

## RUBY TANDOH DINNER PARTY PHILOSOPHER



I made a pecan pie recently – a strangely exotic American dessert, loaded with symbolism. Thick with sugar, studded with pecans and with an entire bar of butter, it was an all-American health disaster.

This wasn't just about baking, though. I've been whipping up pies for weeks now, swept along by an American dream fuelled by back-to-back *Buffy* and *Friends* marathons. Even the eponymous film couldn't dispel my *American Pie* fantasies.

But I wasn't alone in this romanticism. Having left the pie to cool, I sprawled out with my flatmates, Ingrid and Marta, to watch TV. We've been living together – Ingrid, Marta, Flo, a family of mice and I – for three months. This is no chic city pad, just a student flat with peeling paint. Goodbye hazy visions of drifting around London like Mrs Dalloway. Hello Finsbury Park. Still, we can seek refuge in TV. Today, it's *Grey's Anatomy*. 'Why is everyone so beautiful?' Marta asks.

'So much hope. Why can't we be like that?' Ingrid sighs.

Hardly cutting-edge cultural observations, but somewhere between sighing over handsome doctors and bemoaning our own pessimism, we all agree on one thing: transpose *Grey's Anatomy* here and it devolves into something less hopeful and scandalous. We don't have groups of hot young medics moving up in the world. We have a *Green Wing* brand of carnivalesque reality: lusting over a sarcastic surgeon but actually snogging the misogynistic friend.

No wonder we look across the pond for optimism. We have a language bled dry of whimsy by phrases like 'congestion charge' – the highlight of a recent walk was the contagious glee of two men watching a dog humping a bollard.

When the USA bounds on to the scene, ebullient and shiny, it's

hard not to fall for its charms. No more pedantry or cynicism – this is America, the real deal. This vision is, of course, a fiction: even I struggle to romanticise a Wendy's burger. But it's a fiction enthusiastically maintained and, as long as it distracts me from our recent rodent infestation, I'm happy to buy into it.

But we don't all agree. Our flatmate, Flo, for example – while we witter on about *Girls*, she reads about Victorian Catholicism. I throw on threadbare T-shirts; she wears heels and expensive bras. When I ask her what she thinks of the American dream, she shrugs. 'I'd rather watch *Downton*. But,' she laments, sagely, 'it really is very problematic for women.'

Our attempts at contemporary escapism are either trite (see: *Love Actually*) or weirdly anti-heroic. Bridget Jones became a poster girl for singledom because she was a prize berk – instead of eternal optimism, it's a happily ever after that trundles into place in spite of awkwardness and poor grooming. Obviously, I was delighted when Bridget heralded this bumbling new era, but feels a bit... fatalistic.

As *Grey's Anatomy* finished, I wondered if I could have the best of both worlds – British ambivalence en route to the American dream. I can make my all-American pies and end up with Patrick Dempsey, but also cling to sarcasm and *Strictly*. A revelation! I drifted, euphorically, into the kitchen on this wave of new-found optimism, only to be greeted by a cluster of fresh mouse droppings on the pecan pie.

**TRY IT** Recipes? From ELLE? Yes indeed. Read them at [elleuk.com/star-style](http://elleuk.com/star-style)

## WAKING UP from the AMERICAN DREAM

Meet our new columnist, Ruby Tandoh. We loved watching her on *The Great British Bake Off*, but what impressed us most about the 21-year-old philosophy graduate and *Guardian* contributor is her take on the things that matter to women. Now Ruby brings a fresh voice and point of view to ELLE.

### LONDON'S NEWEST AMERICAN DINERS

Oh America, bringer of fries, sweet pies, burgers, pancakes and hot dogs. We can't wait to indulge



JACKSON + RYE, SOHO

A sexy diner, serving buttermilk pancakes and breakfast cocktails. ([jacksonrye.com](http://jacksonrye.com))

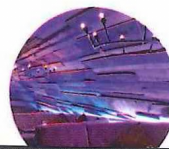
#### AVENUE, ST JAMES'S

Root beer, Jello, pretzels, sliders and macaroni with lobster. Win! ([avenue-restaurant.co.uk](http://avenue-restaurant.co.uk))



#### THE BIG EASY, COVENT GARDEN

Time to get acquainted with boozy juice, brown liquor and X-rated shakes. ([bigeasycoventgarden.co.uk](http://bigeasycoventgarden.co.uk))



EARLHAM STREET CLUBHOUSE, COVENT GARDEN

Grab a slice of *The Fresh Prince* or *Dawson's Creek*. It's pizza, FYI. ([esclubhouse.com](http://esclubhouse.com))

#### SOHO KITCHEN & BAR

Psst... Get 50% off fully loaded burgers and BLTs with your ELLE Insider card. See p32 for details. ([sohokitchenandbar.co.uk](http://sohokitchenandbar.co.uk))

