Marco Pierre White

COURSE NOTES 2.2

DELICIOUS VEGETARIAN COOKING

BBC MAESTRO



The Lessons

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1. Introduction

BEFORE YOU BEGIN COOKING,
PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO READ THESE NOTES...

This course is for you, the cook or chef of today, who is often making a meal for a variety of dietary wishes and requirements. Gone is the time when your guests who did not eat meat or fish were happy with just the trimmings or a nut roast. Many of us are 'flexitarian'; wherever possible, we will opt for vegetable or vegan dishes, rather than that steak, lamb chop or roast chicken.

Yet for me, these dishes have taken me on a journey back through time. Vegetable dishes that I have cooked over many, many years have influenced or inspired the ones that feature in this course today. There are countless classics here, but all with my twist. Ultimately, I have taken my classical training and three Michelin Star knowledge and I've adapted it for the 21st century cook at home. Dishes which I may once have foolishly considered just the garnish on a plate have now become wholesome, spectacular and delicious centrepieces. Yet they can all still be served with meat or fish if you so wish, so that at your table, all tastes are satisfied.

As a chef, I won many prizes, plaudits and trophies. However, my firm belief has always been – and I cannot emphasise this enough – that I am just the architect, while Mother Nature is the true artist. In the world of gastronomy, chefs love to 'deconstruct': to break down the components of the dish to make little knick-knacks of this and that. In truth, I don't like this; deconstruction makes no sense. The ingredients – Mother Nature's creations – become unrecognisable. So, you will see dishes here in which the primary ingredient, be it celeriac or cauliflower (the 'brain' of the vegetable world), is instead 'reconstructed'. Let's show off these humble ingredients and let them shine.

Be generous, too. Most people place more importance on the presentation, but never forget – it's all about the eating, so let *generosity* be your presentation. If you can't be generous on a plate, how can you be generous with flavour? Season food generously, season hard, and season to the max.

My favourite pastime is feeding people; I enjoy feeding people more than I do cooking, but I have to do the cooking to be able to feed them. So, give yourself time, just as you are giving time to those who will enjoy your food. When I was a young chef at the Box Tree, in Ilkley, Yorkshire, my boss Mr Reid would say, 'It doesn't matter how long it *takes* to create the desired effect, as long as you *create* the desired effect.' Wise words and ones which, as you can see, I have never forgotten. Be patient, too, because if a job is worth doing, then it is worth doing well. Patience is one of the greatest qualities a cook can possess, so do focus and question the job in hand.

Talking of which, I urge you to regard the recipe as merely a guideline. Remove the blinkers and question, question, question: what are you doing and why are you doing it? Cooking is not about throwing things in a pan and just hoping for the best. Everything has to be in stages – doing all those little jobs well – and only then will you create those layers of flavours, so that in the end, you have *intensity* of flavour. That's what cooking is all about – intensity of flavour, making ingredients taste as they are meant to taste. Therefore, allow your palate to dictate, to lead you to the destination. Work with all your senses, as well as your hands, your brain, and your heart.

Gastronomy is the greatest form of therapy. The kitchen is a good place for the misfit (and trust me, I know). When we are in the kitchen, many of us find that we can process our thoughts, and if it wasn't for food, then I would never have the understanding of life that I have today. A few great French chefs taught me how to cook, but it's the food that taught me about myself.

Enough about me. These recipes are for you, and for you to cook for your family and friends. When you step into the kitchen and flick on the gas, let your imagination also be ignited. Then the world is your oyster…

SOUS VIDE

A number of the recipes in this course refer to the *sous vide* technique of cooking. Ingredients are sealed in a bag and then gently poached in water. As the ingredients are vacuum-sealed (*'sous vide'* translates as under pressure), they cook within their own natural juices. I especially love to cook vegetables this way because the results are intensely flavoursome.

Sous vide is traditional in professional kitchens and in recent years, has become popular at home. More and more home cooks are investing in vacuum-seal machines (which I use in the videos) and water baths and these gadgets have become affordable.

However, there are two alternatives that achieve a similar result:

- A roasting/poaching bag. Simply place the ingredients in the bag, spin the bag to create a vacuum and tie before poaching.
- A blanket of clingfilm. Lay a large sheet of clingfilm on a board and fold it in half; repeat with two more sheets of clingfilm, laying these on top of the first folded sheet. Place the ingredient, e.g., celeriac, in the centre of the clingfilm blanket. Lift the corners of the clingfilm so that they meet above the celeriac. Spin the clingfilm and tie it before poaching.

DEEP FRYER

If I had to make a recommendation for any household then I'd say, "get a deep fryer". It's inexpensive, it's safe, and it does the job.

There is a common misconception that deep frying is unhealthy. Frying removes the water content and acidity of vegetables, bringing out their natural sweetness. Deep fryers are not expensive, but do make sure you change the cooking oil. If you do not have a deep fryer, you can use a wide-mouthed saucepan and cooking thermometer. Just be sure to leave ample expansion space when filling the pan, as the oil will increase in volume as it heats, and also when ingredients are added.

BAKING PARCHMENT

This may seem too basic for inclusion, but there is nothing more important to cooking than the basics. Baking parchment, cut to form a lid on top of a simmering sauce such as ragù, is called a cartouche. It helps to reduce evaporation, ensuring as much flavour as possible is retained.

VEGAN RECIPES

I love butter. Frequently, I use clarified butter (ghee is an alternative). However, for vegan savoury dishes, the butter can often be replaced by olive oil.

INGREDIENTS:

½ tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 large onion, peeled & grated

2 cloves of garlic, peeled & grated

4 thyme sprigs

1 bay leaf

1kg cherry tomatoes, halved

1kg good quality, chopped, tinned tomatoes

TOMATO SAUCE

This sauce can be made well in advance, and stored in batches, either in the freezer, or for a few days in the fridge. (For home use, I make 2 litres of sauce and then freeze in batches.) It's very simple to make – an equal quantity of cherry tomatoes and chopped tinned tomatoes are cooked with onions, garlic, thyme and bay. By combining the two types of tomato, the flavours are consistent for 12 months of the year.

METHOD:

Preheat the oven to 150°C / Fan 130°C / Gas Mark 2.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat, add the grated onions and garlic, and cook until softened. Add the thyme and bay leaf, and continue to stir.

Add the cherry tomatoes, and cook until they begin to break down. Add a little more olive oil if necessary. Let the tomatoes slowly release their liquid, and then increase the temperature.

Taste, taste, taste. Notice how the acidity of the tomatoes slowly evaporates as the tomatoes' natural sweetness takes over.

When you're happy with the sweetness of the sauce, add the tinned tomatoes, stir well, and bring the ingredients to a gentle boil. Cover with a cartouche of baking parchment. Then wrap the saucepan lid in tinfoil and place the wrapped lid on top of the pan. This way, what happens in the pan, stays in the pan.

Cook in the preheated oven for 1 hour.

Pass the sauce a bit at a time through a conical strainer. Use the back of a ladle to thoroughly push through the liquid until what is left in the colander is almost dry, and as you go, discard the dry husks from the colander.

Taste the sauce and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

INGREDIENTS:

1 black truffle

100ml Madeira

PRESERVING BLACK TRUFFLES

METHOD:

Clean and scrub the truffle. In a saucepan, bring Madeira to the boil and let it reduce by half. Pour it into a poaching bag, add the truffle and poach in simmering water for 5 –15 minutes, depending on the size of the truffle. Lift the bag from the water, allow it to cool. Truffles are best preserved a few days in advance of using and, left in the bag, can be stored in the freezer until required.


“
I’ve been cooking vegetarian dishes for many years, but was always taught to make them as garnish, but now, I make them large.

2. Baked Celeriac with Cheese & Truffle

Nutty, peppery and creamy – celeriac is an underused vegetable, but it's versatile and I love it. This knobbly, odd-looking vegetable can be used in salads (raw, grated and combined with mayonnaise, it becomes remoulade). Alternatively, serve it as a fantastic puree or simply roasted. The celeriac flavours, however, are greatly intensified when the vegetable is gently poached in a sealed bag, *sous vide*-style, so that it cooks it within its own amazing natural juices. And then, for this recipe, the celeriac is sliced and reconstructed with layers of cheese, crispy-fried onions and truffle. A fantastic vegetarian dish, and I like to serve it with a green salad.

It's the fashion to deconstruct dishes, but the truth is I prefer to reconstruct, because Mother Nature is a true artist, and I am just the architect.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS:

1 whole celeriac

½ lemon

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

About 100g Emmental cheese, finely sliced

1 preserved truffle, finely sliced, plus truffle juices (see preserved truffle note)

20g unsalted butter, chilled & diced

Handful of flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

For the assembly:

5–6 skewers or cocktail sticks

METHOD:

Trim and discard the roots from the celeriac, and peel the celeriac using a vegetable peeler, retaining its shape. Wipe it with a clean tea towel and then rub the celeriac with the lemon half (to help prevent discolouration).

Bring a large saucepan of water to a gentle simmer.

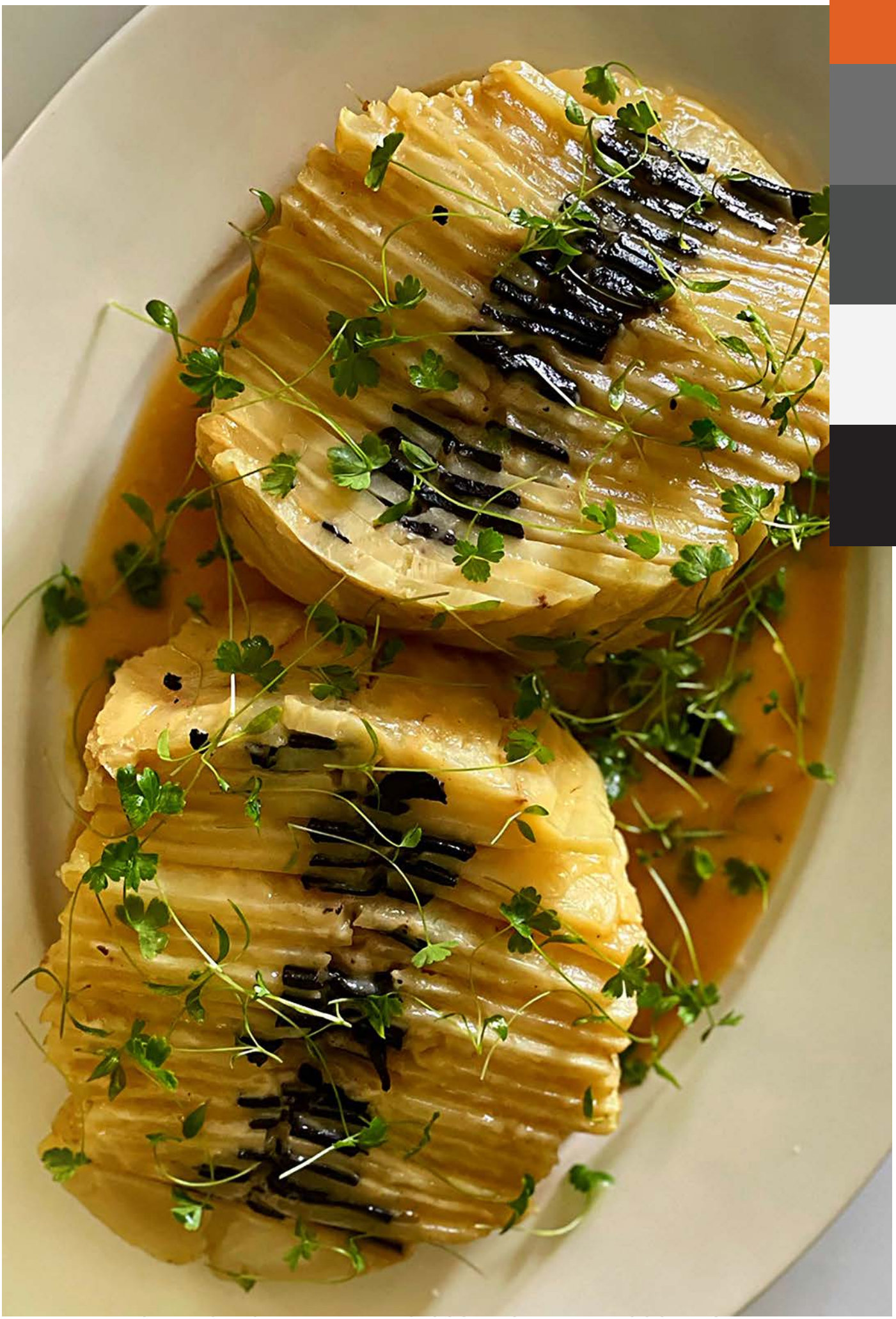
Place the celeriac in a roasting bag (or vacuum-seal bag or clingfilm blanket; see *sous vide* note). Add a pinch or two of salt and then seal the bag.

Place the sealed celeriac in the pan of water and poach for 75 minutes. Try to keep the water's temperature at just below boiling point (about 95°C).

Once out of the pan, allow the sealed celeriac to cool before removing it from the bag (or clingfilm). Retain the juices, as they'll be needed to make the sauce.

Preheat the oven to 140°C / 120°C Fan / Gas Mark 1.

Reconstruction:
Slice off and retain the base of the celeriac (about 2cm thick). This will be your foundation. Now finely slice the celeriac crossways, about ½ cm thick. (In the video, I have used a bacon slicer, starting at number 6 for the base and then reducing to number 5.) As you slice, lay the slices on top of each other in the order in which they are removed. Keep the cap of the celeriac quite thick (2–3cm).



