



# how to spend it



TRAVEL / CITY

## Clare Smyth's perfect weekend in London

The three-Michelin-starred chef heads to Borough Market to buy Stilton and sniffs the flowers at Chelsea Physic Garden



Clare Smyth in Borough Market | Image: Sophia Spring

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## WHERE TO FIND



“I grew up on a farm in Northern Ireland and moved to **London** when I was 18. I have lived close to Wandsworth Common since then – probably because it has a feel of being in the countryside.

During the week I am at **Core**, my **restaurant** in Notting Hill, by 9.30am, and I leave around midnight. My husband Grant works in finance and he would say he does long hours; I joke he does half days compared to me. Even so, I get up at 8am on Saturdays, like every other day, and have a cup of **tea** but no breakfast. It’s a habit; chefs are tasting all day long and you can’t judge a dish if you don’t have an appetite.

We take an Uber to Borough Market, heading first to Neal's Yard Dairy to buy some rich and deep Isle of Mull Cheddar and Stichelton Stilton, which is nutty and quite sharp. Then we go to **Brindisa** for the Bellota Ibérico ham – one of my favourite foods; I eat tons of the stuff – and their sweet pickled chillies and Spanish olives. With a glass of cider from one of the stalls, we'll wander around looking at the produce, then head home to take our naughty Highland Terrier, Storm, for a walk on the Common. Grant and I catch up as we stroll around the lake, and stop for a coconut turmeric latte at Skylark Café; it's always full of dogs and kids – very cheery.

Then we'll make our way to **A Wong**, the modern Chinese restaurant in Pimlico. Andrew Wong is a friend, so he usually cooks what he fancies for us. It has always been a local, friendly place, albeit now with a Michelin star. I recommend the spongy wild-mushroom truffle steam bun and the

Shanghai steamed dumplings with ginger-infused vinegar; you bite in and the broth explodes in your mouth.

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Next, Books for Cooks in Notting Hill. We have vintage chefs' books on display in the restaurant and I have about 1,000 at home, but I'm always looking for more. Then we'll stroll over to see the art in The Vessel Gallery. I love appreciating the things other people make with their hands.

In the evening, we head to the bar at The

**Connaught** for a Dirty Martini and then to Bentley's. If it's just the two of us, we sit at the bar and talk to the guys shucking the oysters. When it's dark outside and you're sitting with the sound of the piano playing, you get that timeless feeling of old London – almost as if a horse and cart could be going past on the cobbled street outside. I'll have the beautiful grilled Dover sole. Not thinking about complex food at the weekend is genuinely relaxing. We recently had a bottle of Meursault Jean-Philippe Fichet, Côte de Beaune there; it's a chef's **wine** – a rich, beautiful Chardonnay that connects with chefs' palates. Another chef's drink is a Negroni – though I'm not sure whether it connects with the palate or if it's just the alcohol content that makes it so popular.

On Sunday, we love visiting **Chelsea** Physic Garden, which has plants dating back 270 million years. I find the smell intoxicating. We'll walk to the Royal Hospital and stop for a chat with the Chelsea Pensioners. Many people don't know you can visit. Then we go

our separate ways, me for a manicure at the **spa** at the Mandarin Oriental. It's very calming. As a chef, I can't grow my nails or wear varnish, but I like to have them as neat as I can. Later, I'll meet Grant for lunch at Trinity in Clapham, owned by our friend Adam Byatt. Last time I had the mackerel with white gazpacho, grapes and tarragon, and roast beef. The salted-caramel tart is a must; Adam can't ever take it off the menu.

We stay till we get kicked out, then maybe go to the cinema at the Olympic Studios in Barnes. I'm in bed close to midnight with BBC News 24 on. People say you shouldn't, but it helps me to switch off."

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