



**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

Dear Customer,

It's been t shirt weather, 29 degrees ! The sun has been blazing. The reason ..... I have been in London. I made a dash for it down the A1 on Sunday afternoon. Seeing I'd gone, the cloud mass set off too and slowly made its way south overnight reaching London by morning – ready and waiting for me when I got up.

I was there for an important meeting in offices in the City. So important that I had days of anxiety about who to stay with and therefore how long it would take me to get across London by car. I don't know how long it takes to get anywhere in London anymore. I don't know what rush hour looks like, what time it starts, what time it ends and how congested it is. The meeting was a 10am one. Did that mean I had to set off before the rush hour so as not to get caught in it and to give me parking time. But then would I then have to hang about roaming the Square Mile for three hours. It wasn't a meeting I could be 'fashionably late' for. Then I had an eureka moment. I would try and find a hotel nearby. I went on lastminute.com and found one in Charterhouse Square where my meeting was, dogs were welcome and it had easy parking on the square. Perfect. When I got there I checked out the whereabouts of my meeting. I was 5 doors away from it. I timed how long it took to get there from the hotel, it was 15 seconds. This meant I could leave my hotel room at 10am, get to the office reception by 10am and still be in the meeting by 10am. Nothing left to chance. As long as I could manage to get out of bed I was sorted.

#### **Leek with Mustard and Mascarpone on Garlic Toast**

*2 leeks, washed, cut in half lengthways and cut into ¼" half moons and washed again*

*30g butter*

*150g Mascarpone cheese*

*1 tsp mustard*

*1 clove garlic, peeled*

*100ml cream*

*2 tbsp parsley, finely chopped*

*4 slices crusty bread*

*ground black pepper*

*Melt the butter in a saucepan on a gentle heat then add the leeks. Simmer gently for 5 minutes until the leeks are tender then turn the heat up slightly to reduce any moisture in the pan. Turn the heat down again and add the cream. Boil for about 1 minute or until the mixture looks nice and thick. Add the Mascarpone and beat it well into the mixture until melted and bound together. Season with pepper, parsley and the mustard. Toast the bread then rub the slices with the garlic, place the leeks on top and serve.*

#### **Roasted Salt and Vinegar Crushed New Potatoes**

*750g new potatoes*

*black pepper*

*1-2 tsp sea salt*

*2 tbsp olive oil*

*2 tbsp cider vinegar*

*2 tbsp flat-leaf parsley, chopped*

*Preheat the oven to 220C/ 425F/ Gas 7. Boil the potatoes in salted water until knife-tender. Drain. Put back in the pot to dry out a little then tip onto a large baking tray. Using a tea towel, gently crush each potato but leave them whole. Drizzle them with the olive oil and season with pepper. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until the edges are browned and crisp. Remove from the oven and gently toss with the vinegar. When all of the vinegar has been absorbed, sprinkle with sea salt and parsley.*

#### **Baked New Potatoes in Browned Lemon Butter**

*650g new potatoes, washed*

*juice of ½ lemon*

*125g butter, diced*

*salt and black pepper*

*Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Add the potatoes to the pan, cover with water, bring to the boil then simmer for 8 minutes. Check them by piercing with a sharp knife, they need to be just firm, not soft or overcooked. While the potatoes cook, add the butter to a saucepan and place over a medium heat. It will melt, then foam, then settle down. At this stage the solids will start to brown and the butter will smell nutty. As soon as you see a golden colour in the pan, tip the butter into a bowl to prevent over-cooking. Add the lemon juice. When the potatoes are cooked, drain them, then add back to the pan. Shake them around in the pan so they break up a little, just enough to expose the flesh. Add the bashed potatoes to a roasting tray, spoon over the browned lemon butter, sprinkle with sea salt and black pepper, then place them in the oven for 8-10 minutes so that they crisp a little and soak up the butter. Give a little stir half way through. Serve warm.*

Not here long enough to catch up with friends, I did a mini tour. I stopped on Waterloo Bridge as the sun was setting. I remembered how this was my city that I know like the back of my hand – the shortcuts, the side streets and one ways. I instinctively started to drive like I used to - audaciously - the U turns, the weaving in and out of lanes including the bus lanes, the going through the lights – I was the master of getting somewhere quick ( and safely ) - it was what you had to do. Then I remembered the cameras. You can't drive like that now – you'd lose your licence in 5 minutes. I took Myfa to Hyde Park. She was absolutely terrified of the groups of women in burqas – the black shapes coming toward her. It used to be full of dog walkers and joggers – we only saw one other dog and I walked the whole way round the Serpentine. I wouldn't let Myfa in for a swim as it was full of bread and bread scum all around the edge – not enough ducks and swans for the picnic recycling.

On my way back to the A1 yesterday I went to Highgate Village, bought some nice bread from Le Pain Quotidien and then Hampstead Heath. Myfa didn't have the energy to walk much in the heat so we had lunch at Kenwood – she had 2 sausages. I was served a caterpillar in my salad which I nearly ate. It went through my mind to not be bothered, which I wasn't, and to just say that at least it shows it's organic ( what you very kindly say to us so often ). However, I decided to use it as an opportunity and pretended I was very upset – with a big queue of people listening in and trying to have a look at the caterpillar, they had to deal with me quickly. I was offered a refund or whatever I wanted. I opted for another cup of tea and a piece of chocolate cake.

I wish I had my own place here again – not to live all the time but some of the time, I do miss it – the buzz, the people. I'd picked up a free paper in Highgate and browsed the properties. My perfect house - £40 million.

Kind wishes,

Isobel