



A Blind Date with Dinner

WORDS —
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What happens when you remove the one sense we depend on most?

In this immersive dining experience, guesswork, giggles and great food share the spotlight.

There's dining at a restaurant, and then there's experiences that make your heart thump a little before you've even picked up a fork.

Dining at Dans Le Noir? begins not with a menu, but with a line. You place your hand on the shoulder of the person in front of you and follow your guide into complete darkness. And I mean complete and utter darkness. The moment the last trace of light disappeared, I felt that tiny flicker of doubt... what have I got myself into?

But you are not alone. You are gently guided one by one. Once we were inside what I can only guess was a dining room, our host for the night, Chayse, took each of us by the hand and placed us at our seats. Chayse told me I was at the head of the table, so I instinctively ran my hands along the edge to find my bearings. Table located. Chair secured. Pride intact.

For a minute I just sat there, listening to everybody around me settle in, staring into the abyss. And, probably wondering why today was the day I chose to wear a white top.

We were told to explore the space in front of us with our hands. Napkin first, which in this setting is less of a

suggestion and more of a survival tool. This was tucked quickly into the neck of my top and I felt glad that looking composed felt wildly irrelevant here. Cutlery next, then a glass, and a water jug. I popped the lid and used a finger as a guide while pouring to ensure I didn't empty it onto the table. Although my dining neighbour was less successful.

With sight removed, everything else turns up the volume. Conversation feels different. More focused. Without eye contact I felt myself listening more intently. Although when speaking yourself you do wonder for a second if anyone is actually listening and at one point I had to genuinely ask.

Then the food arrived. It's important to add here that the menu remains a secret until the final reveal, so every bite is guided by instinct rather than expectation.

The first bite was a small thrill. You aim your fork and hope for the best. There were a few empty attempts and a couple of near misses, which only added to the enjoyment. The starter was rich and silky, something raw and delicate. I debated between salmon and tuna, and as a sashimi fan I was fairly certain it was one of them. Yellowfin tuna, it turned out, dressed in a rich egg yolk and miso sauce, finished with a crisp tapioca and kombu cracker. Velvety, savoury, perfectly balanced. Paired with a pinot blanc, it was a quietly confident start.

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The main required more detective work. Pork or beef? The table was divided. I decided to abandon all dignity and let my fingers investigate. The texture gave it away first, tender with a slight crisp edge, then came an unmistakable hit of cherry. Ah yes, duck. A beautiful piece, served with roasted vegetables, cherry puree and veal jus. When my hand brushed what I later realised was a bold red wine on my left, it confirmed I was on the right track. The rioja alongside this dish was generous and warming, the kind of pairing you would happily order again, in full light of course.

Dessert was the only course I felt sure about straight away. Banana is not usually my first choice, but it



was full of flavour. Roasted banana ice cream with freeze dried pineapple, caramel sauce, an almond tuile, and passionfruit and champagne gel. Sweet, sharp, creamy and crunchy. A glass of champagne to finish and the meal stood firmly on its own, theatrics aside.

Dining in absolute darkness sharpens your senses in surprising ways. Texture becomes a language, another sense on its own. Aroma leads the way. You are constantly guessing, questioning, recalibrating. It is playful yet relaxing, and strangely intimate.

But more than that, it is humbling.

The concept was first created in Paris over two decades ago to encourage people to reconsider how they experience the world and to build awareness around visual impairment. The Auckland restaurant continues that ethos, with visually impaired and blind team members leading guests through the experience. Spending even an hour navigating food and space without sight gives you a small glimpse into how different daily life can be. The skill and composure Chayse showed throughout the evening, for example, was nothing short of impressive.



When it was time to leave, we were told to look down as the door opened as the light would be rather intense. We stepped outside. I heard birds before I properly saw anything. I felt the warmth of the sun on my face. Slowly, I looked up to see the trees moving in the breeze. It was a simple moment, but it felt amplified. The kind of moment you would usually rush past, now impossible to ignore.

Dans Le Noir? is far more than just a dinner. You will laugh, you will guess wildly, you might even spill a little water, although let's hope it's not a bold rioja. And you will walk out seeing the world just a touch differently.

For more information or to book visit auckland.dansle noir.com