

# Taste <sup>GQ</sup> 04

THIS MONTH /// HESTON BLUMENTHAL /// THE GREENHOUSE RESTAURANT /// GQ WINE

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The French quarter:  
Marlon Abela's  
Greenhouse brings  
A-list Gallic gastronomy  
to central London

## Shoots of success

Frequented by Sir Paul McCartney, Sir Tom Jones and Madonna, the **Greenhouse** in London's Mayfair has built an enviable reputation. It has earned a coveted Michelin star and, along with Japanese restaurant Umu and Morton's private member's club, is owned by 34-year-old connoisseur/restaurateur **Marlon Abela**. With its accomplished food, exemplary service and extensive wine list, the Greenhouse attracts loyal diners and is always busy - even Abela has to book ahead. ▶

# MEN OF THE HOUSE

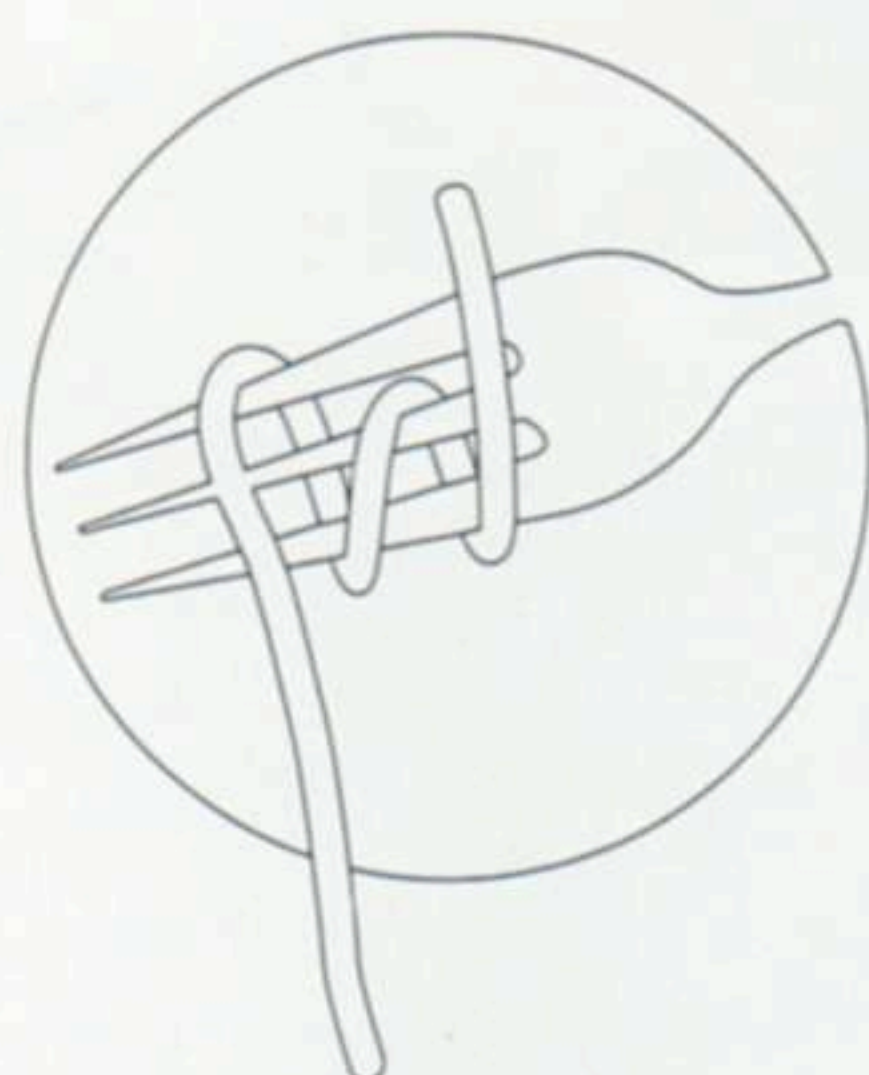
One Michelin-starred kitchen, a 3,000-bottle wine cellar, three multi-talented men. GQ meets the faces behind the scenery at Mayfair's the Greenhouse