Place the celeriac base on a baking tray or roasting tin. Lightly season it with salt and pepper. Lay a slice of Emmental cheese on top. Next, place a slice of truffle on the centre of the cheese slice.

Place a slice of celeriac on top and repeat the process, reconstructing the celeriac: a light seasoning, cheese slice, truffle slice, celeriac slice… Continue until the celeriac is reconstructed in its original layers. Finish by placing the celeriac cap on top.

The cheese acts as your 'cement', but a 'scaffolding' of skewers helps to hold the layers in place during baking, so push 5 or 6 skewers into the celeriac from top to base.

That's the celeriac – deconstructed, reconstructed and now ready for the oven!

Bake for 30 minutes.

The sauce:
In a small saucepan and over a medium heat, bring the truffle juices to the boil and let it reduce by half. Pour in some of the retained celeriac juices and bring back to the boil. Remove the pan from the heat and vigorously whisk in the chilled butter to add gloss (this is known as *monter au beurre*). Season to your taste.

Done!

To serve:
Remove the skewers. Cut the baked celeriac in slices, from top to base, or lift the layers and serve. Pour over the sauce, season, and scatter with the finely chopped parsley.

ALTERNATIVE:

The truffle can be replaced by crispy, fried onions. Finely slice the onions lengthways, and then deep fry the slices at 160°C until golden, or shallow fry the onion slices in a sauté pan. Pat the slices dry with kitchen paper and add them in place of truffle when reconstructing the layers of celeriac.

3. Truffled Cauliflower Cheese

A proper celebration of cauliflower cheese, the much-loved British comfort dish. First, the cauliflower is gently poached in a sealed bag, *sous vide*-style, ensuring the flavours and nutrients are kept in the bag (see my note about *sous vide* cooking). A similar effect can be achieved by wrapping the cauliflower in a blanket of clingfilm before poaching it. The deep-fried onions add their own sweetness and crispy texture. For the cheese, Emmental or Cheddar works well, and I also love Clawson White Stilton, which is vegetarian and excellent. The truffle, of course, delivers a finishing touch to the whole sense of occasion.

> **Cauliflower cheese with a difference, but still very simple, very easy and very quick.**

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

1 cauliflower

½ lemon

Oil for frying

2 medium-sized onions, peeled & very finely sliced

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

150g cheese, grated (or in crumbs if using Stilton)

60ml double cream (optional)

2 eggs, yolks only for egg wash

1 preserved truffle, finely diced (see preserved truffle note)

20g clarified butter (or ghee), melted

METHOD:

Bring a large saucepan of water to a gentle simmer.

Meanwhile, remove and discard the leaves of the cauliflower and the woody base. Rub the cauliflower with the lemon to help prevent discolouration.

Place the cauliflower in a vacuum-seal bag (or roasting/poaching bag or clingfilm blanket; see *sous vide* note). Add a pinch or two of salt, and seal the bag.

Place the sealed cauliflower in the water and poach for about 45 minutes. It's a gentle poach, so keep the water at about 95°C, just below boiling point.

While the cauliflower poaches, fry the onions until crispy. (I use a deep fryer, but they can be shallow-fried in olive oil over a medium heat in a sauté pan.) Preheat the deep fryer to 160°C. Fry the onion slices in the deep fryer for 6–8 minutes, until lightly golden. Place them on kitchen paper and season with salt. Set to one side.

Preheat the oven to 140°C / 120°C Fan / Gas Mark 1.

Slice the poached cauliflower crossways to create 4–5 cauliflower 'steaks'. Season each steak with salt and white pepper.

On a board, reconstruct the cauliflower. Take one steak, season and sprinkle some grated cheese over it (the cheese is a little like the 'cement' in this construction). Add a spoonful of cream, if using, followed by a spoonful of fried onions. Place a cauliflower steak on top.



Repeat this process to ‘reconstruct’ the cauliflower: cheese, cream (if using), fried onions, cauliflower steak, seasoning.

Once complete, brush the top and sides with beaten egg yolks, sprinkle with the diced truffle and drizzle all over with the melted butter.

Place any excess fried onions, grated cheese and truffle slices on the baking tray (or in a casserole dish) that you intend to use.

Lift the cauliflower from the board to the tray. If the cauliflower seems a little unsteady, place a wooden skewer (or two) through the centre, from top to base, to hold the cauliflower steaks in place when baked.

Bake for 25–30 minutes, or until browned to your liking. Scoop the melted butter that has pooled at the sides and spoon it back over the cauliflower. Season well with salt – in life, always season hard.

Serve from the tray at the table.

4. Endives with Poached Pears & Stilton

As a young chef in London, I'd go once a month to Brasserie St Quentin, a restaurant in London's Knightsbridge that was co-owned by the great food writer, Quentin Crewe. Stepping into that restaurant, it felt as if you were in Paris. There was one particular salad that I'd often order and then slowly savour. In fact, it is a classic combination – the bitterness of endive (also known as chicory), the sweetness of pear, the acidity of the blue cheese… These ingredients work so well together, and even better when the salad is finished with a few sliced walnuts.

Well, there's my inspiration for this dish, a fresh take on the classic. I've adapted it – from that salad to a more wholesome, substantial starter or main course. The endives are poached, *sous vide*-style, and then 'reconstructed' with layers of blue cheese in between the leaves, so that with every mouthful of endive, you get a little bit of cheese. Next, they are roasted with poached pear. In the video, I've used the Conference variety of pear, which should be slightly underripe so that they're ideal for poaching. Roasting removes the natural water content of the endives and pears while also intensifying their flavours.

> **The acidity of the blue cheese, the bitterness of the endive, and then the sweetness of the pear… that wonderful explosion of flavours.**

SERVES 4–6

INGREDIENTS:

3 endives (chicory)

½ lemon

Sea salt

Caster sugar

3 pears (slightly underripe)

Extra virgin olive oil (or clarified butter)

About 50g vegetarian Stilton or other blue cheese, broken into crumbs

20g walnuts, sliced

Handful of fresh herbs such as parsley, finely chopped

METHOD:

Bring a large saucepan or stockpot of water to a gentle simmer.

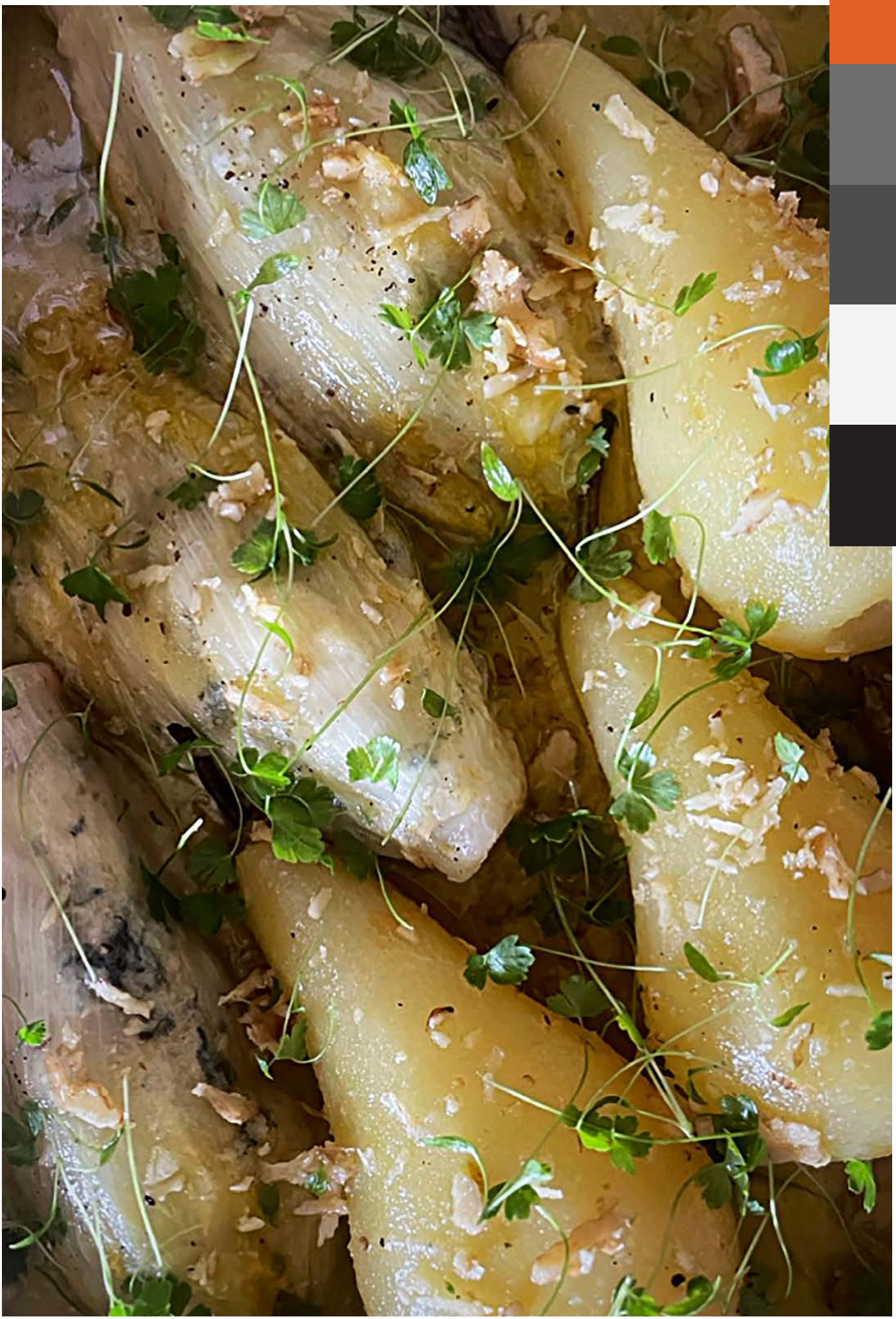
Meanwhile, prepare the endives and pears:

Rub the endives with the lemon; the juice will prevent discolouration.

Place the endives in a vacuum-seal bag (or use a roasting/poaching bag or blanket of clingfilm; see *sous vide* note). Add a generous pinch of salt, a squeeze of lemon, and 2 pinches of sugar (to balance the natural bitterness of the endives). Seal the bag and put it to one side, ready for poaching.

Peel the pears, following the contours and retaining the shape of each pear and their natural beauty. Remove the core from each pear. Rub the pears with the lemon.

Place the pears in a separate vacuum-seal bag (or roasting/poaching bag or blanket of clingfilm). Add a strong squeeze of lemon and 3 pinches of sugar; it accentuates the pears' sweetness. Seal the bag.



Put the sealed bags of endives and pears in the simmering water and poach for 35–40 minutes, depending on the size and ripeness of the pears. Feel them to check for a slight indentation.

Preheat the oven to 160°C / 140°C Fan / Gas Mark 3.

Drain the poached endives, discarding the bitter juice. Gently peel back the leaves of each endive and place the blue cheese crumbs between the leaves.

Dip your fingers in olive oil and then reshape the endive, applying a little pressure. Take your time, there's no rush – cooking well is a balance of patience and speed.

Lay the endives and pears in a shallow casserole dish. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil (or brush them with clarified butter) and season with salt and white pepper.

Next they are roasted…

Begin by placing the casserole dish over a low-medium heat, very gently to bring out the colour: rush and you might scorch them.

After about 5 minutes of gentle cooking, transfer the casserole dish to the oven and continue to cook for 15–20 minutes. Remember, time is only a guide and every oven is different.

Once out of the oven, transfer the endives and pears to a platter (or serve from the casserole dish if you wish). Scatter with the sliced walnuts and fresh herbs to serve.

5. Risotto of Wild Mushrooms

My mother was from Veneto where they're well known for their excellent risotto. At the age of 4 or 5, I'd sit at the kitchen counter watching her make it, stirring the pot with a wooden spoon. I suppose that was my first risotto masterclass, and I'm pleased that my mother was the teacher. Often people are scared of making risotto. On *MasterChef Australia* it was known as 'the death dish' because so many contestants cooked it… and failed. This recipe is straightforward and it's almost foolproof. As with pasta, risotto rice should be cooked *al dente* so that as you eat, you can almost sense each individual grain of rice. And the risotto should be creamy and almost walk across the plate. This risotto is vegetarian and made with mushroom stock, which can be replaced by chicken stock if you prefer. There's a simple rice:stock ratio of about 1:4, so every 100g of rice requires about 400ml of stock. When it comes to wine for the risotto, don't blow the budget. First, I taste. If the wine is good it goes into my glass. Not so good and it goes into the risotto. Mushrooms – I sauté them first, which intensifies their flavour. Some cooks add mushrooms at the beginning of cooking, but they end up being stewed. This recipe means they're still beautifully firm.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

For the mushroom stock:

1.5kg white mushrooms, finely diced

4 tbsp olive oil

1.5 litres water

For the risotto:

2 tbsp olive oil

3 large knobs of unsalted butter, softened

1 onion, peeled & grated

400g Arborio rice, washed

1 glass of dry white wine

50g Italian vegetarian cheese, Parmesan-style, grated

For the sautéed mushrooms:

500g wild mushrooms (e.g., porcini, king oyster, oyster), sliced

Olive oil

To garnish:

Handful of flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

METHOD:

To make the mushroom stock:
Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan, add the diced mushrooms. Sweat them in the pan, stirring as you go. Pour in the water. Cook on a medium heat for 20 minutes. Pass through a muslin cloth and squeeze out all the mushroom juice to collect the flavour. Keep the diced mushrooms to one side.

