

CHEF'S NOTEBOOK



Shaun Hill is chef-patron of the Michelin-starred Walnut Tree Inn (thewalnuttreeinn.com) near Abergavenny. His previous restaurant, the Michelin-starred Merchant House, helped to put Ludlow on the food map. He tells Clare Hargreaves about his food haunts and favourites.

Earliest food memory My mum was a wonderful person but she was not a cook, although she did make decent soda and potato breads. One day



Nadia Santini, above left, is one of Shaun's favourite chefs; The Walnut Tree Inn



my dad appeared with some live eels. My mother had been brought up in Connecticut, so didn't have a clue what to do with them. She rang my uncle and asked him to come to cut them up.

Most memorable meal This was about 20 years ago, at the Fischerzunft hotel on the Rhine in Switzerland - it was a fabulous fish buffet, with each course totally different from the one before. Ever since I've made a version at home on Christmas Eve.

Top restaurant This has to be Koffmann's (the-berkeley.co.uk). It's the best food in London and good value. I reckon Pierre Koffmann is near the top, along with the Roux family. His cooking still has an element

of rusticity, which I love, and it's not fussy but has confidence. I used to go to La Tante Claire - Koffmann's previous three-Michelin-starred restaurant - but since he moved to the Berkeley hotel, I've eaten there four or five times a year. I always have the same: Langoustine ravioli in bisque, Stuffed pig's trotter and Pistachio soufflé.

London on a budget I love Soho cafés, or places with a similar feel, such as 10 Greek Street (10greekstreet.com), Bocca di Lupo (boccadilupo.com), Barrafinna (barrafinna.co.uk), Polpo (polpo.co.uk) and Russell Norman's latest place, Spuntino (spuntino.co.uk) - we've borrowed one of their cocktails at the Walnut Tree Inn. I also love Lyle's (lyleslondon.com) in Shoreditch.

Best cuisine It has to be northern Italian. It's a home-based food, perhaps because most restaurants are headed up by female

Most chefs my age have packed it in. What on earth would I do if I retired?

chefs. They use first-class ingredients, then put their heart into it rather than trying to show off - when I eat out, I don't want to be amazed or threatened, I want to enjoy it. One of my favourite restaurants in northern Italy is Dal Pescatore (dalpescatore.com), which has a female chef, Nadia Santini. I had the tasting menu, which had lovely changes in tempo and texture - it's food that's good to eat rather than to photograph.

Favourite food Offal. I love the variety of textures. I'm particularly keen on white offal such as sweetbreads, which are always on our menu. I blanch them, then pan-fry them so they're crisp on the outside and soft on the inside, and I serve them with a potato & olive cake, a warm mustardy dressing and a bit of sauerkraut. I also rate kidney and liver; I reckon chicken liver is the most amazing bargain - you can make wonderful risottos with it.

Cooking at home I always make Sunday lunch for as many of the family as want to come. It's a pleasant, leisurely experience. We start around 3pm and finish about 6pm. I cook things like cassoulet or a whole ham. I also love fish, so I often make a stew.

What's next Most chefs of my age have packed it in or are off pontificating about food. But what on earth would I do if I retired? When I'm too old to keep going at the stove, I'll do something peripheral. That won't be for a while yet.

COMMUNITY HERO



During her career as an interior designer, the only plants Estelle Brown (left) dealt with were those printed on fabrics and, by her own admission, she was a dismal gardener and cook. Now she gets her hands dirty growing edible plants all over her West Yorkshire home town of Todmorden.

Seven years ago, Estelle and a group of like-minded townsfolk decided self-reliance in food was vital to the formerly rich mining town. So they planted herbs, vegetables and rhubarb in public places, from car parks to the health centre, the railway station and police station. Townspeople can pick and eat the crops when they wish, and all the local schools are now involved. 'We call them propaganda gardens, because when people see them, they're inspired to grow food in their own gardens at home, just as I was,' says Estelle.

The project - Incredible Edible Todmorden (incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk) - quickly attracted visitors from all over the world, keen to translate the model elsewhere. So Estelle started running 'vegetable tours'.

'If people have money, they pay. If not, they bring seeds. Last year we had 1,000 visitors, bringing in £10,000, which we put back into the community.' Vegetable tourism has had a beneficial effect on hotels, restaurants, cafés and the town's indoor market of local food producers.



3 OF THE BEST... farmhouse butters

Netherend Farm netherendfarmbutter.co.uk

Gloucestershire dairy farmers Wyndham and Linda Weeks found demand for skimmed and semi-skimmed milk meant lots of cream left over, so they used it to make butter. Chefs and others loved it, so the couple decided to concentrate on butter-making, buying in cream from a local dairy and churning it in small batches the traditional way. Find Netherend's lightly salted and unsalted butters (organic and non-organic) in delis, Waitrose and some Tesco branches.

Abernethy Butter abernethybuttercompany.com

This small company based in County Down, Northern Ireland, was a finalist in the 2014 BBC Radio 4 Food and Farming Awards. Abernethy make its butter by hand using traditional methods with cream from a local farm. It's then patted by hand into rolls, ready for wrapping. It claims to be the only firm in Northern Ireland making butter this way.

Lincolnshire Poacher lincolnshirepoachercheese.com

You'll have heard of the cheese, made with milk from Ulceby Grange Farm's own cows. Equally fabulous is its butter, crafted from the cream left in the whey after the milk is separated into curds and whey during cheesemaking. It's matured for a few days, then churned and patted by hand using wooden butter pats. It's sold at Lincolnshire farmers' markets and farm shops. Fans include chefs Sat Bains and Heston Blumenthal.