



RAILWAY ROMANCE

I WANT MY TIME WITH YOU...

BY ANGELA SARA WEST

Photographs courtesy The Searcys Bar & Brasserie

Famously home to the longest Champagne bar in Europe, The Searcys Bar & Brasserie at London's historic St. Pancras International station is the perfect pitstop for a first-class glass of fizz and an increasingly popular place to propose. Indulge in the golden age of travel in this celebrity haunt simply overflowing with romance in the heart of the UK capital. Time it right, and you might even be served up a special serenade by a musical megastar, such as John Legend, Pixie Lott or Sir Elton John!

Angela Sara West finds out about the famous faces who have flocked here, discovers moving artwork by world-renowned artist, Tracey Emin, a unique collaboration between Searcys

and luxury cakemakers GC couture for the perfect proposal, along with a Champagne-themed Sunday Brunch with Laurent Perrier... not forgetting the public pianos played by some of the most famous fingers on the planet.

The famous poet, Sir John Betjeman, once worried that St. Pancras station was "too beautiful and too romantic to survive". The founding member of the Victorian Society was a passionate defender of Victorian and Edwardian architecture, well-known for popularizing and protecting those eras' beautiful buildings. Among Europe's most stylish stations, the beauty of the unique Grade 1-listed building takes your breath away...

Designed by William Barlow, St. Pancras originally opened in 1868. An engineering marvel for its time, it was the largest enclosed space in the world and provided the grandest entrance into London. Over the years, the Victorian

wonder has experienced near-demolition and decay but, although this masterpiece of Gothic architecture has seen a turbulent history, thanks to Sir John stepping in and saving St. Pancras and its resplendent hotel, the station's stunning iron arches, over 100ft high at the roof's apex, still reign supreme over the unrivalled atmosphere and hustle and bustle of today's travellers. A stunning restoration completed in 2007 saw St. Pancras respectfully restored and reopened to showcase a magnificent £800m redevelopment of the globally-famous station, which has become a world-class luxury destination, also home to high-end shops galore, alongside Eurostar's high-speed railway service.

I'm blown away by the grandeur of this great gateway to the rest of the UK and Europe and, despite its modern makeover, it's not hard to imagine the cacophony of sounds and sights of nostalgic steam engines whistling their way up and down the tracks, treasuring that atmo-



JOHN LEGEND

spheric bygone era of train travel. A touching tribute to the famous poet and railway enthusiast who allowed it to go the distance, an 8.5ft sculpture here of Sir John, by Martin Jennings, celebrates the station's saviour and his poetry.

SENSATIONAL SEARCYS

As the last stop before romantic trips from London to Paris, Brussels, Lille, Amsterdam, the South of France and beyond, Searcy's Champagne Bar, the longest in Europe, beckons at this striking train terminus. Justifiably proud of its long-standing heritage, prominent restaurant and hospitality group, Searcy's iconic Champagne bars, restaurants and events have a world-renowned reputation for quality and innovation.

Founded in 1847 by John Searcy, the chef and caterer to the Duke of Northumberland, the first-ever event caterers in the UK Searcys have since carved out a name as brave market-leaders, launching bold, forward-thinking concepts, including the original in-station Champagne bar at St. Pancras, one of London's first skyscraper restaurants, along with cafés and restaurants in two World Heritage Sites. Boasting no fewer than 25 venues across the UK, Searcys serve fresh, modern dishes reflecting the seasons, with a focus on sustainability, showcasing the excellence of the highest-quality home-grown produce available in the British Isles and, of course, world-class service standards.

FIRST STOP – CHAMPAGNE!

The chic Searcys Champagne Bar here at this historic London landmark opened just over a decade ago. Situated on the Grand Terrace Upper Concourse, beneath the station's stylish

iron arches, the much-loved 98-metre-long (over 320 feet) Champagne Bar is the longest in Europe and affords panoramic views of pulsating St. Pancras' station terminal below. With the venue synonymous with excellent Champagne, the extensive bottle selection offers some of the best bubbly in (London) town!

Alongside a variety of Champagnes and world sparkling wines, with a special focus on British varieties, the bar also boasts a thoughtfully-curated cocktail list. Contemporary twists on 1920s cocktails sees 10 of the classy drinks named after trains which used to depart from St. Pancras and King's Cross, including the 'West Riding Rum', a punchy nod to the West Riding train which chugged into King's Cross from Leeds, and the 'The Heady Highlandman', offering a taste of Scotland's whisky to celebrate the Highlandman train journey from famous Fort William.