Making the risotto:
Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add 1 knob of softened butter, followed by the grated onion. Sweat the onion for a few minutes, spreading it across the base of the pan – removing the acidity to bring out the natural sweetness and flavour of the onion.

Add the rice and stir well, working the onion through the rice for a few minutes.

Pour in the white wine and let it reduce, removing the alcohol content and the acidity to bring out the natural sweetness of the wine.

Next, pour in about a quarter of the mushroom stock. When it starts to boil, stir and when it comes back to the boil, stir again.

Continue like this, stirring when it comes to the boil. The temperature in the pan should be just right. If it cooks too aggressively, then it will cook too quickly and you'll end up with a dry risotto. If the heat is too gentle, then it'll be a wet risotto. The rice becomes plump as it drinks the stock, and then it releases its starch. Keep feeding the rice with stock, a few ladles at a time.

Taste a grain of rice. If it tastes chalky, continue to cook. With risotto, you should be able to feel each grain of rice in your mouth; it shouldn't be like a pudding. When it's nearly ready, add the reserved diced mushrooms and stir through.

Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a sauté pan. Add the sliced wild mushrooms and sauté for 5 minutes on a medium heat.



> People are scared of making risotto, but it's one of the easiest dishes to make delicious.

Finally, taste the risotto and adjust the seasoning accordingly. Remove the pan from the heat, and cover with the grated cheese and the remaining 2 knobs of softened butter which will make the risotto nice and creamy. When the butter has almost melted, stir vigorously to work in the cheese and butter.

To serve, pour the risotto onto a platter, and cover with the sautéed mushrooms. Or serve from the pan, with the mushrooms spooned on top of the risotto. Sprinkle with the parsley and a splash or two of olive oil.

6. Vegetable Lasagne

We think of the traditional Bolognese ragù as being made with pork and beef mince, but this lasagne recipe is entirely vegetarian. The ragù, which of course can be served with your favourite pasta, is made with celery, carrots, celeriac, cauliflower, garlic and onions, thyme and bay leaves, and a tomato sauce to die for. If you have time, make the ragù a day in advance so that as it matures the flavours are intensified. Lasagne pasta sheets are replaced by thin layers of celeriac.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

For the celeriac sheets:

1 celeriac

½ lemon

Sea salt

For the bechamel sauce:

75g unsalted butter

50g plain flour

500ml whole milk

A few raspings of nutmeg

50ml double cream

1 bay leaf

For the ragù:

4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 onion, peeled & grated

2 cloves of garlic, peeled & grated

2 medium-sized carrots, finely diced

200g celeriac, peeled & finely diced

1 celery stick, finely diced

1 cauliflower, florets only, finely diced

3 thyme sprigs

2 bay leaves

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

500ml tomato sauce (see Tomato Sauce recipe (p5), or use shop-bought passata)

100g Italian vegetarian cheese, Parmesan-style, grated

METHOD:

Poaching the celeriac for the lasagne sheets:
Trim and discard the roots from the celeriac, and peel the celeriac, retaining its shape. Rub the celeriac with the lemon to help prevent discolouration.

Bring a large saucepan of water to a gentle simmer.

Place the celeriac in a roasting bag (or vacuum-seal bag or clingfilm blanket; see *sous vide* note). Add a pinch or two of salt and then seal the bag.

Place the sealed celeriac in the pan of water and poach for 75 minutes. Try to keep the water's temperature at just below boiling point (about 95°C).

Once out of the pan, allow the sealed celeriac to cool before removing it from the bag. Retain the juices, as they'll be needed to make the sauce.

To make the bechamel sauce:
Melt the butter in a saucepan over a medium heat, add the flour and whisk for 3–4 minutes. Pour in the milk, continuing to whisk. Grate a few rasps of nutmeg into the sauce – to your taste. Pour in the cream and add the bay leaf, and season with salt and white pepper. Over a low-medium heat, keep stirring with the whisk for 10–15 minutes. Set to one side.

To make the ragù:
Heat the olive oil in a large casserole pan on a medium-high heat and add the onions and garlic. Work them across the base of the pan, so that they cook evenly and quickly.

Add the diced carrots, celeriac, celery, cauliflower, thyme and bay leaves and stir well. Season with salt and pepper and continue to cook, letting the water content evaporate from the vegetables.

Add the tomato sauce and continue to cook until the ragù is reduced but the texture of the vegetables is retained – don't let them break down and become mushy.

Remove the thyme and bay leaves and put the ragù to one side.

Preheat the oven to 160°C / 140°C Fan / Gas Mark 3.

Finely slice the poached celeriac to the width and thickness of lasagne pasta sheets.



> **Once you've made your ragù Bolognese, you can make lasagne, you can make pappardelle with king oyster mushrooms with a ragù Bolognese, it's delicious and quite versatile.**

Drizzle oil all over a casserole dish. Spread a layer of ragù into the casserole dish and lay celeriac 'sheets' on top to cover.

Spoon bechamel sauce over the celeriac and sprinkle with grated cheese. Add another layer of the ragù, and spoon over more bechamel sauce, followed by a layer of celeriac. Continue to build up the layers, and add a final layer of celeriac sheets. Apply a little pressure to compact everything down in the casserole dish.

Season, and smooth bechamel sauce over the surface of the lasagne, and sprinkle with the last of the grated cheese.

Bake for about 30 minutes, scatter a little more salt over the top, and serve.

7. Arancini

I always make more risotto than I need. And from the leftover risotto, I make arancini, deep-fried balls of risotto coated in breadcrumbs. They're a treat from Sicily, and arancini means 'little orange'. The technique of coating with breadcrumbs to create a crisp crust is known as *pane*, the Italian for 'bread'. Very few people pane correctly and there is a golden rule to follow: the crust should be as thin as eggshell. Making arancini is not to be rushed. It's an investment of time but, as you'll taste, your patience is well rewarded.

A speciality from Sicily with the most deliciously crispy crust.

QUANTITIES WILL VARY, (DEPENDING ON YOUR LEFTOVERS)

INGREDIENTS:

500g leftover risotto

150g plain flour

350g breadcrumbs

4 eggs, beaten

Oil for deep-frying

METHOD:

Be well prepared before you begin. You need three baking trays: put the flour in one tray, the egg wash in another and the breadcrumbs in the third.

Roll small balls about 6cm in diameter from the risotto rice, placing them on a board as you go.

Take one risotto ball and gently roll it in the flour. Move the ball from one hand to the other to remove the excess flour.

Next put the rice ball in the bowl of egg wash and splash the egg wash over the ball – don't roll the ball in the egg wash. Now place it in the tray of breadcrumbs.

Repeat the process with the remaining risotto balls.

With all the risotto balls sitting in the tray of breadcrumbs, scoop and scatter the breadcrumbs over the balls to give them a light dusting of crumbs. Then use your hands to gently turn and coat each ball all over.

Place the balls in the egg wash for a second time, splashing the egg wash over them. To retain their shape, work them between the palms of your hands. Then return the balls to the tray of breadcrumbs for the lightest of dustings.

Preheat the deep fryer to 160°C.

Deep fry the balls for 8–9 minutes. Once drained, place them on a tray lined with kitchen paper to remove excess oil.

Transfer to a platter, season with salt and serve.



8. Asparagus Spears with Truffle Mayonnaise & Chopped Egg

One of gastronomy's perfect marriages and a dish of indulgence, asparagus spears are served with a light truffle mayonnaise and chopped hard-boiled egg. And the whole glorious thing is created within 30 minutes – that's living! As for the frequently asked question: to peel or not to peel the asparagus? In restaurants, we always peel them but at home, to be frank, I don't bother. The mayonnaise can be made in the time it takes to cook the asparagus, or in advance if you prefer. British asparagus is in season from the end of April through to June. Be sure to cook them in a large saucepan of boiling water. If the pan is too small, it'll take a while for the water to come back to the boil once the spears have gone in, so they'll lose their freshness.

An easy, quick and indulgent dish.

SERVES 6–8

INGREDIENTS:

1kg asparagus spears

1 hard-boiled egg, peeled & finely diced

For the truffle mayonnaise:

2 egg yolks

1 tbsp white wine vinegar

1 tbsp water

1 tsp Dijon mustard

About 150ml rapeseed oil

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

1 preserved truffle, finely sliced, plus truffle juices (see preserved truffle note)

To finish:

10g flat-leaf parsley leaves, finely chopped

METHOD:

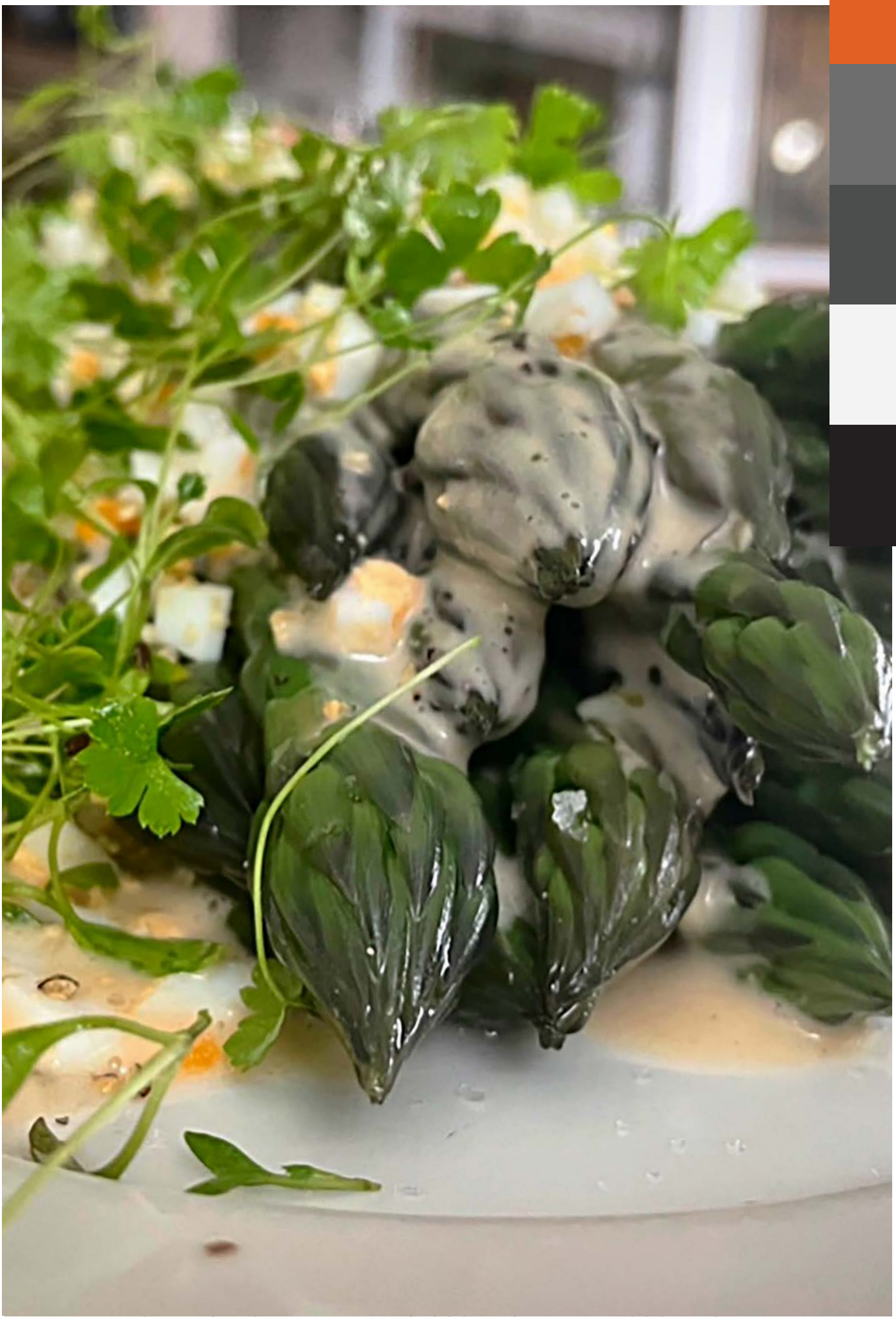
Preparing the asparagus spears:
Remove the woody part at the base of each spear like this: with the blade of a knife, tap, tap, tap the spear, moving from its base upwards, until there is no resistance and the blade cuts cleanly through the tender part of the spear. Discard the woody bits.

Bring a large, deep saucepan of salted water to the boil. Add the asparagus spears and cook on a rapid boil for about 3 minutes. Drain the asparagus in a colander and immediately transfer them to a bowl of iced water to stop them cooking. Once the spears have cooled, and when you are almost ready to serve, place them on a clean tea towel or kitchen paper and dab them dry.

For the truffle mayonnaise (which is quite light, almost a vinaigrette):
In a bowl, briskly whisk the egg yolk with the white wine vinegar, water and Dijon mustard to create an emulsion. Tilt the bowl and, while continuing to whisk, pour in the oil – in a steady trickle – little by little on the side of the bowl. Whisk in a pinch of salt and another of white pepper. Add the chopped truffle with its juices, stir and check for seasoning.

Refrigerate until required.