## ● THE CHEF ANTONIN BONNET

Although killing live frogs in Singapore comes a close second – “I had to chop off their heads and rip their skin off while they were still wriggling; it was as bad as it sounds” – Greenhouse chef Antonin Bonnet's most demanding job was working as private cook to his boss Marlon Abela. “It was very intense, I had to be especially creative and constantly develop new dishes. This was when I understood how difficult it was for my mother to please us with something different to eat every day.” Bonnet's modern and experimental menu is based on classical French cuisine and changes regularly to incorporate the best seasonal products, sourced from around the world. A family man, his experience of cooking began at home in his grandmother's kitchen

– “she has cooked the best meal I have ever eaten” – and he was formally trained at Michel Bras' celebrated three Michelin-starred restaurant in Aubrac. Now in his 20th year in the industry, Bonnet is deservedly head chef at the Greenhouse where his mission is to satisfy his guests. But he hasn't always been so accommodating. “When customers sent back their food, I used to be really ‘French’ about it and think, ‘Stuff them.’ Now I understand that everyone's tastes are completely different and I can't be a king in my own kitchen.” With the freshest ingredients and his skill at combining mouthwatering flavours, Bonnet treats his guests to culinary sensations they hardly ever feel the need to complain about. Responsible for 24 chefs in the kitchen and maintaining the Greenhouse's Michelin star, Bonnet is always kept busy. “My job is like juggling as fast as you can with as many balls as you can without dropping them.” So far, so perfectly balanced.



## ● THE SOMMELIER RONAN SAYBURN

With an epic wine list of more than 100 pages, the largest in the UK, head sommelier Ronan Sayburn has his work cut out. At least two bottles of each wine are kept in the Greenhouse cellar, which needs constant attention and must be restocked after every day's service. “A lot of customers come to the Greenhouse because of our extensive wine list, so we don't want to disappoint them.” And with 3,169 different wines in stock, this is unlikely. Sayburn stocks a variety of wines – “the most difficult part of my job is keeping the list balanced” – and keeps some highly prestigious (and extremely expensive) vintages, as well as some more affordable and more unusual wines. He started working with wine more than 12 years ago, eight of those years having been spent as executive sommelier for Gordon Ramsay Restaurants, and is now one of only 150 qualified master sommeliers in the world. He spends a lot of time helping guests select the best wine to accompany their meal – “that's the whole point of my job, really” – and tasting new wines to keep the Greenhouse's list fresh and exciting. Sayburn, whose favourite wine is Bordeaux Saint-Émilion, is the only Englishman working at the Greenhouse (French rap provides the background music to our meeting), and unsurprisingly he wouldn't visit a restaurant with a “boring” wine list. Two tips include serving white wine at 9°C – “any cooler and you kill the flavour” – and to appreciate sherry more, a “fantastic” wine despite its bad rep.

