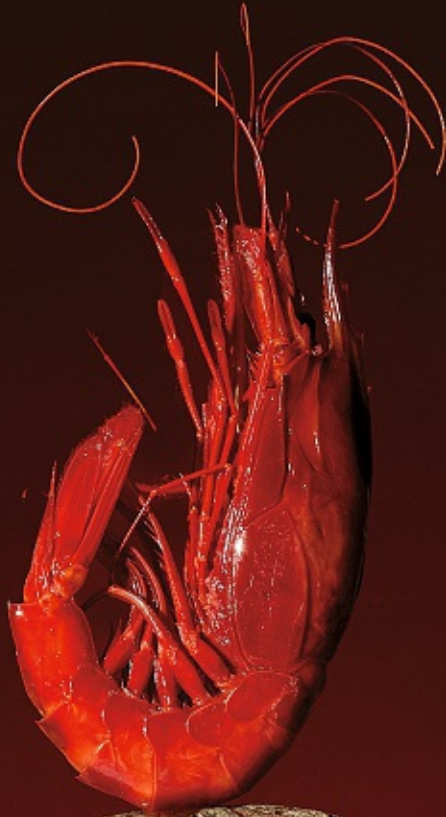


MARCH 21/22 2020

FT Weekend Magazine



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Cover photograph by *Kellie French*

Styling by *Rosie Scott*

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The world has changed since we started commissioning this issue. As coronavirus dominates our lives, it is difficult to think about anything else. For now, we hope that these pages can offer inspiration, comfort and even some much-needed escapism

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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Governments need to make good use of this pandemic



By the time this horror ends, it might have changed our way of life. Already, the coronavirus has achieved something that government policies and moral awakening couldn't: it is pushing us into green living. The nature of work, commuting and shopping changed this month. If that transformation sticks, then one day we'll have happier and more productive societies, and we'll look back on December 2019 as the all-time peak in global carbon emissions.

First of all, the pandemic may show that offices are an outdated way to organise work. This is something I have suspected since my three-year office experience in the 1990s. I was amazed at the inefficiency of the set-up: people spent much of the day distracting each other by gossiping, flirting, bitching about the boss or complaining about that morning's commute. I've worked happily alone for 22 years now.

Offices exist largely so that bosses can check whether workers are doing the work (or at least putting in face-time). But nowadays, data can do much of the monitoring. Meanwhile, improved workplace software such as Slack and Zoom lets employees collaborate from home. The tech may actually outperform real life: a professor who has hurriedly learnt Zoom told me he liked the way the software can instantly create small break-out groups of students to work on a problem. In an auditorium, everyone has to pack their bags, find a room and grab a coffee on the way.

Now that entire countries are learning to work from their bedrooms, many employers may end up concluding that they can ditch expensive office space. That wouldn't merely reduce emissions, and liberate metropolitan workers from ghastly commutes (the daily round trip averages well over an hour in cities such as New York, Chicago and London). The shift would also reduce urban house prices, as some offices get converted into homes, and some workers are freed to leave the city. In the next year or two, virtual-reality software will let the boss (or at least the boss's avatar) step into underlings' home-offices to root out shirking.

In short, work could follow dating, shopping and game-playing in going virtual. That would make life greener but also more isolated. To compensate, neighbourhoods will need more communal spaces. Already the death of bricks-and-mortar retail has allowed coffee shops and co-working spaces to take over high streets. But we'll also have to build more playgrounds (with some for adults), community centres and parks.

Another benefit: the pandemic may help stop the decades-long rise in business travel. I discovered last week that each time a trip was cancelled, I mostly felt relief. I know the benefits of business travel: the two books I'm currently writing both came out of meeting someone while at a conference. So did my previous book.

However, most trips probably cause a net loss of productivity. While you search for the one or two useful people to talk to amid the 300 carbon-emitting duds at a disappointing conference, you're missing work at home. Moreover, most conferences feature a lot more wannabe sellers than buyers. Nowadays it's quicker to find the perfect counterpart on LinkedIn. As for content, well-made virtual conferences could be as compelling to watch as good TED talks or TV – and more so than the endless panels of executives talking their own books.

'In the future, we might look back on December 2019 as the all-time peak in global carbon emissions'

As for shopping, even before the coronavirus we were shifting towards a world where the shop comes to you. That movement just accelerated, possibly for ever. It's much greener for a supermarket to send an electric van (or a cargo-bike) to 100 homes in a neighbourhood than for all those people to drive to the supermarket. Some could ditch their cars.