To serve:
Lay the asparagus spears on a platter. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and white pepper. Spoon over the truffle mayonnaise, and be generous with it – life's too short for small portions. Add the finely diced hardboiled egg and chopped parsley, and serve.



9. Baked Tomatoes stuffed with Ratatouille

I learnt how to make the Provençal classic ratatouille at the Hotel St George in the late 70s. Admittedly, it was quite wishy-washy, sloppy and not very nice. So, on second thoughts, I suppose I learnt how *not* to make ratatouille. We also served big, beef tomatoes that were stuffed with rice, a popular dish of the time. For this recipe, the tomatoes are filled with ratatouille, which I make with tomato sauce and three vegetables that are deep-fried; courgettes, aubergines and red peppers.

> **Ratatouille niçoise is one of those great vegetable dishes from the south of France – it's delicious.**

INGREDIENTS:

6 nice, big, very ripe beef tomatoes

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

For the ratatouille filling:

1 aubergine

2 courgettes

3 red bell peppers

1 ladle tomato sauce (see my recipe, or use shop-bought passata)

For the oil – an equal mix of olive oil and sunflower oil

METHOD:

To create the tomato shells:
Slice away the top of a tomato, about 1cm from the stalk. Put the 'lid' to one side. Use the tip of a knife to remove the tomato core, and use a teaspoon to scoop out the seeds and surrounding veins – take your time, work from the outside in and leave the structure in place to prevent the tomato collapsing when it's baked. Remove the seeds from the tomato lid as well.

Repeat this process with the rest of the tomatoes.

Now arrange the tomato shells topped with their lids in a casserole dish (or deep-side baking tray) and keep to one side.

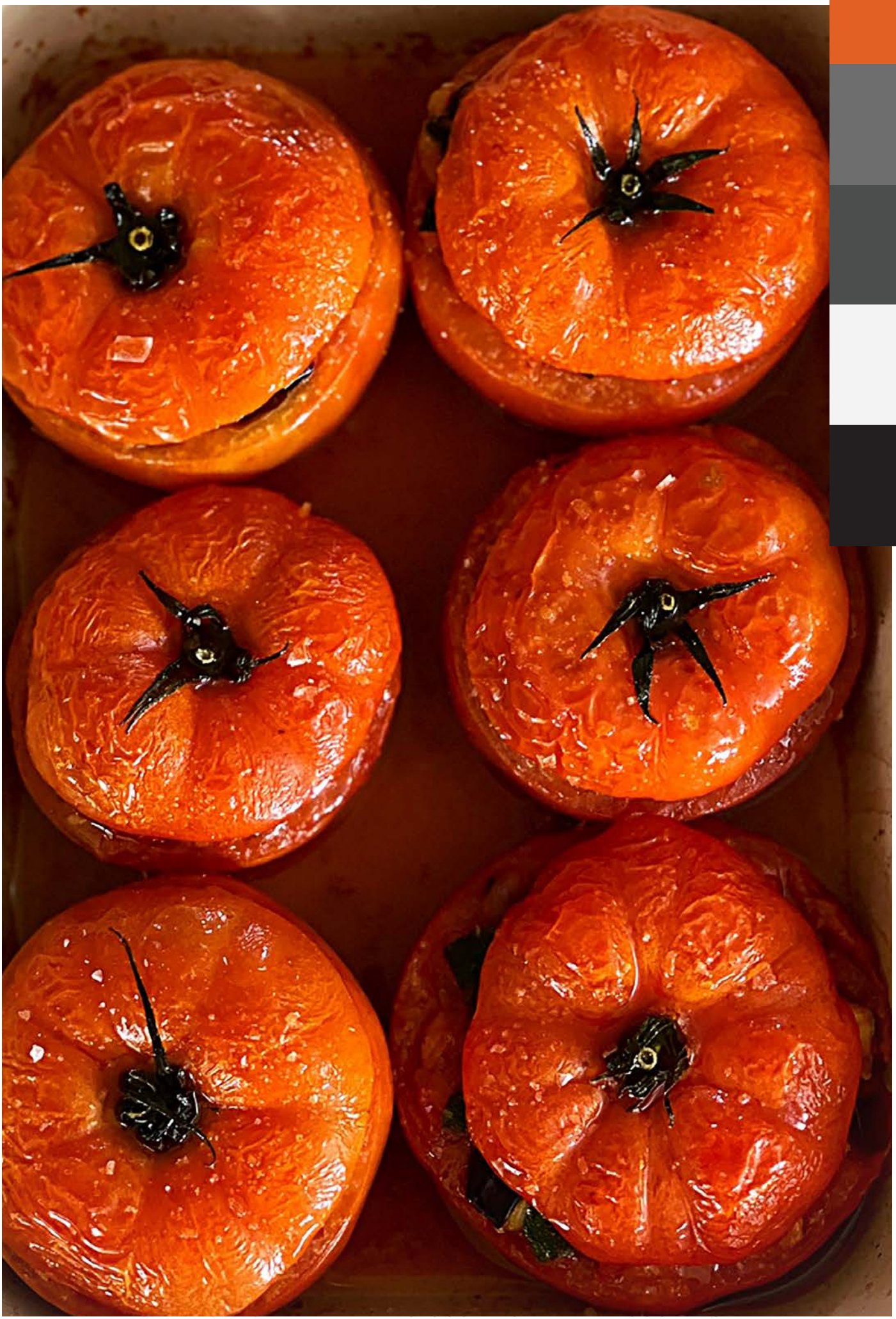
To make the ratatouille:
Preheat the oven to 180°C / 160°C Fan / Gas Mark 4.

For the aubergine:
Remove and discard the stalk from the aubergine. Slice the aubergine lengthways, into slices about 1cm thick. Dice the aubergine slices, not too chunky but not too small – you want to retain the texture.

Deep fry the diced aubergine for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
Drain and season with sea salt.

For the courgettes:
Halve the courgettes lengthways and dice, but again not too small.

Deep fry the diced courgette for 2–3 minutes until cooked, or shallow fry.
Drain and season with sea salt.



For the red bell peppers:
Use the tip of a knife to puncture each pepper a few times (this will stop them bursting when fried). Transfer the peppers to the deep fryer and fry while turning constantly for about 5 minutes, or until they start to blister. Place them in a large bowl, wrap the bowl in clingfilm and leave for 15–20 minutes to continue to steam.

Take a pepper, slice it into quarters and use the tip of a knife to gently scrape away and remove the skin. Remove and discard the seeds. Repeat this process with the remaining peppers. Dice the peppers – not too fine, not too coarse.

Transfer the red pepper, aubergine and courgette to a large bowl and season with sea salt and white pepper. Add the tomato sauce and stir to bind the ingredients.

That's your ratatouille!

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

To stuff the tomatoes:
Remove the tomato 'lids' and tip away any excess tomato water that's gathered in the shells. Spoon the ratatouille into shells and place the lids back on top.

Drizzle with olive oil and bake for 20 minutes.

Once out of the oven, season with sea salt and serve.

10. Romano Peppers stuffed with Piperade

A delicious lunch, with fresh green salad and, perhaps, hardboiled eggs with mayonnaise. Sensational! The Romano peppers are stuffed with piperade, made from red bell peppers and a speciality of the Basque Country. There are two stages of cooking the bell peppers: first, they are deep-fried; then, while still hot, they're placed in a bowl and covered with clingfilm, so they continue to cook in their steam, and their skins are easily removed. These stuffed Romano peppers can be made a day in advance and refrigerated so that they firm up. They can be served at room temperature or baked for 10 minutes and served hot.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

6 Romano peppers

Oil for deep-frying: equal quantities of olive oil & sunflower oil

For the tomato *concasse*:

6 tomatoes

For the *piperade*:

4 red bell peppers

1 onion, peeled & finely chopped

2–3 tbsp olive oil

2 cloves of garlic, peeled & finely chopped

2 bay leaves

3 thyme sprigs

1 tbsp tomato puree

1 tsp paprika

To garnish:

Extra virgin olive oil

Sea salt & ground white pepper

Fresh herbs such as parsley, coriander or basil

METHOD:

Preheat your deep fryer to 160°C.

With the tip of a knife, puncture the sides of each Romano pepper – this will stop them bursting when they're deep fried.

Deep-fry the Romano peppers (or shallow fry them in a pan). Once they've blistered, transfer them to a bowl. Tightly wrap the bowl in several layers of clingfilm and leave in a warm part of the kitchen for at least 20 minutes where the peppers will continue to steam.

Repeat this process with the red bell peppers – deep fry them, place them in a bowl and cover the bowl with clingfilm to allow them to steam for at least 30 minutes.

Remove the skins from the Romano peppers.

Make a small incision lengthways at the top of each Romano pepper and carefully remove the seeds.

While the peppers cool down, make the tomato *concasse*. Blanch the tomatoes in a pan of boiling water, peel, seed and dice.

Keep aside.

To make the *piperade*:

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and sweat them for about 5 minutes and then add the bay leaves and the thyme. Stir in the tomato puree, add the paprika, stir well and cook for a further 2–3 minutes.

Add the tomato *concasse* and a pinch of sea salt and stir well.

There you have it – this is the base sauce. Leave it to simmer and cook down slowly over a gentle heat while you continue to prepare the bell peppers.



Bell red peppers. They’re amazing: treat them hot or cold, they’re sensational – powerful in flavour, vibrant in colour.

Slice a bell pepper in half lengthways and remove the core. Slice each half in two lengthways. With a pepper quarter on the board skin-side up, use the tip of a knife to gently scrape away and remove the skin, from the base to tip of the pepper. Remove the seeds and veins.

Repeat this process for the remaining peppers.

Now take a red pepper quarter and finely slice it lengthways. Then finely dice the strips – this cut is known as brunoise. Repeat this process for the rest of the pepper quarters and transfer the diced peppers to a bowl.

Add an equal amount of the base sauce to the diced peppers in the bowl, remove the thyme and the bay leaves, and stir well to incorporate. This is the *piperade*.

Half-fill a piping bag with the *piperade*. Insert the tip of the piping bag through the incision of one Romano pepper and pipe the *piperade* into it. Once filled, turn the Romano pepper so that the incision is underneath and out of sight.

Use your fingertips to reshape the Romano pepper and lay it on a platter (use the blade of a knife to lift it from board to platter).

Repeat this process with the remaining Romano peppers, adding more *piperade* to the piping bag as you go.

Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil, season with sea salt and a little white pepper. Finish with fresh herbs, such as parsley, coriander or basil and serve. Alternatively, refrigerate until needed or bake for 10 minutes in an oven preheated to 160°C / Fan 140°C / Gas Mark 3.

11. Artichokes Barigoule

This dish of braised artichokes is a Provençal classic, made famous by that great French chef, Roger Vergé. Hollywood stars visiting the Cannes Film Festival always found time for a fabulous meal at his glorious Three Star restaurant, Moulin de Mougins, where Artichokes Barigoule was often on the menu. Artichokes range in size, depending on the time of year (large in the spring, smaller in the winter).

Artichokes Barigoule is a farmhouse dish that hails from the south of France, but despite its rustic origins, it is rightly served in restaurants throughout the region.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

For the basil butter:

A handful of chopped basil leaves

50g unsalted butter

50ml extra virgin olive oil

For the artichoke barigoule:

18 artichokes

2 medium-sized carrots, sliced crossways

2 medium-sized onions, finely sliced in strips

2 garlic cloves, finely sliced

2 bay leaves

3-4 thyme sprigs

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

A generous glass dry white wine

200ml vegetable stock

Sea salt – to season to your taste

300ml tomato sauce:

(see Tomato Sauce recipe (p5), or use shop-bought passata)

METHOD:

For the basil butter (this will give you extra basil butter to use in other recipes):
In a food processor, blend the basil leaves with 50ml extra virgin olive oil and the unsalted butter until emulsified.

Preparing the artichoke hearts:
Peel the artichokes, so that you are left with the very heart of the artichoke and the stem. Remove the woody base of each heart, or 'choke', so that you are left with the stem and top half of the heart. To prevent discolouration, keep the artichokes in a bowl of cold water with a squeeze of lemon juice.

Heat 4 tablespoons of olive oil in a large flameproof casserole pan over a medium heat. Add the carrots, onions, garlic, bay leaves and thyme, and sweat them down, stirring occasionally to prevent the pan scorching.

Add the artichoke hearts to the pan, and pour in the wine and let it reduce to remove the wine's acidity and bring out its natural sweetness.

When you can no longer smell the acidity of the wine, it's time to add the vegetable stock, so pour in the stock and add a couple of pinches of salt. When the stock comes back to the boil, reduce the heat to a simmer and cover with a cartouche made from baking parchment with a hole in the centre. Continue to simmer for about 20 minutes. The cartouche serves two purposes; one, to hold in the flavours; two, to release a little bit of steam through the hole in the centre of the cartouche. Without the cartouche, the sauce would reduce and evaporate too quickly – the cartouche slows it all down.

To check the artichokes are cooked, insert the tip of a knife – there should be no resistance.



Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, heat the tomato sauce on a medium-high heat and add a splash of olive oil. Take the pan off the heat and whisk in the knob of butter to add gloss (this technique is known as *monter au beurre*).

Add 20g basil butter, chilled and diced, to the pan of artichokes, take it off the heat and swirl the pan so that the butter melts and emulsifies (again, *monter au beurre*).

Pour the tomato sauce in the centre and arrange the artichokes on the platter, stems pointing upwards. Spoon over the carrots, onions and the artichoke sauce. Season with sea salt, scatter with herbs, and serve.