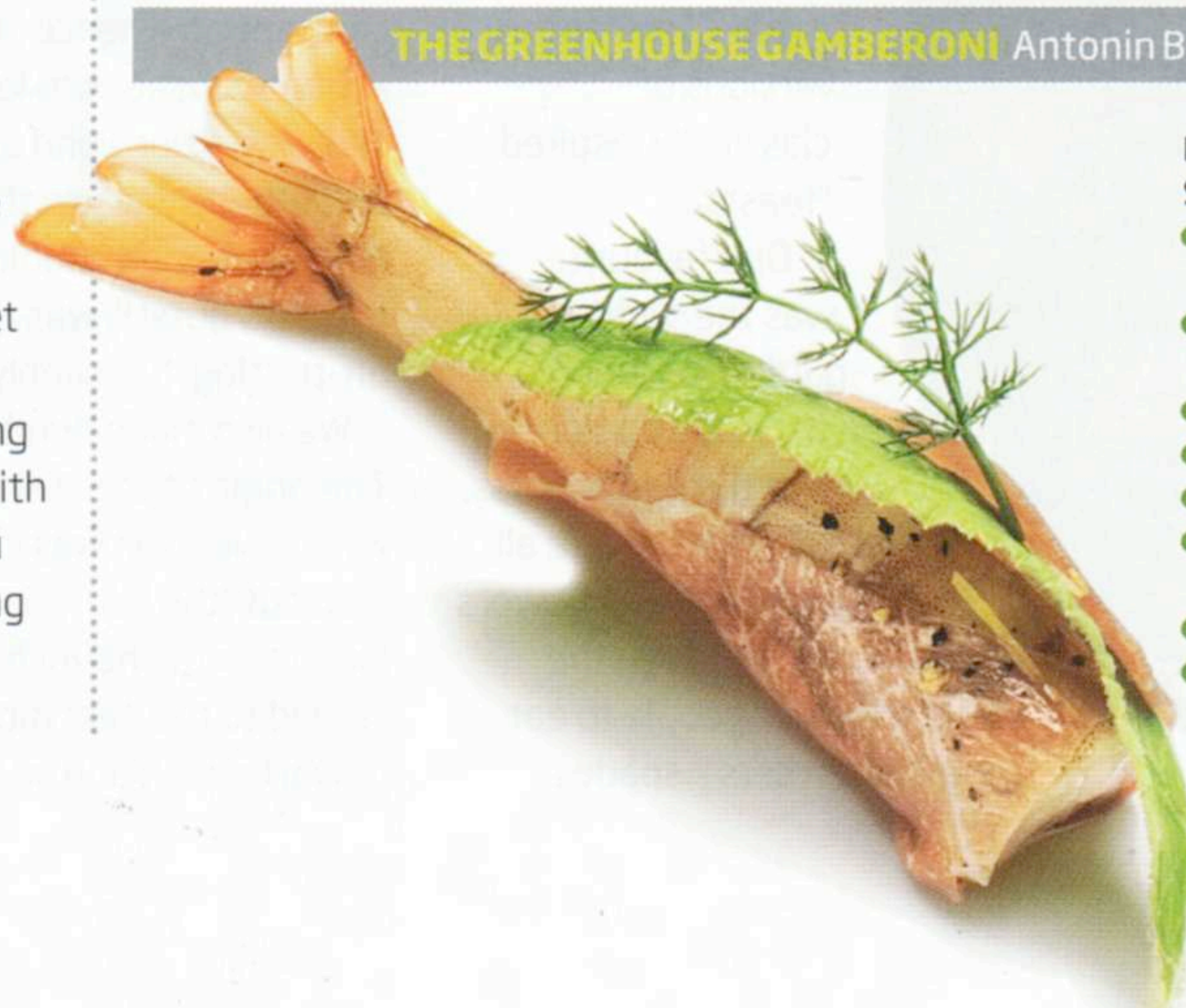


## ● THE MAÎTRE D' JEAN-MARIE MIORADA

**“I spend more time with the chef than he spends with his wife, we're like a couple but without the sex,” says Greenhouse Maître d' Jean-Marie Miorada. “A good relationship with the chef is essential - it takes a lot of work.” Charming and courteous, Miorada has managed the restaurant since it opened in 2003. He's been in the industry since 1979, when he opened a hotel/restaurant in his native France, and has since worked at Terence Conran's Quaglino's Oak Room and Marco Pierre White's Criterion. He's faced challenging situations, having dealt with a diner's allergic reaction - “she was in hospital for two days” - and a waiter who dropped a tray of drinks over**

**a guest - “I tried to apologise but I thought he was going to punch me.” The same guest is now a regular at the Greenhouse. In Miorada's own words he has “survived the industry” and is passionate about his work. In charge of the 22 members of the front-of-house team, he starts at 9.30am and is lucky if he leaves by midnight. Miorada supervises the restaurant, bar and reception, and constantly checks on guests. Most stressful is dealing with food critics, especially Michelin inspectors who work anonymously. “Sometimes I feel like an actor about to go on stage, but we can only provide a good service and do our job.”**  
**GQ's verdict: a job well done.** Dana Sawdaye

### THE GREENHOUSE GAMBERONI Antonin Bonnet's classic canapé in three steps



#### INGREDIENTS SERVES 10

- 10 *gamberoni* or prawns
- 10 slices of Iberico ham
- Tidman's rock salt
- Pepper
- Zest of 10 lemons
- A bunch of fennel or dill
- 10 sorrel leaves
- Extra-virgin olive oil

#### METHOD

- Wrap the *gamberoni* (or prawns) in Iberico ham, then lightly sear or grill in a pan for 1-2 minutes.
- Season with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil, a little cracked pepper, a pinch of Tidman's salt and the zest of a lemon.
- Finish with sorrel leaves and either fennel or dill.