely one encounters that kind of uncynical approach in the West End.

And the food? Hot smoked salmon with cracked

If London were a small town, Frocks would be the best restaurant in it

pepper, beetroot, dill and sour cream was tasty, but the fridge-temperature salmon killed its kick a bit. My brother loved his scallops, black pudding and mash, a much-loved dish first tried at L'Odeon. My friend Avery had roast rack of Devon lamb with flageolet beans and minted redcurrant gravy, while I tucked into chicken breast with chorizo mash. I'd never eaten chorizo mash before, but any new method of getting cured meat, saturated fat and solid British carbohydrates into a girl is always laudable.

If London were a small town, this would be the best restaurant in it. We all wanted to drink the French cider listed on the blackboard, but because Britton goes to France to buy it, they'd run out. But strangely, even that's kind of comforting, and only a pedant or a crass middle-class hooligan could let something like that put them off snuggling down for a very happy night indeed. ■
Frocks, 95-97 Lauriston Road, E9 (020 8986 3161). Dinner for three, two courses each and a plate of cheese, with two bottles of wine, £99.20

Pink vodka, petal?

In vodka land, pink is the new black. Launched just in time for Valentine's Day, *Seriously Pink* is a subtly rosy tippie with more stylish kick than that rosé champagne everyone else'll be drinking. Use in fruity cocktails, on the rocks or straight up. Available exclusively at Harvey Nicks (£20) and selected style bars.



But if you can't get a table, try...

● Royal Inn on the Park, 111 Lauriston Road, E9 (020 8985 3321). Lively, semi-gastro pub with a good wine list ● Mojoes, 132 Lauriston Road, E9 (020 8985 5864). Seventies bistro food and a relaxed Sunday lunch atmosphere ● brb, 162 Victoria Park Road, E9 (020 8985 5404). Pub with DJs ● The Crown, 223 Grove Road, E9 (020 8981 9998). Organic pub where even the tampons are certified by the Soil Association. The food tastes better, though...