12. Baked Aubergine Niçoise

Back in the days of my first restaurant Harveys – and I'm talking 30-odd years ago – there was a dish of roasted lamb that was served with a garnish of stuffed aubergines. I've moved on and have adapted the recipe. What was once garnish is now the vegetarian star of this show (though is still a delicious accompaniment to lamb). The flesh of the aubergine is microwaved so that it cooks in its own steam and retains its creamy-whiteness (if it's baked in the oven, it'll turn an unappetising grey). The flavours of the olive oil and seasoning are absorbed by the vegetable. This 'aubergine caviar' is combined with a little tomato sauce (or a shop-bought passata) to become a stuffing for the aubergine shell which is then topped with a crust of breadcrumbs and hard cheese before being baked. One mouthful and you're beneath the Mediterranean sun, savouring the flavours of Nice.

SERVES 2
(AS A MAIN COURSE)
OR 4
(AS A STARTER)

INGREDIENTS:

2 aubergines

½ small lemon, juice only

1 large clove of garlic, finely sliced

Extra virgin olive oil

Sea salt

Plain flour for dusting

A few basil leaves

Ground white pepper

1 ladle tomato sauce (see my recipe, or use shop-bought tomato passata)

Ground white pepper

For the crust:

20g breadcrumbs

40g vegetarian hard cheese (similar to Pecorino or Gruyère)

For the garnish:

Fresh herbs of your choice, e.g., basil, parsley

METHOD:

Preparing the aubergines:
Remove the tip of one aubergine, so that it can stand upright on a chopping board. Peel the aubergine and discard the skin. Cut the aubergine into strips lengthways and then coarsely dice it; it doesn't have to be perfect.

Transfer the diced aubergine to a microwaveable bowl and keep to one side.

Slice the second aubergine in half lengthways. Run a paring knife around the pocket of seeds in each aubergine half. Use a teaspoon to scoop out the seeds and surrounding flesh (retain these), so that you are now left with 2 aubergine shells. Put these to one side.

Coarsely chop the flesh and seeds and add them to the bowl of diced aubergine. Add a strong squeeze of lemon to help prevent discolouration and add the finely sliced garlic.

Finally, add 4 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil, season with a generous pinch of sea salt and toss the ingredients together.

Now wrap the bowl in 4–5 layers of clingfilm. Microwave on full power for 8 minutes. Allow the aubergine to cool before removing the clingfilm.

Deep frying the aubergine shells:

Preheat the deep fryer to 160°C.

Rub lemon inside the aubergine shells and then dust them in the flour. Transfer the shells to the deep fryer and fry for 60–90 seconds – it's a gentle fry and we don't want to cook them all the way through, as they'll finish cooking when baked in the oven.

Place the semi-cooked shells, skin-side down, in a casserole or ovenproof dish. Season with sea salt.

Preheat the oven to 140°C / 120°C Fan / Gas Mark 1.



> **Microwaves do have their place in the world of gastronomy and you'll find them in every three-star kitchen. Don't be narrow-minded. Remove the blinkers.**

Spoon the microwaved, softened aubergine flesh onto a board, squeezing out the excess water as you go.

Run the blade of a knife through the aubergine flesh to chop it coarsely. Chiffonade the basil and add it to the aubergine caviar. Season with sea salt and white pepper, and add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the fresh tomato sauce and work it through. It should have quite a coarse texture. This is your aubergine caviar.

Fill the shells with this mixture.

Make the herb crust by mixing the breadcrumbs with the grated cheese. It's a ratio of 2:1 breadcrumbs to cheese.

Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil, and spoon or sprinkle the crust mixture over the top of the filling.

Bake for 15–20 minutes – when the crust begins to crisp, you know it's ready. Scatter the fresh herbs all over and drizzle a little more olive oil on top before serving.

13. Smoked Aubergine Baba Ganoush

This recipe adds a new dimension to baba ganoush, the Lebanese dish that's made from the flesh of chargrilled aubergine. Here, two aubergines are filled with the baba ghanoush – it's delicious, and perfect when served with toasted sourdough or flatbreads. Baba ganoush is one of my favourites and usually I take the opportunity to make it when using the barbecue. Sadly, it's not always made correctly and is therefore disappointing. Baba ganoush should be both smoky and creamy, and there are three steps to perfection: first, char the aubergine skins to create the smoky flavour; second, cover them so that they continue to cook in their own steam and the skins are easily removed; third, finish with tahini, garlic, olive oil, a little lemon juice and seasoning. If you don't have a grill to put on the gas, the aubergines can be charred by perching them by the gas ring.

A two-dimensional take on the Lebanese classic baba ganoush.

SERVES 4 (AS A STARTER) AND 6 (AS AN APPETISER)

INGREDIENTS:

4 aubergines

2 cloves of garlic

1 lemon

2 tbsp tahini paste

Extra virgin olive oil

10g coriander leaves, finely chopped

To season:

Sea salt & ground white pepper

METHOD:

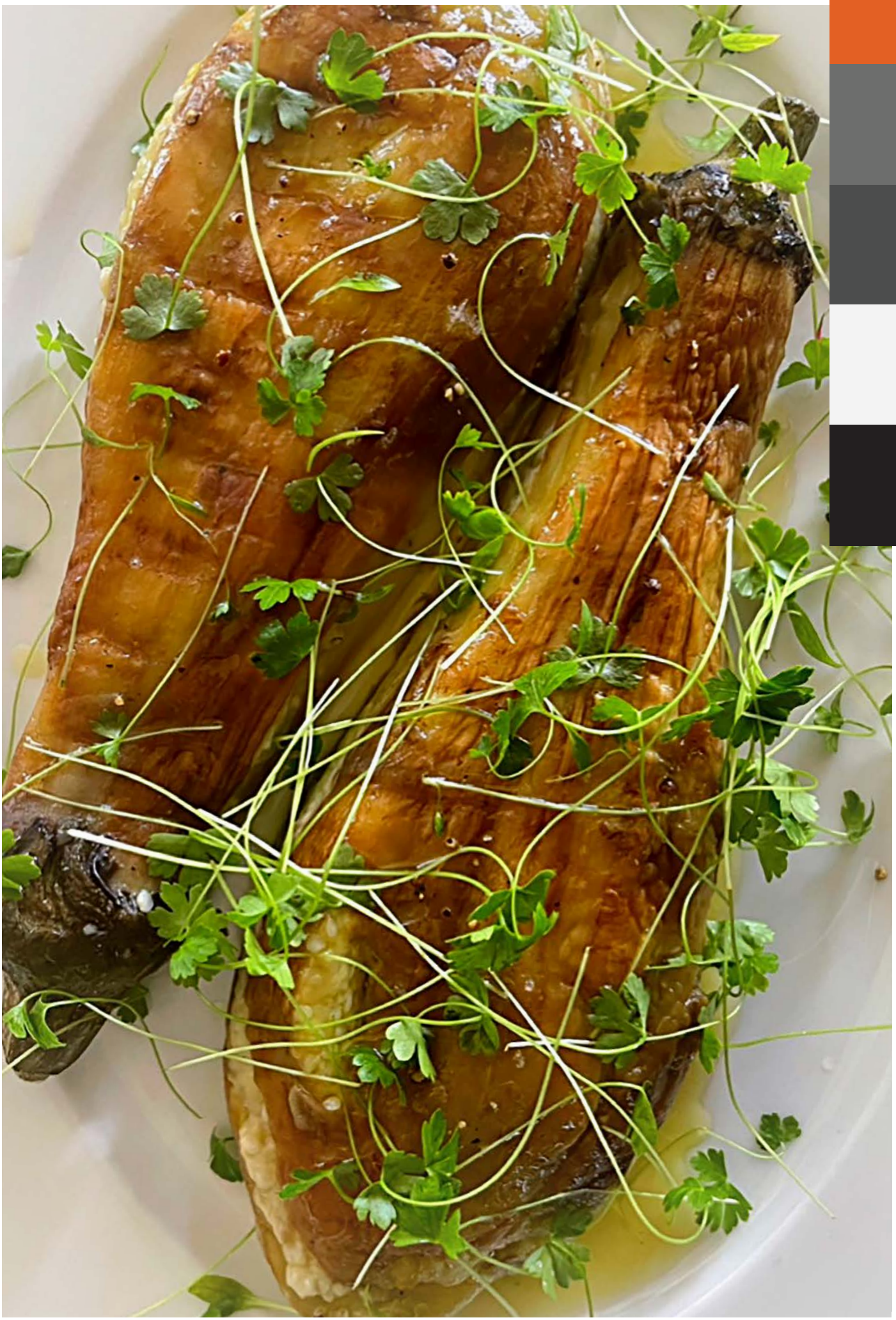
Begin by chargrilling the aubergines like this:
Place a barbecue grill or metal rack directly on a gas flame and over a high heat. Lay the aubergines on the grill and cook them until their skins char and they soften, turning them occasionally with tongs. (You can touch them – careful, they're hot, of course – to check their softness).

Transfer the charred aubergines to a plate, wrap clingfilm around the plate and leave them for at least 15–20 minutes to steam and also help loosen the skins.

Peeling aubergines is also easier when they're dipped in water, so fill a large bowl with cold water. Take an aubergine, dip it in the water and then peel away the skin. Every so often, dip the aubergine back in the water to help with the peeling. Place the peeled aubergine on a plate, and repeat with the 3 remaining aubergines.

With a paring knife, scrape away and discard any excess charred skin.

The baba ganoush requires 2 of the aubergines. So, halve 2 aubergines lengthways and remove the seeds – or leave them in if you wish, your call. Remove and discard the nose, or tip, of the aubergine. Finely slice the aubergine flesh. Grate the garlic over the aubergine flesh. Add a few strong squeezes of lemon juice – if you squeeze the lemon through a clean tea towel it'll catch the pips. Add the tahini paste. Season with salt and add a splash of extra virgin olive oil. Run a knife through it to create a paste. This is the baba ganoush; put it to one side.



Now, slice one of the 2 remaining aubergines in half lengthways from the base but stopping at the tip so that it remains attached at the tip and can open like a book. Season the inner flesh with sea salt and white pepper and drizzle it with olive oil.

Taste the baba ganoush and adjust accordingly – a little more salt, pepper, lemon juice, tahini?

Spread about half of the baba ganoush along the centre of the aubergine and then place the other aubergine half on top, so it's a bit like a sandwich. Run your fingers around the edges to remove any excess baba ganoush.

Repeat this process with the other aubergine, so that you have two 'reconstructed' aubergines, each with a filling of baba ganoush.

Lay the aubergines on a plate. Drizzle with olive oil, add a squeeze of lemon, season with salt and white pepper and finish with a scattering of coriander. Slice each aubergine in half if serving as a starter for 4, or in thirds if serving as an appetiser for 6.

14. Endive Tarte Tatin

This endive tarte Tatin is a sensational, light main course. Goat's cheese can be sprinkled on top, or even scallops can be added. I like to use the trim from pastry, refold it and then beat it out with a rolling pin. The pastry disc can be prepared in advance and refrigerated until the point when it's required. For this recipe, I've used a large oven-proof pan (about 30cm diameter) so if using a smaller pan, adjust accordingly. For the goat's cheese, I like Rosary English, which is also vegetarian.

We tend to think of tarte Tatin as a sweet dessert, and I've made many. Pear, apple, pineapple... However, there's one vegetable that makes an amazing Tatin – endive.

SERVES 6
(AS A MAIN COURSE)
OR 8–10
(AS A STARTER)

INGREDIENTS:

400g puff pastry

250g unsalted butter, room temperature, sliced

30g caster sugar

5 small (or 4 large) endives

Sea salt

200g goat's cheese (optional)

Extra virgin olive oil

METHOD:

Roll out the puff pastry to a disc that's the same diameter as the pan for the tarte. Refrigerate the pastry until the moment when it's required.

Preheat the oven to 200°C / 180°C Fan / Gas Mark 6.

Lay the butter slices in an oven-proof sauté pan. Sprinkle the sugar over the butter.

Halve the endives, lengthways, and lay them in the sauté pan so that they fit snugly. Season with salt.

Place the chilled pastry disc on top of the endives and, using a tablespoon, tuck it tightly underneath the endives (once done, you should be able to see the base of the pan around the pastry edges). Using a fork, pierce the pastry all over (about 40 times) – there need to be lots of little holes to let the steam escape during cooking and ensure perfect caramelisation of the endives.

Now place the pan over a medium-high heat and cook for about 10 minutes; you'll see caramelisation at the pastry edges as the melted butter dissolves the sugar. At this point, transfer the pan to the middle shelf of the oven and bake for 25–30 minutes.

Once out of the oven, tilt the pan and spoon out some of the butter. Now put a board on top of the pan and – swiftly – turn the pan and tray simultaneously so that the tarte flips onto the board and the pastry side is on the board with the endives facing you.

If using, break the cheese into crumbs and scatter these over the hot tarte. Drizzle with olive oil, season with sea salt and serve.



15. Poached Fennel Hearts

A delicate, light dish for a summer's day, perfect with a green salad, roast chicken or grilled fish. Fennel, with its aniseed flavour, is versatile, either when raw or cooked. The soft flavours of the fennel are lifted by the star anise and lemon. Yes, the fennel can be braised but it won't have the same intensity of flavour that's produced with the *sous vide* method. It should be called *cuisine naturel*, the way mother nature made it. These fennel hearts are delicious with roast chicken, roast lamb, or fish. For the wholly vegetarian option, scatter with crumbs of goat's cheese and serve with green salad. Sensational!

