



Monday 11th February 2019

Dear Customer,

The storm passed and we are now bathed in warm sunlight. Nature is stirring and it feels like the cusp of spring. We even have a couple of daffodils out, unheard of for mid-February. I don't think they came out until August last year. But I had better not speak too soon. You could do some novel roasted vegetable trays. Parboil potato wedges, drain and shake in a colander, season and sprinkle with a little semolina flour. Tip into a tray and squeeze over a good dollop of Marmite. Toss together and roast as usual. Cut your cabbage into chunks and toss in olive oil, salt and pepper. Put in a roasting pan with a little water and roast at 200C/ 400F/ Gas 6 under foil for 20-40 minutes. Grate cheese on if desired before serving. For parsnips, mix a little melted butter or margarine, maple syrup and mustard in a large bowl. Cut the parsnips into batons and coat them in the sauce before roasting. Or you could try one of these tasty recipes:

Aubergine Goulash

1 tbsp oil	1 aubergine, cut into 1" dice
2 carrots, sliced	¼ cabbage, thinly sliced
500ml vegetable stock	400g kidney beans, drained
400g tin chopped tomatoes	1 tbsp smoked paprika
70g pasta eg macaroni or penne	black pepper

Heat the oil in a large saucepan or casserole dish. Add the aubergine, carrot and cabbage. Cook over a medium heat for a few minutes until slightly softened. Add the tinned tomatoes, vegetable stock, kidney beans and smoked paprika and mix well to combine. Add a lid to the pan and leave to simmer gently for around 30 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Add the uncooked pasta to the pan and leave to cook for a further 15 minutes or until the pasta is cooked. Season generously with black pepper and serve with crusty bread.

Baked Aubergine Pasta

1 aubergine	250g cherry tomatoes
3 cloves garlic	8 tbsp olive oil
250g penne or other pasta shape	

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Slice the aubergine into thin rounds. Place the slices in a single layer in a large roasting tin. Peel and crush the garlic and scatter over the aubergine. Add the cherry tomatoes, whole, to the aubergine and spoon over the olive oil. Season and then bake for 25-30 minutes. Cook the pasta according to al dente then drain. Transfer the aubergine and tomatoes to the empty saucepan with a draining spoon leaving the oil behind. Add the pasta to the oil and toss it to coat the pasta with the flavoured oil. Tip into the aubergines and tomatoes. Tear up the basil leaves, toss them in and serve.

Parsnip and Potato Rosti

250g potatoes	250g parsnips
1 tbsp thyme leaves, chopped	1 small onion, peeled and finely sliced (optional)

Peel the potatoes and chop into large pieces of an even size. Put in a pan, cover with water, add salt and bring to the boil. Peel the parsnips and cut into large chunks. When the potatoes are boiling, add the parsnips and simmer for 5 minutes, they should be underdone, drain and leave to cool. Fry the onion in a little oil until soft and golden and set aside. Coarsely grate the drained potato and parsnips into a bowl, add the thyme, and onion if using, season, then toss through. Pour enough oil into a non-stick pan to cover the base by about 1mm. Form handfuls of the mixture into cakes no more than 1cm thick. Don't worry if they're falling apart a bit as the cooking will sort that out. Fry them on a medium heat for 5 minutes so they form a golden-brown crust underneath. Flip over and cook until golden-brown and crisp on both sides – about 12 minutes in all. Slip out the pan onto kitchen paper. Serve hot sprinkled with flaky salt.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, especially when it comes to property. It's really wonderful, and a sentiment most of us probably have in common. I know I've said it many times but I wish I'd kept my house in London. Bought for a meagre, but at the time terrifying, £120,000, sold by me for £400,000 and now worth getting on for £1.5 million, an increase of a million pounds, in which time my house here in Richmond has not even increased by 1p. I live a parallel life looking at properties in the South of France. In this fantasy life I am always about to pack my bags and go....to sunny terraces, fig trees, lizards and flip-flops. Many years ago I was on the verge of taking a 2nd mortgage to buy a 2 bedroom flat on the Cap Ferrat on the French Riviera. I was going to take out a 2nd mortgage but bottled it at the last minute. It was £120,000. It would now be worth over a million. Prices in France are almost as expensive there as they are here now, except in the Limousin and La Manche where you can still find some sort of structure for 20,000 euros. I spend many dark winter nights inhabiting this parallel life of French property websites.

They have a peculiar thing in France, a 'viager' and it is becoming very popular. You see advertised for example a house worth 500,000 euros being sold for a 'bouquet' of say 250,000 euros plus a monthly payment of say 600 euros until its inhabitants die or go into full-time care, then the property is yours. In the advert it will give you their ages, a woman of 81 yrs old perhaps. Then one has to calculate how long they might live for. It's very gory and Agatha Christie. Firstly one has to be sure one would outlive them..... they are on healthy Mediterranean diets and have life-extending sun. Although it seems like a sensible arrangement one would have to be quite dispassionate. I don't think I could be.

“Madame Lefebvre, please don't think I want you to die..... You just go on living for as long as you bloody well can, to 120..... I don't care about your house.... I care about you....”

Last night was remarkable for remembering a dream. I think I had slept lightly with storm Erik roaring outside. It was night time, I was in a busy, festive place like the Edinburgh Festival. Someone who I thought was going to bring me a drink, instead brought me a small bucketful of fish instead. I must have taken a bite of one and my mouth was full of all these little white pieces of fish which were alive and wriggling in my mouth. I stood on top of a bridge and was spitting and spitting to try and get them out. Then I woke up. Flipper my 10yr old 1ft goldfish had been found dead in my pond on thursday. I guess the dream was related. After the sheep last week, more sadness and guilt. All you can do for your animals is do the best that you possibly can.

Kind wishes,

Isobel