

Monday 19th May 2014

Bonjour dear customer,

Coming to you in torrential rain from the South of France ! Here are some delicious recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Penne with Courgettes, Parmesan and Toasted Pine nuts

500g penne pasta	4 garlic cloves, peeled and left whole
2 medium courgettes	50g butter or margarine
50ml olive oil	100g pine nuts, toasted
100g Parmesan	15g fresh basil, roughly chopped
sea salt and black pepper, to taste	

Bring a very large pot of water to the boil. Cook the pasta with the garlic cloves until the pasta is al dente and the garlic tender. Drain, pass the garlic through a press or smash with a fork. Mix the garlic, butter, olive oil, salt and pepper with the warm penne. Wash the courgettes and coarsely grate straight onto the pasta. Toss through when the pasta is still warm. Then finely grate the Parmesan into it along with the pine nuts and basil. Serve.

Courgette and Red Pepper Tart

1 red pepper, sliced	2 courgettes, sliced
250g shortcrust pastry	300ml whipping cream
3 free range eggs	2 cloves garlic
50g Parmesan, grated	1 handful fresh basil, torn

Preheat your oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Roll out the pastry thinly and put into a 23cm flan tin, allowing a slight overhang to allow for shrinkage. Blind bake for 20 minutes (cover with greaseproof paper and a handful of beans or pebbles to stop the pastry puffing up). Remove paper and beans and bake for a final 5 minutes to seal the centre of the pastry. Gently fry the courgettes, garlic and peppers making sure it doesn't burn – no more than 5 minutes. Beat the eggs with the cream and half of the cheese. Add salt and pepper. Arrange the vegetables in the pastry case and pour the egg mixture over. Add some of the basil leaves. On a lower heat (Gas 4), cook the tart for about 20 minutes until the egg is set and slightly golden, Serve warm with a drizzle of olive oil and the remaining basil scattered over the top.

I have walked into a glass door and crushed my finger in a sunbed but we have not been car-jacked - we made it ! Only twice have I heard from Dawn, my fab travel companion, the ominous words "you're on the wrong side of the road". Myfa has been as cool as a cucumber and travelled through the tunnel without shaking. She thought she we were tanking it down a rabbit burrow. Travel down was slow, stopping at every single 'aire' for one reason or other – usually the incredible buffet of fresh food, salads, fresh bread and fruit salads with every type of fromage, patisseries..... and saucisson or jambon for Myfa. We spent the first night in Arras, a night in Valence and then a few nights in my favourite hotel in La Croix Valmer. We are now at our rented villa near Le Lavandou where we have been joined by friends Liz and David who did the journey in one hit through the night. It is a beautiful modernist villa in the style of Le Corbusier which sits above the bay and looks straight across to 'Les Iles d'Or'. It is so comfortable and luxurious. Myfa is spooked by the enormous view of the sea and is terrified of the fluttering parasols but very happy when I take her down to the beach for a swim. Weather has been glorious except for today.

We went to eat in an oddly deserted Saint Tropez last night and found a Moroccan restaurant in the cobbled back streets. I made the grave error of commenting too many times on how good-looking the waiter/owner was. The others the proceeded to try and fix me up with him. I'm sure he could hear everything we said as we were the only ones in there and it got so bad and raucous that at the point when they insisted they were going to give him my phone number, I had to leave the restaurant. Months of our combined exhaustion and stress were taking their toll. We spent ages talking to the waiter in English and when he came back 5 minutes later Dawn asked him if he spoke English and then when he again came back to the table, Liz started speaking to him in Spanish. Actually, we are having one hell of a laugh.

This morning the weather is awful, worse I gather than in Yorkshire – we have had to hunt the villa for quilts, trying to work out if there's central heating, I've been looking for my hot water bottle in the car and we are all bemoaning only having brought summer clothes. We are all different colours now – I am red, David is brown, Dawn is white, except for a lovely rosy face, and Liz is a spectacular golden / bronze colour which she derived from a bottle - cheat. I have toe nail envy – Liz' are painted with a Tom Ford pale pink which I am now obsessed with. I was gutted she didn't bring the bottle with her and will spend the rest of the holiday seeking the shops to find it. I guess I am having an emotional response to tramping round muddy fields in wellingtons – my normal life. I'm in my bedroom writing this, it is 1pm and I can hear them all dancing to Michael Jackson and the clatter of plates. A French lunch may be waiting on the table !

Hope you are enjoying our beautiful summer holiday weather – please can we have it back,

Kind wishes,

Isobel