> **Fennel is underused but not underrated; raw or cooked, with fish – it's sensational, with chicken – amazing!**

INGREDIENTS:

5 fennel bulbs

Olive oil

1 lemon

Sea salt

1 star anise

50g unsalted butter, chilled & diced

10g fresh herbs, such as parsley, coriander & tarragon

METHOD:

To prepare the fennel:
Remove and discard the woody base of the fennel bulbs. Remove the stalks and outer layers – all we want for this dish is the hearts of the fennel. Use the tip of a knife to bevel the base of each heart.

Halve the fennel hearts lengthways, and place these in 2 vacuum-seal bags (or roasting/poaching bag or wrapped in a blanket of clingfilm; see *sous vide* note).

Add to each bag a generous splash of olive oil, a strong squeeze of lemon juice (to prevent oxidisation) and a pinch of salt. Seal the bags.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the gentlest simmer (if using a thermometer, aim for 95–98°C). Poach for 30 minutes – when gently squeezed, the fennel should be slightly indented.

Transfer the bags to a large bowl, and cut them open so that the juices are collected in the bowl. Arrange the poached fennel hearts on a warm platter.

To make the sauce:
In a small saucepan or frying pan, heat the juices. Add the star anise and a splash of olive oil. Add the diced butter, and whisk to emulsify the sauce. Taste and adjust to your taste with salt and a squeeze of lemon juice.

To serve:
Spoon the hot sauce over the fennel hearts and scatter with finely sliced fresh herbs. Add a dash of olive oil to split the sauce and finish with a pinch of sea salt. Serve.



16. Stuffed Mushrooms with a Herb Crust

This dish takes me back to the spring of 1978, when I began as a kitchen apprentice at the Hotel St George in Harrogate. Years later, I discovered a more sophisticated version, Porcini Maxim Duxelles: porcini mushrooms filled with mushroom duxelles and topped with a herb crust. This dish, which requires portobello mushrooms, has a lot going for it. Apart from the mushrooms' meaty, earthy flavours, there are the contrasting textures – the firm portobello and the soft duxelles filling, made from chestnut mushrooms, Madeira and port; two alcohols which beautifully complement mushrooms. The flavours of the duxelles improve with a little time, so my advice – make the duxelles a day in advance.

I was taught to serve this mushroom dish as a wonderful garnish for a steak, but I now serve it as a fabulous starter or main course.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

6 portobello mushrooms

Extra virgin olive oil

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

For the duxelles filling:

500g chestnut mushrooms

100ml Madeira (optional)

100ml ruby port (optional)

20g unsalted butter, cubed

For the herb crust:

20g breadcrumbs

Handful of flat leaf parsley, coarsely chopped

1 clove of garlic, coarsely chopped

METHOD:

Pull off and discard the outer skin from the caps of the portobello mushrooms, and pop out and discard the stalks.

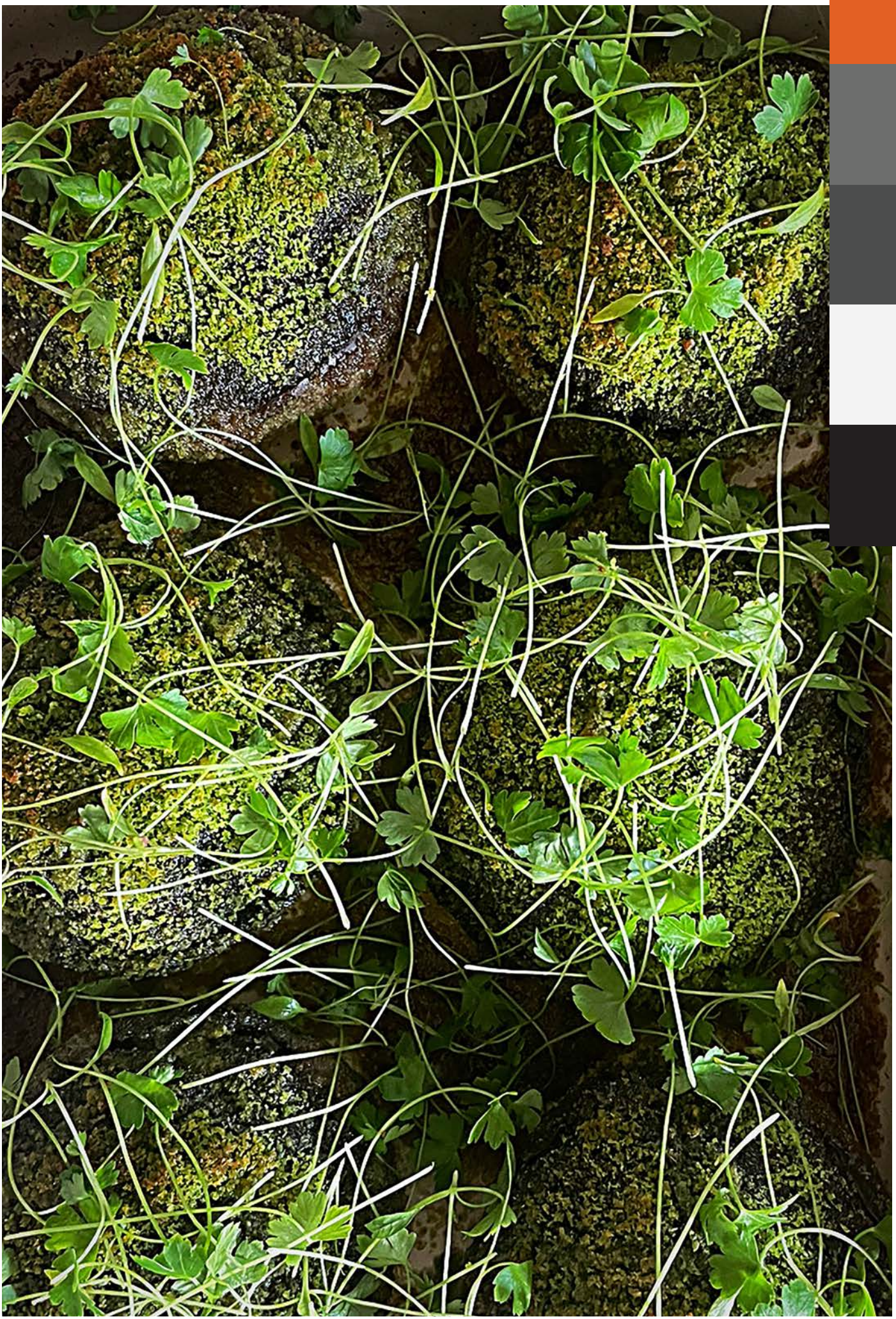
Heat 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Lay the mushrooms in the pan, cap-side up, season with salt and pepper, and cook for 2–3 minutes. Turn the mushrooms over, season again, and continue to cook. As they cook, they'll release their water content and roast, intensifying the flavours of the mushrooms. Insert the tip of a knife into a mushroom and if it meets no resistance, the mushroom is cooked.

Transfer the mushrooms to a baking tray, leaving them to rest and release their juices.

For the duxelles filling:
Blend the chestnut mushrooms in a food processor (or with a handheld blender) to a puree. Transfer the puree to a large saucepan and cook it over a medium-high heat. Stir with a spatula, bringing the puree down from the sides of the pan. Allow the water content to evaporate – if you run the spatula down the middle of the puree and you can see the water content gather in the centre of the pan, continue to cook, reducing the mushrooms so that they become a paste, quite dry but intense in flavour. (Where possible, reduce rapidly over a high heat to retain the freshness.)

If using port and Madeira, pour these in now and let them reduce by about 90 percent. Remove the pan from the heat, add the butter and work it in with the spatula. Season with salt.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / Fan 160°C / Gas Mark 4.



Dab the rested portobello mushrooms with kitchen paper to remove excess juices and lay them, cap-side down, in a casserole dish.

Spoon a generous amount of the duxelles mixture into the cavity of each mushroom.

Make the herb crust:
In a food processor, or using a handheld blender, blitz the breadcrumbs, most of the parsley and garlic to a fine powder. Add 2–3 tablespoons of olive oil and work it through.

Sprinkle the herb crust over the mushrooms. Drizzle a little olive oil over the crust.

Bake the mushrooms for 15–20 mins.

Scatter with the rest of the parsley, season with sea salt, drizzle with a little more oil and serve.

17. Roasted Endives with Orange Dressing

Endives (also known as chicory) are mostly used in salads, but they're amazing when cooked. They can be roasted or braised and, as you can see from my recipe in these notes, they make a great tarte Tatin. For this dish, they are gently poached so they cook in their natural juices, and then served with a reduction of orange juice, which is intense in flavour, and a little coriander. The combination – the sweetness of the orange juice, the slight bitterness of the endive, with the olive oil and fresh herbs – is extraordinary.

> **Orange, endives, a little coriander – sensational!**

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

6 endives

Extra virgin olive oil

½ lemon

A generous pinch of caster sugar

Sea salt

4–6 oranges, juice only

20g clarified butter

1 tbsp coriander seeds, toasted in a dry pan & then crushed

15g fresh herbs of your choice, finely chopped

METHOD:

Bring a large saucepan of water to a gentle simmer.

Place the endives in a vacuum-seal bag (or roasting bag or clingfilm blanket; see my *sous vide* note). Add a splash of olive oil and a strong squeeze of lemon, as well as a pinch of caster sugar and a pinch of salt. Seal the bag and place it in the simmering water.

Poach very gently for about 30 minutes – lightly squeeze the endives and if there's a slight indentation, they're done.

Meanwhile, make the orange dressing.

Heat the orange juice in a sauté pan or small saucepan over a high heat. Lift the pan and swirl the juice from the pan's sides to help the reduction.

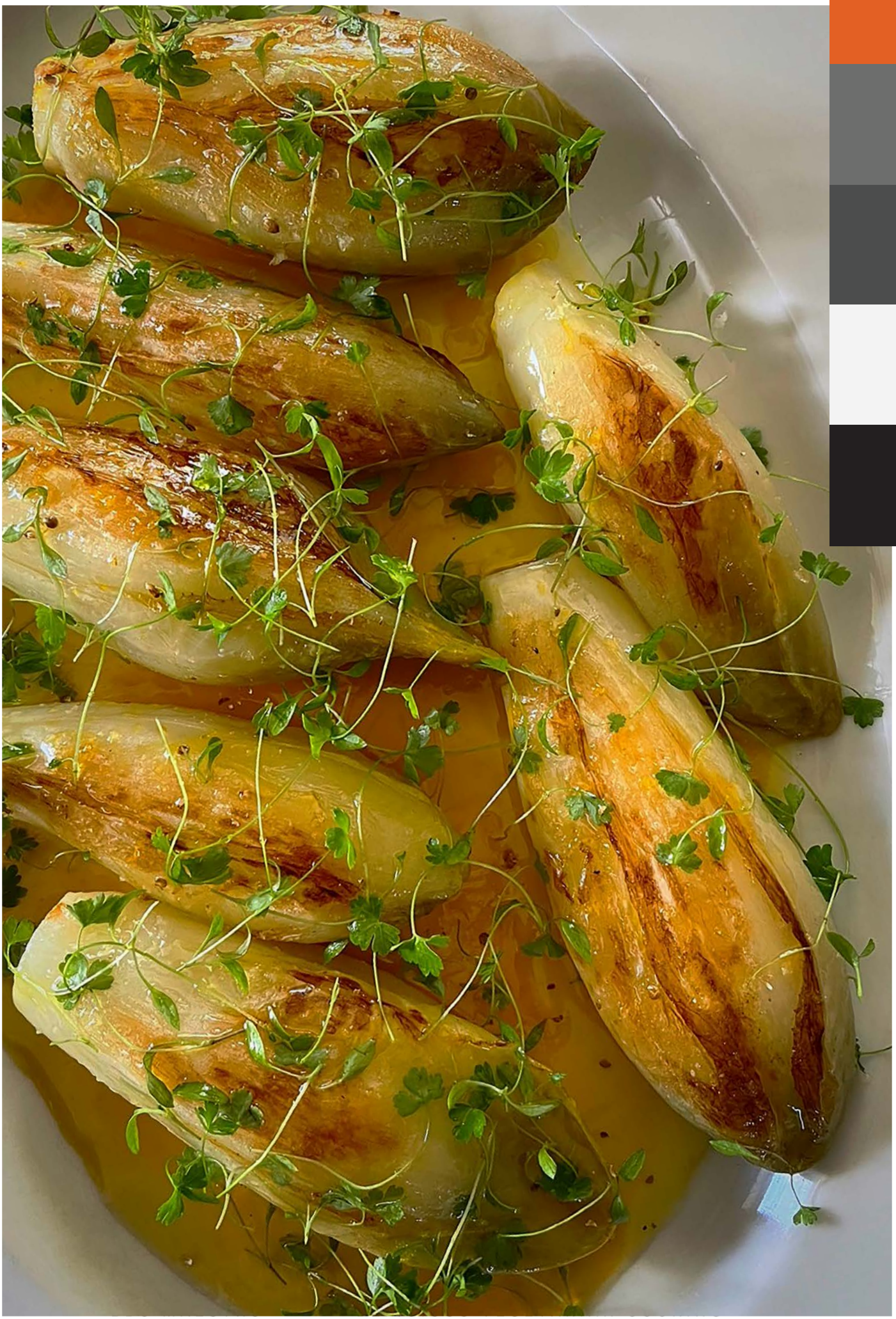
Transfer the reduced orange juice to a bowl, and stir in a splash of olive oil.

