

Monday 4th May 2015

Dear Customer,

Hope you had a nice bank holiday. Things have reached boiling point here. I had to rush over early to the Garden Centre to open the gates to a new team of painters to help speed the job up. It's like a Hieronymus Bosch scene in there. There are painter / decorators everywhere – you can just about see them through the fog of brick dust as a big hole is being drilled in the café to put a back window in. Wheelbarrows of silt are being ferried out to the skip. In another corner a joiner is sawing a door frame for my Victorian doors. The electricians were here yesterday and the flooring people start 'screeding' on Thursday – hence the new urgency. Ernest is there helping out too moving things about. I've been going back and fore to the paint shop trying to hold lists in my head ' 5 litres acrylic primer, powder filler, 'cork'. "Cork?" I asked. He showed me a tube of caulk (another filler). The paint shop had run out of the base paint to mix the gold wall colour so I was sent to another place to get some, 20 litres, it was too thin and had bits in, I've rushed back here to write this and I'm almost exploding. The Farmaround server, the Queen, is being moved next Wednesday so that will be us in.

We have lovely crunchy fennel in the bags this week. You could thinly slice it and place in a roasting tin, drizzle with olive oil and a pinch of salt and roast for about 15-20 minutes. For the last 5 minutes, you could add some thinly sliced Parmesan on top and leave to brown. You could thinly slice it into a salad with some fresh oranges. You could bake it with a bit of white wine and finish with crème fraiche.

Penne with Purple sprouting Broccoli, Pine Nuts, Chilli and Lemon

<i>bag purple sprouting broccoli</i>	<i>400g penne</i>
<i>handful pine nuts toasted</i>	<i>2 tbsp olive oil</i>
<i>1 small onion, peeled and finely chopped</i>	<i>2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped</i>
<i>½ red chilli, de-seeded and finely chopped</i>	<i>sea salt and pepper</i>
<i>1 un-waxed lemon, zest removed and juice squeezed</i>	

Wash and trim the purple sprouting broccoli, discarding any tough parts of the stalks and cutting them into two centimetre pieces. Set aside. Cook the pasta according to packet instructions and drain. Toast the pine nuts in a non-stick frying pan. Be careful not to burn them. In a heavy saucepan, heat the oil and add the onion, garlic and chilli with a pinch of salt and some freshly grated black pepper. Soften the vegetables quite gently, adding a bit of water to allow them to steam in the pan. When the vegetables in the pan are soft, add the cooked pasta, the lemon zest, a little lemon juice and the toasted pine nuts. Mix well and fry for 3 minutes. Add the blanched purple sprouting broccoli, mix well and then turn off the heat. Serve on a warm platter with extra lemon juice and a drizzle of olive oil.

Courgette and Aubergine Bake

<i>3 courgettes, cut into 5mm slices</i>	<i>1 large, cut into 5mm slices</i>
<i>100g greens or broccoli, finely chopped or sliced</i>	<i>1 tin chopped tomatoes</i>
<i>1 clove garlic</i>	<i>50g Parmesan, grated</i>
<i>handful fresh herbs</i>	<i>salt and black pepper</i>

Preheat the oven to 200C. prepare the aubergine and courgettes. Layer the aubergine and courgette slices in an ovenproof dish, alternating between each until they have all been used. To make the sauce, liquidise the garlic and tinned tomatoes and add the green and herbs and liquidise again. Pour the tomato sauce over the aubergine and courgette slices and sprinkle over a thick layer of grated Parmesan. Put in the oven and bake for 30 minutes until the crust is golden.

Courgette and Lemon Salad

<i>courgettes</i>	<i>chopped herbs – parsley, tarragon, basil</i>
<i>handful toasted pine nuts</i>	<i>olive oil</i>
<i>lemon juice</i>	<i>lemon zest, finely grated</i>
<i>honey</i>	<i>salt and pepper</i>

Slice the courgettes lengthwise as finely as possible using a mandolin. Put the courgette slices in a bowl with the chopped herbs and a handful of toasted pine nuts. Toss the ingredients together. To make the vinaigrette, mix together the olive oil, lemon juice, honey, lemon zest, salt and pepper. Pour the vinaigrette over the salad and toss together.

Just back at my desk again from the GC and Diane is screaming for the newsletter. The crittall windows have now gone into the back wall – what a difference. The café was flooded with afternoon light, it had been dark before and it has transformed the ambiance.

I bought a copy of the Darlington and Stockton Times. The real Queen came to Richmond on Saturday as guest of honour at a parade marking the amalgamation of two regiments. It received a half inch column on the front page. However, the main story, and taking nearly a full page 'DUCK RACE TO GO AHEAD DESPITE ENGINEERING WORK AT STARTING POINT'. 'Around 2500 ducks will be tipped from a JCB bucket at Green Bridge on Monday at 2pm'.....'the traffic lights will be manned on the day of the Duck Race, workers will ensure that the vehicle which holds the ducks is able to get onto the bridge to safely tip the ducks into the river'. Well thank God for that.

I nearly called out to William Hague as he strode past my house yesterday morning with Ffion for probably the last time before he stands down on Thursday and moves to Wales. I wanted to thank him for all the letters he'd written on my behalf and bid him farewell. I met him a few times and was very in awe of him – he had huge charisma and presence. I liked him.

He on the other hand will probably be very glad to see the back of this town full of rubber duck racing weirdos.

Election Week – OMG !

Kind wishes,

Isobel