The impressive Champagne Bar was designed by multi-award-winning Swedish designer, Martin Brudnizki, who has famously designed other London celebrity hangouts and eateries including The Ivy, Le Caprice, Sexy Fish and Scott's. Among DebreTT's 500 Most Influential People in the UK, on The Who's Who List of Influential People around the World, in Elle Decoration's List of Best British Architects and Designers, Martin's magic touch has seen Searcys swiftly become a must-visit destination, where guests enjoy the grandeur of a superb setting whilst sipping their favorite fizz.

DRINK IN THE VIEW & POP THE Q!

The perfect pit-stop before hopping aboard a high-speed train to another UK city or a Eurostar train to Europe, Searcy's Champagne Bar is a fashionable first-class destination

for a discerning drinking and dining experience. And, it seems, the romantic nature of train travel never fails to put us in the mood for love – it's fast becoming THE place to pop the question, with Searcys seeing more and more star-crossed couples becoming betrothed.

The Lovers' statue, a 30ft tall bronze sculpture of an intimate pose by world-renowned sculptor, Paul Day, takes place of honour on the Grand Terrace and is often the first thing travellers take in when stepping off a Eurostar train. To add to the romance, Searcys Champagne Bar sits just below this statue, known as 'The Meeting Place', as well as an eye-catching message by a certain well-known artist. "Whether or not you are travelling via Eurostar, Searcys Champagne Bar at St. Pancras has long been a romantic destination in its own right," Joel Claustre, General Manager for Searcys Brasserie at St. Pancras, tells me. "It's Europe's longest Champagne bar, located just below the famous Lovers' statue and Tracey Emin's evocative artwork. Our attentive, personalized service, combined with the stylish architectural surroundings, makes it the perfect location for marriage proposals. In 2018 alone, we had 15 proposals taking place at Searcys St. Pancras, which is really special for us!"

Whether it's whistle-stop tipple whilst awaiting a train, a fizz-filled romantic rendezvous, an appetizing apéritif to whet the appetite for some fine English fare, or you're on track to ask your intended to marry you, Searcys serves up fine fizz and so much more... something to suit even the most discerning of suiters, travellers, diners and Champagne lovers. Stylish décor and gastronomic delights await in the glamorous Brasserie, where Art Deco details hark back to the roaring 1920s and old station clocks and intimate private booths pay tribute to the golden age of travel, setting the tone for a romantic brunch, lunch, starry-eyed evening of delectable cuisine, or even the perfect proposal – it really is the ideal spot to ask your beloved to tie the knot!

AN ENGAGEMENT RING BOX THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT!

Missed the opp to give the question a pop on Valentine's Day? Searcys now offers a helping hand when you ask for your loved one's hand, with a new edible engagement ring box made entirely of cake and icing in which to present the ring. As part of Searcys' engagement package, you'll also enjoy two glasses of their selected Cuvée Champagne plus a seasonal food platter to share.

The delicious turquoise ring box, covered in flavoursome fondant icing, is created by purveyors of luxury cakes, GC Couture, Mayfair-based international suppliers of cakes for prestigious weddings and 5-star hotels. "We're delighted to collaborate with such a wonderfully romantic venue and provide our unique Proposal Cake," says Sach Singh, Managing Director, GC Couture.

The icing on the cake, sitting beneath Tracey Emin's emotive artwork in bright pink neon is a sure signal to help you express your undying love... Can't find the words? The sign says it all... At 65 feet long, the light installation by the world-renowned artist and Royal Academician depicting the words 'I want my time with you' in Emin's signature handwriting is the largest text piece ever made by the artist, who is one of the most important and influential in the world and has been appointed a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II for her contributions to the visual arts.

How did it feel to see her illuminating sculpture light up such an iconic railway station? "I want my time with you.' I cannot think of anything more romantic than being met by someone I love at a train station and, as they put their arms around me, I hear them say those words... It's also a statement that reaches out to everybody from Europe arriving into London," says Tracey of the inspiration behind her much-loved installation.

Suspended above the Grand Terrace, beneath the famous St. Pancras International vintage DENT clock, her poignant words hanging here from the Grade 1-listed Barlow shed roof mark the sixth installation in the Terrace Wires series, commissioned by HS1 Ltd., the owners of St. Pancras International, and the Royal Academy of Arts. The artwork is part of the station's exciting calendar of arts and cultural events and, as a highly-visible programme for public art, Terrace Wires offer no fewer than 50 million travellers a year the chance to experience the latest contemporary artwork from leading international artists.