Return the pan to the heat, and add the clarified butter.

Transfer the endives to a bowl. Discard the juice (endive is one of the very few vegetables that you can't use the juice of – it's just too bitter). Dab the endives dry with kitchen paper.

Lay the endives in the pan and, over a medium-high heat, caramelise them on one side. Season with salt, and then turn and continue until all the outer leaves are evenly caramelised.

Pour over the orange dressing and season with sea salt. Scatter with the crushed, toasted coriander seeds, drizzle with olive oil, scatter with finely chopped fresh herbs, and serve.



18. Braised Celery Hearts with Walnuts and Madeira

When I started in this trade, braised celery hearts were on the menu every week. They seem to have been left behind, but they are, without question, one of the most delicious garnishes or side dishes that you can have. The celery heart is the crown of innermost stalks or sticks. Once again, this dish is improved when the celery is poached in a bag, so that it cooks in its natural juices. There's no need for technical ability – just a little bit of understanding. And with it, you'll change something humble into something that's extremely elegant and delicious. With the Madeira-scented sauce and the walnuts, this is an extraordinary marriage of ingredients.

> **Without question, one of the most delicious side dishes or garnishes that you can possibly have.**

INGREDIENTS:

6 whole celeries

½ lemon

Olive oil

Sea salt

100ml Madeira (or sherry)

2 knobs of unsalted butter

20g walnuts, finely chopped

Ground white pepper

Handful of flat leaf parsley, finely sliced

METHOD:

To prepare the celery hearts:
Trim and discard the woody base of one celery, giving a slight bevelled edge. Remove the celery sticks just above the point where they meet the heart. (Keep the celery sticks and any leaves, of course – they can be used in salads, soups, stocks… or to garnish a few dozen Bloody Marys).

Take the celery heart, and peel the sides with a vegetable peeler to remove the strings. Use a knife to bevel the base of the heart and place the heart in a bowl of cold water.

Repeat the process with the 5 remaining celeries.

Poaching the celery hearts:
Bring a large saucepan of water to a gentle simmer.

Shake the water from the celery hearts and place them in a vacuum-seal bag. (Alternatively see *sous vide* note for options.)

Add a strong squeeze of lemon juice to prevent discolouration, a generous splash of olive oil and a good pinch of salt.

Seal the bag, place it in the simmering water and poach gently for 30–40 minutes (I prefer 30 minutes, but you may prefer them cooked a little longer).



Transfer the bag to a large bowl, and cut open the bag so that the juices drain into the bowl. Keep the bag of celery hearts in the bowl over the saucepan so they stay warm in the pan's residual heat.

To make the sauce:
In a separate saucepan, and over a high heat, bring the Madeira (or sherry) to the boil and let it reduce by two-thirds.

Pour in the celery heart juices from the bowl. Add a splash of olive oil and whisk in 2 knobs of butter. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the chopped walnuts. Add a pinch of salt and white pepper, and stir.

Arrange the poached celery hearts on a platter, and spoon the sauce over the hearts.

Scatter with the finely sliced parsley, add a pinch of sea salt and pepper, and a dash of olive oil – I love the combination of oil and butter.

19. Stuffed Savoy Cabbage à l'Ancienne with Tomato Sauce

A whole Savoy cabbage is stuffed with forcemeat and served, with fresh tomato sauce, on a platter. It's majestic! I've adapted the dish so that it's vegetarian. The pork filling is replaced by a stuffing of buttered cabbage, celeriac and carrots. Stuffing a cabbage really does call for a cook's time, patience and focus because – slowly, slowly – you 'reconstruct' the cabbage, leaf by leaf. Don't give up yet! It's a rewarding experience, and this dish is impressive and has presence – you'll get applause as you carry it to the table. The tomato sauce can be made a day or two in advance, or instead use shop-bought passata.

As I came from the old world of gastronomy, I can well remember a dish called Chou Farci à l'Ancienne. You may never have heard of it, but it is quite a spectacle.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

For the filling:

2 large knobs of unsalted butter

300g carrots, diced

300g celeriac, diced

4 large Savoy cabbages

145g unsalted butter

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

100ml double cream

For the tomato sauce:

400–500ml tomato sauce (see my recipe, or use shop-bought passata)

Extra virgin olive oil

2 large knobs of unsalted butter

METHOD:

Heat a knob of butter in a sauté pan over a medium heat, and add the diced carrots. Sauté until just cooked through. Do the same with the diced celeriac. Keep the sautéed carrots and celeriac aside.

Finely slice three of the cabbages. Melt 125g butter in a large casserole over a medium heat, add a ladleful of water, the shredded cabbage, 2–3 pinches of white pepper, 2 generous pinches of salt. Stir well and spread and cook for about 10 minutes, or until the cabbage has wilted. With a spatula, push the cabbage to the side of pan and pour the cream into the centre. When the cream thickens, stir to combine with the cabbage.

Transfer the shredded cabbage to a colander in a bowl lined with a tea towel. Twist the tea towel to squeeze out 90 percent of the buttery sauce. Leave the shredded cabbage to cool.

Remove the core of the remaining cabbage and remove the leaves. Blanch the leaves in a saucepan of salted boiling water for 10 seconds. Drain them and immediately transfer them to a bowl of iced water. Drain and place the leaves on kitchen paper. Then lay the leaves between 2 tea towels and roll them with a rolling pin.

Divide the cabbage leaves between three plates, in order of size.

Lay three of the largest leaves, so that they overlap, on a muslin cloth and lightly season them.



Take a handful of the shredded cabbage from the bowl and gently squeeze to remove excess butter. Place this cabbage in the centre of leaves and spread it evenly. Add some carrots and celeriac, spreading them evenly over the shredded cabbage. Top with a little more shredded cabbage. Season with salt.

Place three medium-sized cabbage leaves on top – again, overlapping – and gently push down to compact. Follow the same process as before: season lightly with salt and white pepper, place shredded cabbage on top; add carrots and celeriac and top with more shredded cabbage; lay more cabbage leaves on top… Push down as you go to compact the stuffing mixture.

Finish the stuffing with some of the inner heart leaves and the last of the shredded cabbage.

Lift the muslin cloth from the corners and gather them in the middle, above the cabbage. Tightly twist the cloth to form the ball shape of a cabbage. Tie with string. Cut the ends of the string and cut the excess muslin – there we have our reconstructed cabbage.

Lay one large sheet of clingfilm on top of another. Place the muslin-wrapped cabbage in the centre of the clingfilm. Lift the corners of the clingfilm to meet above the cabbage and wrap up tightly – tie with string. Poach the cabbage for 1 hour in a large saucepan of water at a temperature of 95°C–98°C. Once cooked, remove the cabbage and leave it to cool.

Meanwhile, the tomato sauce…

Bring the tomato sauce, and a splash of olive oil, to the boil and then whisk in 2 knobs of butter. Season to your taste.

Unwrap the cabbage, brush it with 20g melted butter and season with salt and pepper. Transfer it to a platter. Pour the tomato sauce around the cabbage, and serve.

20. Mushroom Christmas Tree

The world of gastronomy can be terribly serious. There are times when you really want – *need* – to have a little bit of fun. If you agree, read on…

One day I was at the kitchen pass, and glanced at the docket spike. Stuffed with tickets for orders from guests it seemed, to me, to look a bit like a Christmas tree. There you have it – the inspiration for this mushroom Christmas tree. It's not only fun to make but delicious too. A stainless-steel docket spike is about the same price as a peeler or tin opener so the minor expense is worthwhile as you'll be making this often. The 'tree' is made of thick, plump slices of king oyster mushrooms, Gruyère-style hard vegetarian cheese, and smothered with garlic butter. From just a few ingredients – oh, and the help of an oven – it becomes something magical and the ingredients melt into one. Best served with hot buttered toast.

> **It's not three stars Michelin. But is it delicious? Is it naughty? Do you want to eat it? Yes!**

INGREDIENTS:

For the garlic butter:

60g shallots, peeled

50g flat leaf parsley, chopped

10g garlic, peeled & grated

125g unsalted butter, softened

2 onions, peeled & finely sliced

Oil for deep-frying – an equal mix of sunflower oil & olive oil

400g king oyster mushrooms (or oyster mushrooms)

Extra virgin olive oil

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

200g vegetarian hard cheese, sliced very thinly

METHOD:

First, make the garlic butter:
In a liquidiser or with a handheld blender, blend the shallots, parsley and garlic. Add a splash of olive oil to thin a little, if necessary. Then add the softened butter and blend to a smooth, green butter (or beat with the butter in a large bowl).

Refrigerate until required.

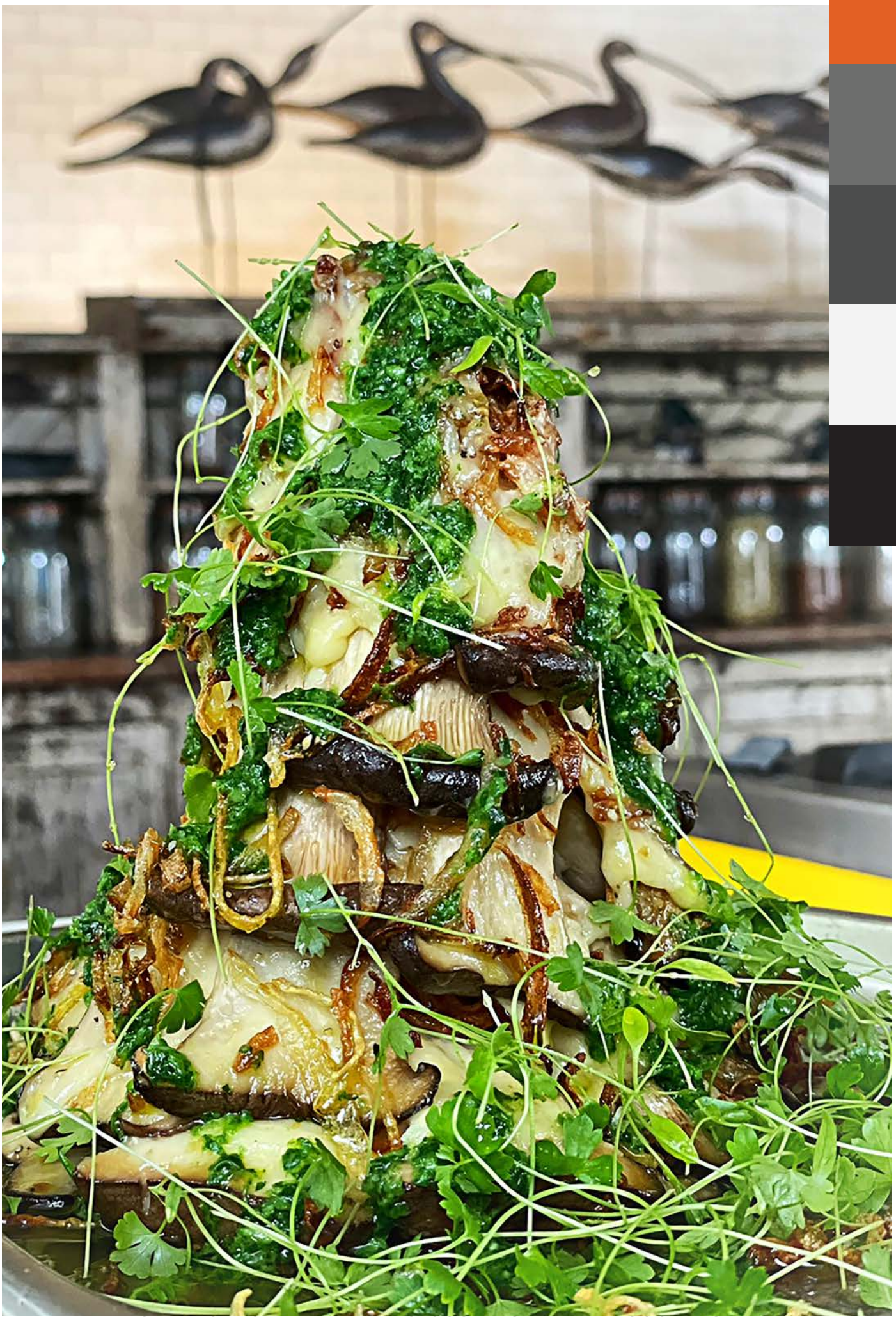
To make the crispy, fried onions:
If deep-frying, preheat the deep fryer to 160°C. Fry the onion slices until golden. Alternatively, shallow fry the onion in olive oil or butter in a sauté pan.

Lay the crispy, fried onions on kitchen paper and keep to one side.

Slice each mushroom lengthways into thirds or quarters – the slices should be quite thick as they'll shrink during the cooking process.

Heat 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil in a sauté pan over a medium heat, add the mushrooms and season with salt and pepper while they're in the pan. Lightly brown the mushrooms on both sides, turning once, and add a little more oil if required. Transfer them to kitchen paper.

Preheat the oven to 120°C / 100°C Fan / Gas Mark ½.



