

CHEF'S NOTEBOOK

Yotam Ottolenghi

The chef, restaurateur and cookbook author is one of the judges of the BBC's Food and Farming Awards



Earliest food memories

When I was about eight, I had a little children's cookbook that had a recipe for a Russian egg. It was the simplest thing - you took out the yolk of a hard-boiled egg, mixed it with mustard and mayonnaise, then put it back.

Another recipe was the Jewish equivalent of a sausage roll, called Moses in a Basket, using chicken or turkey. I remember making those and feeling very proud of myself.

Most memorable meal

It was 20 years ago, when I lived in Amsterdam. I drove to Belgium with two friends to eat at De Karmeliet (dekarmeliet.be/en), a three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Bruges. It was in a beautiful, cavernous building and I had pressed duck. The thing I'll never forget is the cheese trolley, which is not something I'd be very interested in these days; it had about 90 cheeses, so it took 15 minutes just to describe them! Our meal started at 9pm and went on until 1am, then we drove back to Amsterdam. It was the first time that I'd been exposed to that sort of dining.

Favourite places to eat in London

This changes so often. One new place is Primeur (primeurn5.co.uk) in Stoke Newington, a small wine bar with great food. It represents London's food revolution because it's on a residential street, is run by a couple of guys who have all the time in the world for the wine and the food, and is frequented by locals. The quality is superb.

The other place I often go to is a Turkish kebab place in Dalston called Mangal 1 (mangall.com) - they cook

kebabs the traditional Turkish way.

It's fresh, beautiful and buzzy - and is the kind of food that London does well.

I go after work and like the fact that you don't have to make too many decisions.

Cookbook inspiration

I turn to Niki Segnit's *The Flavour*

Thesaurus a lot to jog my memory.

I also use McGee on *Food and Cooking*

by Harold McGee if I'm facing technical challenges, and I love *The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science* by J Kenji López-Alt, an American book about the science of cooking.

Capital shopping

I love Parkway Greens (parkwaygreens.co.uk) in Camden, which sells vegetables from all over the world - organic and non-organic - and lots of British produce. You can get everything from curry leaves and shiso leaves to the first new potatoes. They've positioned themselves next to a supermarket, and they always do so much better - the quality is good and they're reasonably priced.

Dinner at home

Often in the week I don't want to cook or eat, as I've been doing tastings in the day. At the moment it's lots of cakes - we're working on a baking book, due out next year. Some nights I have miso soup from a packet. I'm quite lucky as Max,

my son, likes his food really simple, and what he doesn't finish I eat, so it's naked beans, naked pasta.

Cooking happens at weekends. We often have people over and I cook the stuff that I like to eat - lots of vegetables, and brunch fare like frittatas or tortillas.

Being a judge

I'm looking forward to this! When small producers are invited to an awards ceremony, it's a real opportunity for them to engage with other people who do the same thing. When you run a restaurant, you're in contact with people, but when you're a producer or a farmer you get very little of that.

People remember these events for the rest of their lives - and the recognition keeps them going. It'll be fun to see what's going on across the UK, as I'm so London-centric. This is always my motivation for travelling. I was in a New York restaurant recently, where they were serving lavender lemonade, and my head chef said: 'Hey, there's a sorbet for you.'

BBC RADIO 4 **The BBC Food and Farming Awards ceremony will be held in Bristol on 28 April. The finalists and winners will be featured on BBC Radio 4's Food Programme and on BBC One's Countryfile and at bbc.co.uk/foodawards.**



Interview CLARE HARGREAVES | Photographs LAUREN FLEISHMAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES, GETTY IMAGES



From top: Russian eggs; Yotam outside Parkway Greens; inspiring cookbooks