FAMOUS FACES GRACING THE LONGEST CHAMPAGNE BAR IN EUROPE!

When it comes to celebrities stopping by for a glass of something special at Searcys, the list goes on and on... "With our exceptional



selection of sparkling wines and Champagnes, Searcys Champagne Bar at St. Pancras has been visited by world-famous personalities, including actors and politicians such as Joanna Lumley, Michael Palin, Maggie Smith, Michelle Dockery and John Goodman. Even Theresa May (before she became Prime Minister) and Boris Johnson have visited the bar on a stop-over before catching their train," reveals Joel.

WHERE DINING, SHOPPING & CULTURE MEETS TRAVEL... ALL UNDER ONE ICONIC ROOF

As for the world-famous station itself, it's become a destination in its own right, offering a wealth of stylish and premium shops, bars and restaurant. Along with its role as a world-class station, the venue's vibrant calendar of new and exciting arts and music experiences means there's always something new to discover. Boasting more shops than any other railway station and its own fresh produce market for visitors to enjoy, St. Pancras International's retail offering combines high street favorites with boutique independent retailers and was proud to be the first UK train station to launch a retail and consumer app – 'StP' – allowing customers to capitalise on new shopping trends. With arts, events and workshops, travellers are also treated to live music and poetry events throughout the year.

PLAY ELTON'S PIANO!

Brightening up the daily commute, in 2016 Sir Elton John delivered not only a surprise piano performance of a mesmerizing medley in the middle of the station's concourse, to the delight of star-struck onlookers, but donated the Yamaha piano to St. Pancras International station for all to appreciate. The Rocket Man completed his impromptu gig by signing the piano with the note, "Enjoy this piano. It's a gift. Love, Elton John."

Many a music icon has played on the station's collection of pianos, bringing songs and smiles to overjoyed visitors. International stars, including Hollywood legend, Jeff Goldblum, simply cannot resist a tinkle on the keys, while British music maestros, Jamie Cullum (joined by the National Youth Jazz Orchestra), Laura Mvula and Jools Holland, have all had a turn, too. Comedian, Bill Bailey, has also showcased his musical talents here and even global music icon, John Legend, couldn't pass by without a play, wowing passers-by with an impromptu performance. Fresh off the Eurostar train from Paris, the multi-award-winning American artist entertained a gathering awestruck crowd with a selection of songs on Sir Elton's piano before continuing his journey.

Alongside off-the-cuff performances from famous faces and the passing public playing a

tune or two on their way through the station, other artists here have included Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, West End star Kerry Ellis and Queen musician Brian May. In aid of the charity Penny for London, singer Pixie Lott has also graced the station's Grand Terrace to serenade commuters with a choir of local primary school children and, believe it or not, before he became a household name, Ed Sheeran took part in St. Pancras' Station Sessions for up-and-coming acts – the audience had no idea at the time that they were witnessing a megastar in the making!

BACK TO SCHOOL, CHAMPAGNE STYLE!

To mark the station's 150th anniversary last October, St. Pancras celebrated the momentous milestone throughout 2018 with exhilarating events galore organized in conjunction with HS2 and Crossrail. St. Pancras Champagne Bar and Brasserie by Searcys toasted the big '1-5-0' by unveiling its first Champagne School and a fresh new look last spring. The school's launch allows Searcys to share their wealth of knowledge on Champagne and British sparkling wines with guests through ticketed or private party masterclasses, which can be accompanied by a delicious meal or as a one-of-a-kind celebration in the new Tasting Room or Kitchen Bar. Exclusive masterclasses include Champagne and food pairing to appeal to all kinds of wine lovers, from complete beginners to knowledgeable connoisseurs.



A BUBBLY SUNDAY BRUNCH!

