

# palate

EPICUREAN DELIGHTS, DELECTABLE DESIGN AND THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE

## *fresh* **START**

SKYE GYNGELL'S NEW LONDON VENTURE REINVIGORATES BOTH AN HISTORIC SPACE AND A SISTERLY BOND.

PHOTOGRAPHER **PAUL MASSEY** PRODUCER/WRITER **DAVID PRIOR**

Spring's interior sees diners seated in Mario Bellini for Cassina '412 Cab' chairs, available from Cult, while a classic Vico Magistretti for Oluce 'Atollo 233' table lamp, available from Euroluce, decorates one corner of the Arabescato Corchia marble bar. **Details, last pages.**





Spring can be cool, pale and elusive at times, while at others it is warm, glowing and bursting with life. It's a season of transition, when bare earth hardened by winter's chill transforms into a garden alive with beauty and promise.

Spring is also the name of Skye Gyngell's new restaurant in London's historic Somerset House. The Australian expat chef chose it well before opening, as a nod to the seasons that inspire her cooking and because it symbolises optimism and hope. She could never have predicted it then, but the name would also capture the spirit of an extraordinary collaboration with her once-estranged sister, Sydney interior designer Briony Fitzgerald. But after all, what is spring about if not new beginnings?

For many Australians, the Gyngell name is a familiar one. Bruce Gyngell — father to Skye, Briony and David (now Nine Entertainment CEO) — was the first man to appear on Australian television. A legend in the industry for his drive

and charisma, he was married to the beautiful Ann Gyngell, herself a legend in Sydney interior design circles. Along with the Murdochs and the Packers, they were about as close to royalty as 1970s egalitarian Australia would permit.

As with all families, the Gyngells experienced ups and downs, but theirs played out in public. Bruce and Ann's divorce during the children's formative years affected all of their offspring, but especially middle child Skye. With a gentle demeanour unsuited to Sydney social circles, she left Australia for Europe in her late teens to become a cook, and rarely returned. The sisters drifted apart, but as they discovered recently, their bond remained unbroken.

"It is as if she plucked the restaurant from my head," says Gyngell of Fitzgerald's design, which brought Spring to a once-drab tax office in Somerset House's 19th-century 'new' wing. "I knew instinctively she was the only one who would understand what I wanted; other designers would immediately say, 'Petersham comes to the city.'" >

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Early arrivals can pass the time on an & Tradition 'Mayor' sofa by Arne Jacobsen and Flemming Lassen, available from Great Dane. Adjacent are E15 'Habibi' tables, available from Living Edge. **OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Skye Gyngell in her new space; crab salad with pink radicchio, agretti, verjuice dressing and wild flowers; the atrium garden, by landscape designer Jinny Blom, features her custom plaster panels, 'Lucy' chairs from Janus et Cie, and Pedrali tables, available from Café Culture + Insitu; ice-cream from the atrium's Salon bar.



< Housed in a greenhouse in a bucolic garden, Petersham Nurseries is the restaurant where Gyngell made her mark. After starting off “cooking alone with a couple of pots and pans in a shed” in 2004, her composition of flavours and skill in articulating the rhythms of the seasons saw Petersham flourish. However, by the time a Michelin star found its way there, followed by crowds expecting silver-service dining, Gyngell had already set her sights on the big-city lights.

Leaving Petersham in 2012, she and her business partner, Marie Jackson, searched for a new venue for a year before deciding on Somerset House. “When I walked into the room, I felt this could become the restaurant I could die in,” says Gyngell of the light-filled space into which, over 18 months, she, Fitzgerald and architect Stuart Forbes breathed new life.

“When Skye called and asked me to work with her on it, I said, ‘No way!’” says the forthright Fitzgerald. “It went against everything I thought would work. I also thought, ‘The architects and builders will think I’m some dolly-bird sister brought in for no other reason than being family.’”

However, Gyngell persuaded her to fly to London to see the space. And when Fitzgerald noted the carefully collected ephemera that represented her sister’s vision for Spring, she immediately agreed to be involved. “Skye thinks about food on a plate the way I think about a room,” she says. “The colour, balance, the composition, the white space in a room similar to the white space on a plate — it is the same.”

Spring’s food is Gyngell at her best. Inspired by nature, each week she finds a new note in her composition. Working mostly with Fern Verrow, one of England’s finest biodynamic

farms, Gyngell plucks the best of the seasons for her plates. Combining flavours with a comforting yet idiosyncratic touch, her philosophy is one of purity and provenance.

The same is true of the beautifully assembled elements Fitzgerald has chosen. Each is either bespoke or a genuine design original. The winter garden atrium is decked in gunnera leaves cast in Corian, while one pale-blue interior wall is broken up by a dance of 5800 handcrafted ceramic blossoms by Brazilian-born artist Valeria Nascimento.

The floorings, furniture and fittings have been sourced with similar dedication. The oak floorboards are by Danish brand Dinesen; low, pale-pink Arne Jacobsen sofas greet early arrivals; while tan leather Mario Bellini chairs accommodate guests in the dining room. The cutlery is by David Mellor and the stemware of superior quality. Floor staff wear custom-designed Breton striped shirts with calico waistcoats by Maureen Doherty of Knightsbridge boutique Egg, while British label Trager Delaney has fashioned long, voluminous dresses for the maitre d’s.

First reviews mean a lot to restaurateurs, but the opinion that mattered most to the Gyngell and Fitzgerald was their mother Ann’s. So what did she think of Spring, and of their collaboration? Both sisters report “she was overjoyed”.

In other hands, Spring’s multitude of design ingredients competing for attention could have constituted a recipe for disaster. However, Gyngell and Fitzgerald have deftly harmonised them to create something that is greater, and more beautiful, than the sum of its parts.

For more information, visit [springrestaurant.co.uk](http://springrestaurant.co.uk). VL

Patrons dine beneath Valeria Nascimento’s Blossoms installation and Apparatus ‘Cloud 50’ lights, available from Criteria. **OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** the light-filled dining room; wild seabass with Jerusalem artichoke, black olives and a tomato and mint dressing; Briony Fitzgerald in her Sydney home with paintings by Wang Yuping (left) and Celia Gullett; an exterior of Somerset House. **Details, last pages.**



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