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ART & CULTURE

The Hunger | Frieze food: Artist in Restaurant at Pied à Terre

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In this column, Ananda Pellerin and Neil Wissink uncover the secret pleasures of the gastronomie



Untitled (Rabbit Jaw Bone) Photography by Neil Wissink

Drawing inspiration straight out of the bin, Macedonian-born artist **Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva** has spent the past eight months as the first 'Artist in Restaurant' at the two star Michelin **Pied à Terre**, which has been a Charlotte Street favourite for nearly twenty years.

Using materials such as discarded fish skin, quail bones and sheep testicles, Hadzi-Vasileva has transformed organic refuse salvaged from the kitchen into pieces that are now installed throughout the restaurant and bar for her site-specific show, *The Wish of the Witness*.

Catching our eye first in the main dining room is *Witness of Virility*, a black wood panel fitted into the skylight, with small holes through which individual sheep testicle skins hang down like cocoons, allowing them to be lit by the natural light pouring in. So well-suited in colour and form to the burgundy, purple and tan decor – as is the blanket of monkfish skins that adorns one of the walls – diners may not realise that they're sitting under a hive of

testicles, or that *Gill Slits*, the papery sea-like structure on the counter, is comprised of skate wing bones held together with metal clips. "I wanted the work to be very subtle," Hadzi-Vasileva tells us, "to feel like part of the environment." Many of the other pieces have this symbiotic relationship to the space, including the scallop skirt lampshades in the front dining room. While in the upstairs bar, *My Beautiful Army*, an impressive collection of partially-gilded quail bones lined up in rows, and *A Wish*, quail wishbones arranged in a circle, are more traditionally installed behind Perspex.

"We wanted Frieze to be the pivotal moment, so it was essential to have the art in place by then," says Pied à Terre co-owner **David Moore**, of their timing for the residency. During our lunch, Moore, who is a long-time supporter of the arts, regales us with stories of when the restaurant first opened and they displayed art from the personal collection of early Pied patron **Richard Hamilton**. Now popular with the Frieze crowd, we notice that gallerist Iwan Wirth is dining at a table across the room. Moore also tells us that he and a panel of curators and art world luminaries are currently in the selection process to find next year's Artist in Restaurant, and will continue to offer the £10,000 prize yearly to an emerging artist to create a site-specific work.

The Pied menu is comprised of rustic and meaty elements prepared with gastronomic flair. There is a strong emphasis on seasonality and sauces, such as our starters of raviolo of autumn game with baby leeks, and the crispy veal sweetbread with stuffed pig trotters, as well as our favourite main, the loin of Berkshire venison with orange cauliflower and glazed Herefordshire snail. Carefully executed, the dishes offer a good balance of comfort and technique, which works well in the plush and lively dining room.



Hadzi-Vasileva tells us that her favourite item on the menu is the black leg chicken, and that the experience has completely changed her views on food, and has also influenced her artistic practice. "It was quite amazing being in the kitchen," she says. "What they do there is so different to how you cook at home; they spend so much time getting it perfect."

The Wish of the Witness will be on display at Pied à Terre until October 31. You can visit the exhibition without dining Monday-Friday, between 3-6pm and 6pm. Visit [Artist in Restaurant](#) programme for more information.

Text by Ananda Pellerin

Ananda Pellerin is a London-based writer and Neil Wissink is a visual artist also based in London. More from [The Hunger here](#), and contact [The Hunger here](#).



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