Now for the fun of assembling the ‘tree’ on the stainless-steel docket spike on a baking tray…

Take a sautéed mushroom slice and push it through its stalk onto the spike and down to the base of the spike, with its cap facing outwards. Impale the next mushroom slice on top, but slightly rotated so that it overlaps the original slice. Repeat this process with the remaining mushroom slices, continuing to fan as you go to form a Christmas tree shape. After every 2 or 3 mushroom slices, tuck in slices of cheese and a scattering of crispy onions. (Note: If using oyster mushrooms, begin with the larger ones at the base and the smaller ones as you work your way up the tree.)

When you reach the top of the ‘tree’, add extra cheese, spoon over more crispy onions and season.

Bake for 20–25 minutes.

Once the mushroom tree is out of the oven, melt the beautifully green garlic butter and spoon this all over. Scatter the herbs – be generous with them. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil and a pinch or two of sea salt.

Serve at the table, lifting the mushroom slices from the top and working your way down the ‘tree’.

21. Pommes Maxim

A feast is not a real feast without a potato dish, and this French classic never disappoints. Taking its name from Maxim's, that great restaurant in Paris, there are only two main ingredients: potatoes, which are finely sliced, and butter, in which the potato slices bake. By the way, don't wash the sliced potatoes as the starch is the necessary 'cement' of the dish, holding it together. Use potatoes which are roughly the same shape and size. If you fancy taking Pommes Maxim to that next level, sprinkle crispy fried onions across the top before serving. Or up to another level… Fry four eggs, and slide these on top of the Pommes Maxim; cover with layers of hard cheese and place under the grill for 30 seconds. Serve with a salad. Man cannot live on potatoes alone.

> **For me, a meal is not a meal without a great potato dish… without them, the table is naked.**

SERVES 4-6

INGREDIENTS:

About 3–4 equal-sized potatoes (in the video, I use the Golden Wonder variety)

120g clarified butter (or ghee)

A little vegetable oil (to oil a tray base)

Sea salt

METHOD:

Peel the potatoes and place them on a cloth.

Take one potato and finely slice it (about 2mm in thickness), either with a sharp knife or, ideally, with a mandoline. (If using a mandoline, keep the potato in the flat palm of your hand so that your fingers avoid the blade.) As you slice, lay the potato slices on a clean tea towel in the order you slice them to dry them.

Oil a large sauté pan (or shallow, flameproof casserole dish). Place one potato slice in the centre of the pan and then arrange the rest of the slices in a fan on top of the central slice, around the centre, leaving a 1cm space around the outside edge. It should look like a giant daisy, with the potato 'petals' overlapping.

Melt the butter and brush this over the potatoes in the dish and then season with sea salt. (If you season before adding the butter, the salt will draw out the moisture.)

Slice a second potato – roughly the same size, same shape as the first. Again, dry your slices on a clean tea towel. Use these slices to make a second 'daisy' layer of fanned slices, keeping a small hole in the centre so you can see the central slice. Again, brush with the melted butter and season with salt.

Repeat this process with the remaining potatoes (should be 3 or 4 in total), layering the slices and brushing with butter before seasoning with salt.

Pour a little butter into the hole in the centre and around the edges of the potato.

Place the pan over a medium-high heat and once the pan has picked up some heat, reduce to low-medium to prevent the potatoes scorching. Notice how potatoes on the base soon start to caramelise.



Meanwhile, lightly oil the base of an upturned round baking tray.

When the potatoes are nicely caramelised underneath, carefully spoon out 90 percent of the butter from the pan, but reserve to one side.

Place the tray oiled base-down on top of the pan, and then turn the pan so that the potatoes flip onto the tray base.

Now gently slide the potatoes off the tray base back into the pan so the caramelised side is facing up, drizzle the reserved butter all over the potatoes, and continue to cook the underside over a gentle heat for about 5 minutes. Insert the tip of a knife (or skewer or cocktail stick) to check there's no resistance. If you feel resistance, continue to cook for a further 2–3 minutes and then test again. When there's no resistance, it's cooked to perfection.

Slide the Pommes Maxim onto a board (or serve from the pan if you prefer).

Brush with butter from the pan and sprinkle with a pinch or two of sea salt before serving.

22. Rösti

This is a bit like Switzerland's answer to Pommes Maxim, as it requires the same two ingredients, potatoes and butter. But for *rösti*, the potatoes are sliced to matchstick-size before being fried in clarified butter until irresistibly crispy. With an abundance of flavours – the earthiness of the potatoes, the richness of the butter, the scent of the sea from the salt – this is proper comfort food. We used to make it all the time when I worked in the kitchen of Le Gavroche in the early 1980s – the guests couldn't get enough of it!

A delicious potato dish to grace any dining table.

INGREDIENTS:

About 1.2kg potatoes (in the video, I use the Golden Wonder variety)

120g clarified butter (or ghee)

Sea salt

A little vegetable oil (to oil a tray base)

METHOD:

Peel the potatoes and wrap them in a clean cloth to absorb the water content.

Slice the potatoes into matchsticks with a mandoline. (If using a mandoline, keep the potato in the flat palm of your hand so that your fingers avoid the blade.) If you do not have a mandoline, use a sharp knife to slice the potatoes lengthways. Then slice them again into matchstick-sized pieces, about 2mm thick, transferring them to a bowl.

Melt the clarified butter and pour it over the potato matchsticks, season with sea salt, and then work them gently with your fingers so that the matchsticks are well-coated in butter.

Pour a little melted butter into a large sauté pan and spread the potato matchsticks evenly across the pan. Add a little more butter and press to compact the matchsticks.

Place the pan over a low heat – too high and you'll scorch the potato. Let the heat come slowly into the pan, and you'll hear 'the singing' as the water from the potato is extracted by the heat and then the potatoes slowly caramelise – it takes about 15 minutes.

Pour a little melted butter around the edges. Run the spatula around edges of the *rösti*, and push down on the top again, to compact it.

Let the base caramelise beautifully before the flipping stage…

Oil the base of an upturned round baking tray. Tilt the pan of potatoes and remove the excess melted butter, but keep to one side. Place the tray oiled base-down on top of the pan and flip the *rösti* onto the tray base. Now gently slide the *rösti* off the tray base back into the pan so the caramelised side is facing up and return the pan to the heat to cook the underside, and drizzle the melted butter you removed earlier all over the *rösti* – it's the butter that makes it truly delicious.

For the final stage, gently tilt the pan to gather the excess melted butter, and remove this with a spoon. Slide the *rösti* onto a board. Season with sea salt. Serve.



23. Pommes Boulangère

Hearty and rustic, Pommes Boulangère is also one of the simplest and most delicious one-pot dishes ever created. A combination of finely sliced potatoes and finely sliced, caramelised onions, which impart sweetness, and then butter, which adds the essential richness we associate with good comfort food. Traditionally, it is gently baked in chicken stock, although over the years I've used fish stock, and for this recipe I've used vegetable stock. I like to splash it with olive oil on the plate and serve with salad. The French – who like it with gigot of lamb – might disapprove, but I do have Italian genes.

This French classic originates from the old days when villagers would prepare the potatoes and take them to the baker (the *boulangère*) who'd kindly cook them in the gentle heat of his ovens. This is also one of the first dishes I was taught as a teenage apprentice in the kitchens of the Hotel St George. Looking back, it taught me how to be disciplined and focused, to invest the time and, importantly, question what I was trying to achieve and why.

A few pointers before you begin… Use waxy potatoes. Vegetable stock can be very sweet, so taste before using and, if necessary, lighten its strength by adding extra water. Essentially, the stock should not overpower the flavours of potato and onion. The construction of a dish is very important to me, as are the ratios – in this case it's one layer of onions to three layers of potatoes.

Perfection is lots of simple things done well. Peeling might just be peeling to others, but I regard it as an art form. Let the peeler do the work – your hand is only there to guide.

SERVES 4-6

INGREDIENTS:

20g unsalted clarified butter (or ghee)

2 onions, peeled & finely sliced

About 1.5kg waxy potatoes

500ml vegetable stock

Sea salt

Ground white pepper

METHOD:

The first job is to caramelise the onions:
Melt the clarified butter in a large casserole dish, and add the finely sliced onions. Season with salt and stir as the onions slowly caramelise, spreading them across the base of the pan so that they are distributed evenly and cook quickly.
Transfer the caramelised onions to a plate and then tilt the plate to drain the excess butter. Set to one side.

Next, slicing the potatoes:
With a mandoline (or sharp knife) slice the potatoes lengthways about 2mm thin. Don't wash the slices – the potato starch is the 'cement' of this dish, holding it together. Lay the potato slices on a clean tea towel to dry. (You can put the potato slices in the dish – just to check the quantity seems about right and if not, peel more!)



Assembling in the casserole dish:
Preheat the oven to 120°C / 100°C Fan / Gas Mark ½.

Butter the casserole dish. Drizzle in a little vegetable stock. Next, line the casserole base with the potato slices overlapping, like fish scales. Add two more layers of potatoes, drizzle a little more stock all over, and season with salt and pepper. Now spoon the caramelised onions over the top, spreading them evenly. As you go, compact the potatoes by gently pushing down on them.

Then add three more layers of potato slices, a little more stock, more seasoning, and more caramelised onions – so it's one layer of onions to every three layers of potato slices.

Continue this process – stock, seasoning, onions, potato slices. You'll notice that the potatoes start to absorb the stock.

Finish with a layer of potatoes, brush with the excess butter drained from the caramelised onions, and lightly season once more. Pour over a little stock. Cover the dish with a sheet of lightly buttered tinfoil.

Bake for 80 minutes and in the last 15 minutes, if you wish, you can remove the foil to brown the top.

Glaze the Pommes Boulangère with melted butter and season with sea salt.

Loosely cover with foil, and leave it for 20 minutes to rest, allowing the potatoes to become intoxicated on the stock, and then serve.

24. Gratin Dauphinois

When I was an apprentice back in Harrogate, every day there were no less than five potato dishes, as, let's not forget, it was the world of Escoffier. Many of these dishes have since disappeared, but Gratin Dauphinois is one of the ones that have stood the test of time.

> **Perfect, creamy, delicious.**

SERVES 6-8

INGREDIENTS:

800ml double cream

2 cloves of garlic

Ground white pepper

Sea salt

Nutmeg, to your taste

1.5kg waxy potatoes, peeled

Unsalted butter

100g Italian vegetarian cheese, Parmesan-style, grated (optional)

METHOD:

In a large bowl, combine the cream and garlic. Add a good pinch of pepper and salt, and grate in a few rasps of nutmeg. Stir and put to one side.

Finely slice the potatoes lengthways on a mandoline (or with a sharp knife), laying the slices on a clean tea towel and then turning them to absorb the excess water. Transfer the potato slices to the bowl of seasoned cream and submerge them.

Preheat the oven to 140°C / 120°C Fan / Gas Mark 1.

Lightly butter a casserole dish. Now line the casserole with a layer of potato slices, so that the slices slightly overlap like fish scales. Spoon some of the seasoned cream over the potato layer. Then continue to layer with potato slices, adding more seasoned cream after each layer. Every so often, compress the potato down to compact. Cover the final layer with the grated cheese, if using.

Take a sheet of tinfoil that's at least twice the size of the casserole dish surface, and fold it in half. Lightly butter one side of the foil and tightly wrap it over the top of the dish.

Bake for 80 minutes. In the final 15 minutes of cooking, remove the foil to brown the top. To check the potatoes are perfectly cooked, insert a skewer or the tip of a knife – if there's no resistance, they're just right.

Once out of the oven, cover the gratin with foil and leave it to rest for about 1 hour before serving.



25. Buttered 'Chip Shop' Chips

Every now and again in the Michelin Three Star world, there's a request – 'Can I have chips?'. I've done them on a few occasions, charging slightly more than a high street chippie… We all like our chips at a different thickness and, for me, chips shouldn't be too thick and they shouldn't be too thin. I also like them soft, so that they make the perfect chip butty.

There are three stages: first, the prep in which you peel, cut and wash; second, blanch the potato slices in the deep fryer at quite a low temperature (they don't colour at this stage); third, fry at a higher temperature to brown them. You'll also see that, right at the end, I give them that special Three Star indulgence – the chips are tossed in soft butter before serving. Gorgeous!

A good chip takes some beating. Butter brings a beautiful contradiction to the tastebuds: it makes food deliciously rich, but also very light. So always look for the balance when you cook.

SERVES 4-6

INGREDIENTS:

1kg potatoes
(I like the Golden Wonder variety)

Oil for deep frying
– equal quantities of olive oil & sunflower/vegetable oil

50g unsalted butter, softened

METHOD:

Preheat the deep fryer to 140°C.

Slice the potatoes lengthways – yes, chip size! Though not too thick and not too thin.

In a large bowl of cold water, give the chips a good wash to remove the starch then drain thoroughly.

Blanch the chips in the deep fryer for 8 minutes – they shouldn't colour. They should feel slightly soft to the touch, and they'll continue to cook in their own heat. Depending on the thickness, they might need another minute or two in the fryer. Lift them from the fryer and drain them.

Next, increase the deep fryer temperature to 180°C.

Return the chips to the hot oil and cook for about 1 minute, to crisp them and add a tinge of colour.

Place the chips on kitchen paper to remove excess oil, and then tip the chips into a frying pan. Add a few generous knobs of soft butter – be generous – and gently toss the hot chips in the melting butter.

Season with salt and serve – ideally with bread and more butter for the perfect chip butties.




“Cooking is about intensity of flavour. Making food taste of what it’s meant to taste of.

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