



Monday 7th June 2021

Dear Customer,

It's been fabulous weather up here, so no complaint whatsoever and straight onto the recipes:

Swiss Chard with Chickpeas and Mint

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to drizzle	1 onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped	generous pinch chilli flakes
300g swiss chard, leaves and stems cut into 1cm lengths	2 tbsp tomato purée
75 ml dry white wine	400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
¼ lemon, juice	handful mint leave

Heat the oil; add the onions, garlic and chilli flakes. Season and sweat for 5 minutes; add the chard stems and cook for another 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato purée, cook for 1 minute; add the wine and bubble until reduced. Add the chickpeas, chard leaves and 150ml water. Season, then cover and cook for 5 minutes. Add the lemon juice and all but a few mint leaves. Serve, with mint leaves, a splash more olive oil, and couscous, if liked.

Swiss Chard Tart

300g shortcrust pastry	3 tbsp olive oil
2 medium onions, finely sliced	250g Swiss chard
2 Hen Nation eggs plus 1 egg yolk	200ml crème fraîche
salt and freshly ground black pepper	50g finely grated Gruyère

Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface. Loosely wrap around the rolling pin and carefully unroll over a 25cm, round tart dish. Gently press the pastry into the dish and prick the bottom with a fork. Line with crumpled greaseproof paper and fill with baking beans. Chill for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°C/ Gas 4. Put the pastry in the centre of the oven and bake blind for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven, remove the paper and baking beans and return to the oven for 5 minutes to dry out. Then remove from the oven. Keep the oven on. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a frying pan over a low heat and fry the onion until soft. Prepare the Swiss chard by ripping the green leaves away from the white stems. Finely slice both and add the stems to the onions. Fry gently until they begin to soften then add the sliced leaves and fry until soft. Season to taste and tip the mixture into the pastry case. Beat together the eggs, egg yolk and crème fraîche, mix in the Gruyère, season to taste and pour into the tart, making sure that it seeps through the chard filling to the base. Bake for 25 minutes until golden and slightly risen. Serve hot, or cold.

Roasted Aubergine and Tomato Gnocchi

1 medium aubergines, cut into 3cm cubes	2 tbsp olive oil
300g pack tomatoes, quartered	2 cloves garlic, sliced
fresh gnocchi	fresh basil, torn

Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Toss the aubergine with 2 tbsp oil and spread out on a large baking tray. Roast for 20 minutes, turning halfway, then stir in the tomatoes and garlic and roast for a further 10 minutes. Five minutes after you put the tomatoes in, bring a large pan of water to the boil. Add the gnocchi and simmer for 2-3 minutes. Drain and stir into the baking tray coating in the cooking juices. Return to the oven for a final 3 minutes, then serve scattered with basil leaves.

My garden goes from bad to worse. It's out-and-out warfare between the various species, tribes, as they battle it out for space and light. I've just had to intervene with my spade. I put a notice on the local Facebook group saying I was 'thinning out the super-spreaders' and did anyone want any plants. After one 'like', their admin took it down. I've been trying to fathom why. They hadn't been impressed with me posting the local coronavirus cases on a daily basis. Nor links to articles such as 'those who break the rules have blood on their hands'. Since then I have been filtered, my freedom of speech curtailed. I guess the term 'super-spreader' set their alarm bells off. I can ask for a plumber but not offer free plants. They are so petty.

It's been a big week. I met a friend for lunch for the first time since it all started. I had suggested a bog-standard pub so we could sit on a trestle table next to a hedge at the bottom of some garden. My friend then booked the busiest, most up-market place in the region. What a nightmare, did it mean I would have to 'get dressed up'. As the hour drew near I became frightened, an attack of lockdown agoraphobia. The place would be full, and full of people all dressed up. I wanted to cancel but it was too late. I made myself look vaguely presentable.

I arrived before my friend. The reserved table was under their low-slung, taupe canvas, draped across the Provencal courtyard. It was loud with chatter, and oppressive. I asked to change it for one outside, saying we needed space for four dogs. And then everything was fine. My friend arrived and I had potato gnocchi with wild garlic, peas and broad beans: followed by lemon olive oil cake with fennel sorbet. It was delicious, and especially so given I didn't cook it. I even bought some pink nail varnish in their spa shop. Gently does it.

It's all been happening as the next day I went to a funeral here in Richmond. A lovely neighbour sadly passed away. After being invited by the family, I asked if I might come to the church but not inside the building. This time I had to get dressed up, and in haste after a phone meeting over-ran. I squeezed, really squeezed, into my Balenciaga black dress, a relic from bygone days. I squeezed into my black jacket: so tight on the arms now. I squeezed my feet like one of the 'ugly sisters' into my Fratelli Rossetti black court shoes: more relics - far too high but they're all I've got. Not being wellingtons, I wasn't sure I'd even be able to stand up in them. I parked very close to the church and just about managed the vertiginous walk up the path in time for the cortege to arrive. I stood outside the door, alone, masked up, as they entered the church. A man came out and gave me a programme and when I said I wasn't coming in, he kindly brought me a chair. It was the consultant from the Memorial Hospital. What was he doing here ? It was like some secret cult. I sat there with the programme, the pall bearers mere mulling about, I had a headache and the sun was beating down on my head. I couldn't hear anything of the service, just the occasional 'amen'. But I did hear a piece of piano music which brought me to tears – Shostakovich Piano Concerto No2 in F major 11 Andante. They all came out and there I was still standing there in my mask as they passed. I should have gone in. Sometimes I make myself sick. Why can't I just do what everyone else does for a change. It gets really tiresome.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes, Isobel