

the real point of fine dining

Last Autumn's BBC2 comedy series *The Trip* saw Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon play versions of themselves on a culinary tour of The Lake District, poking fun at the formality of fine dining along the way. This month **Nick Harman** explains why he would have been well at home in their company...

"So there I was, absolutely no clothes on, and her husband bashes open the bedroom door, takes one look at what's going on and shouts out... " "The lamb tartine with squid juice and emulsion of escargots."

Don't you just hate it when waiters interrupt as your dining partner is getting to the punch line of a story? They seem to have a radar for the right moment, shimmying soundlessly up on your blind side before butting in abruptly.

And it doesn't end there. As you wait patiently for the man to put the plates down and go away he pauses dramatically to gain your full attention and then begins 'the explanation'.

"So here we have rabbit volaille drowned in its own juices, enrobed in a saffron milk and gelatinated by a reduction of pituitary glands gathered before dawn in a field where Henry V once stood."

This is all bad enough, as your food is going cold while he speaks, but at the same time he does the 'fine dining point'.

This is a way of indicating which puddle, smear or splash he is talking about by means of a bent little finger. To point directly at the item would be too crude for fine dining, so he crooks his little finger back on itself and uses the protruding knuckle to point instead.

This enrages me to the point of steam coming out both my ears. I want to eat and this man is waving his hand over my plate and boring me stiff about the food



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that's on it. I know what's on my plate because I ordered it, and quite frankly if I need help identifying the items then chef should stop mucking about with them.

And there is worse to come; just as I make to pick up my tools and get stuck in the

sommelier enters stage right. This is a peril of having matching wines with each course: a lot of wine bore action. I don't care which side of the hill the grapes were grown on, the average night temperature or the grower's family history. All I need to know is in the glass and all I want to do is taste it.

The more you pay, the worse it gets. My local café doesn't tell me the sausages were lovingly-assembled from scrapings off the abattoir floor and the tea has been relentlessly stewed for five hours. Alf knows exactly what I want from him: full English and a bit of peace and quiet. Merci bien. ■

Nick Harman is editor of www.foodepedia.co.uk and was shortlisted last year for The Guild of Food Writer's Restaurant Reviewer of the Year.