What's more, you can now enjoy an exquisite laid-back brunch washed down with an elegant bottle of Champagne, too, as the brasserie recently launched an enticing new menu in partnership with world-renowned Champagne house, Laurent Perrier. The heavenly brunch



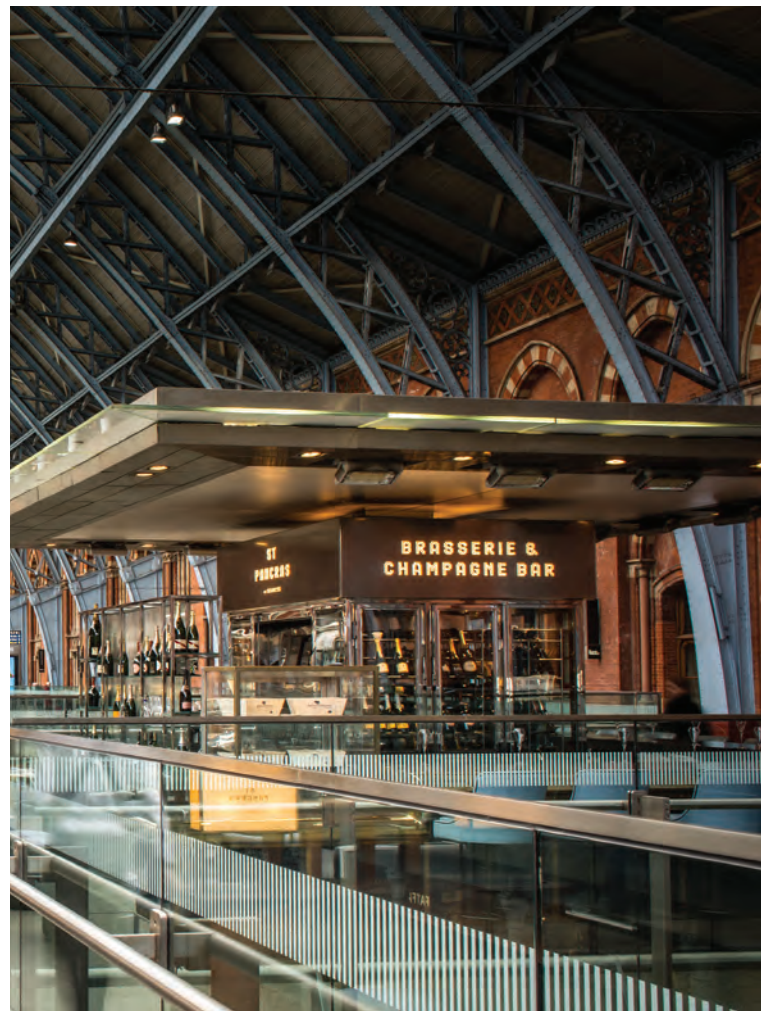
(L) ELTON JOHN PLAYING THE PIANO (R) JEFF GOLDBLUM



for two includes a lavish three-course meal created by Executive Chef, Colin Layfield, topped off with a delightful bottle of Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Champagne. “Our Sunday Brunch celebrates seasonal English fare at its finest, with over 25 hearty dishes synonymous with a leisurely Sunday morning,” explains Joel. “To match such a lavish menu, we have partnered with Laurent Perrier, one of the most distinguished, family-owned Champagne houses.”

With its expressive bouquet and fresh raspberry and wild cherry notes, the iconic Cuvée Rosé is the perfect pairing for a sensational Sunday brunch. Tantalizing the taste buds, this exceptional bottle of sparkling bliss brings the exquisite brunch to the next level, perfect for those special moments. “Laurent-Perrier is thrilled to collaborate with Searcys on this sensational brunch,” says Juliet Elliot, Marketing Controller at Laurent Perrier UK. “The St. Pancras Brasserie’s stylish décor and vintage-inspired lighting is the perfect reflection of the history of our brand.”

From surprise trips to the continent and romantic mystery meet-ups, to star spotting and parties fizzing over with Champagne, Searcys at St. Pancras is the destination of choice to add bit of sparkle to your fashionable fine dining n’wining experience. And what better place to woo your loved one, a heartfelt love letter spelt out above, than in this very special space? Whether or not a proposal’s on the menu, if you’re London-bound, take the train, instead of a plane, this year, with a posh pitstop at Searcys, of course! ■



FACTBOX

Searcys at St. Pancras International: <https://stpancrasbysearcys.co.uk>

The brand’s high-end restaurants include the Helix and Iris bar at the Gherkin, Osteria and Bonfire at the Barbican, the Roman Baths Kitchen, The Pump Room at Bath and The Orangery at Blenheim Palace, while luxury venues include 30 Pavilion Road, Kenwood House, Vintners’ Hall, 30 Euston Square, Blenheim Palace, One Moorgate Place and The Roman Baths.

For further information, visit Searcys London: <https://searcys.co.uk>
 St. Pancras International Station: <https://stpancras.com>
 Laurent Perrier: www.laurent-perrier.com
 GC Couture: www.gccouture.co.uk