Even in the very short term, the green lining to this pandemic is surprisingly large. Air pollution kills about 1.1 million people in China alone every year. The fall in pollution during the country's lockdown in January and February "likely saved 20 times more lives in China than have currently been lost due to infection with the virus in that country", calculates Marshall Burke of Stanford University's Department of Earth System Science. He adds: "The fact that disruption of this magnitude could actually lead to some large (partial) benefits suggests that our normal way of doing things might need disrupting."

That's particularly true since climate change makes pandemics more likely. It expands the natural habitat of infectious insects such as mosquitoes, while reducing the habitat of animals, with the effect of pushing both into closer contact with humans.

Governments need to make good use of the current pandemic. Many states are preparing a fiscal stimulus. Donald Trump wants to bestow much of it on the carbon emitters that could go bust in the incipient recession: airlines, cruise ships, oil producers and his beloved hotel industry (which lives off travellers' emissions). Forward-looking governments will instead prioritise green industries, while helping workers who lose their fossil-fuel jobs.

It turns out that developed countries (except possibly the US) can still do collective government-led wartime-style mobilisation. It's a muscle we're going to need. **FT**

simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon



INVENTORY ELIZABETH HAIGH, CHEF

‘Food waste is kind of why I moved away from Michelin restaurants’

Elizabeth Haigh, 31, was the founding head chef at Pidgin in east London, which won a Michelin star in 2017. She then set up her own enterprise, Kaizen House, a series of projects based around residencies and pop-ups. Her Singaporean kopitiam Mei Mei opened in Borough Market in 2019.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

To be a doctor - or a volcanologist.

Where did you go to school?

Where did you train?

A girls' school in Maidenhead, then Central Saint Martins in London for my degree in architecture. I wanted to become a chef so I worked in a gastropub back in Maidenhead while I worked towards a diploma.

Who was or still is your mentor?

My mother. She gets such flavour into her food. She absorbed south-east Asian cuisine from her own mother and grandmother. I've always looked up to her ability to *agak agak* - to season and taste to your own preference.

How physically fit are you?

Quite fit. I don't work out as much as I want to but I'm always on my feet, and my two-year-old son always wants me to carry him so I've got arms of steel.

Breakfast or dinner: which?

I'm a morning person. In Singapore, breakfast is my favourite meal - a wonderful bowl of noodles that really wakes you up.

Which technique did you struggle to perfect?

I don't have much experience with fermentation. I'd like to learn more as I find it fascinating.

Which flavour always pleases you?

Anything salty or with umami flavour. Anything with Parmesan cheese. Anchovies.

Which flavour can't you abide?

I find it frustrating when people use anything artificial. Almond essence can be overpowering. Artificial truffle oil can ruin a dish.

What equipment could you not do without?

My kitchen caught fire last year in June and I lost all my knives. I was heartbroken. I can't live without those.

What would you like to own that you don't currently possess?

An electric car. We're saving for a Tesla. I want to be able to

get to restaurants outside London more freely.

What's your biggest extravagance?

Either going out to eat or travelling.

Do you consider food waste?

Absolutely. We have separate bins for everything, all our packaging is compostable, we serve a lot of chicken and use every single part. Food waste is kind of why I moved away from Michelin restaurants - you have to try and get that perfect cut. I love the quality of the food but found the waste unbearable.

What is your guilty food pleasure?

Anything cheesy.

In what place are you happiest?

At home in my kitchen. Or in Singapore with my entire family and loads of barbecued food.

Who or what makes you laugh?

My husband, Steele, and Riley, my son.

What ambitions do you still have?

Making Mei Mei as successful as possible and enjoying the experience at the same time.

We want to grow our business and open across London - that's the biggest ambition.

What is the luckiest aspect of your life so far?

My lovely family.

What has been your greatest kitchen disaster?

We were fermenting some kimchi and we thought we could speed it up by vac-packing it. It blew up like a balloon, it was a really hot day, and it exploded - just before service. It smelled like cabbage fart all through the restaurant. We were trying to waft it out of the door. And we were cleaning for hours.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

It was very difficult through my early twenties, changing careers and taking a bit of a leap. I think she'd be quite proud of what she'd achieved in quite a short time.

Do you see yourself as an artist?

I've always wanted to be an artist, so yes! Cooking is a creative art.

It's very constructive and artistic.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

Eight. I don't think you're ever completely satisfied, there are always things to achieve. **FT**

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Interview by Hester Lacey.

Elizabeth Haigh is the founder of Mei Mei in London; @the_modern_chef

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TECH WORLD NOTES FROM A DIGITAL BUNKER

BY LEO LEWIS IN TOKYO

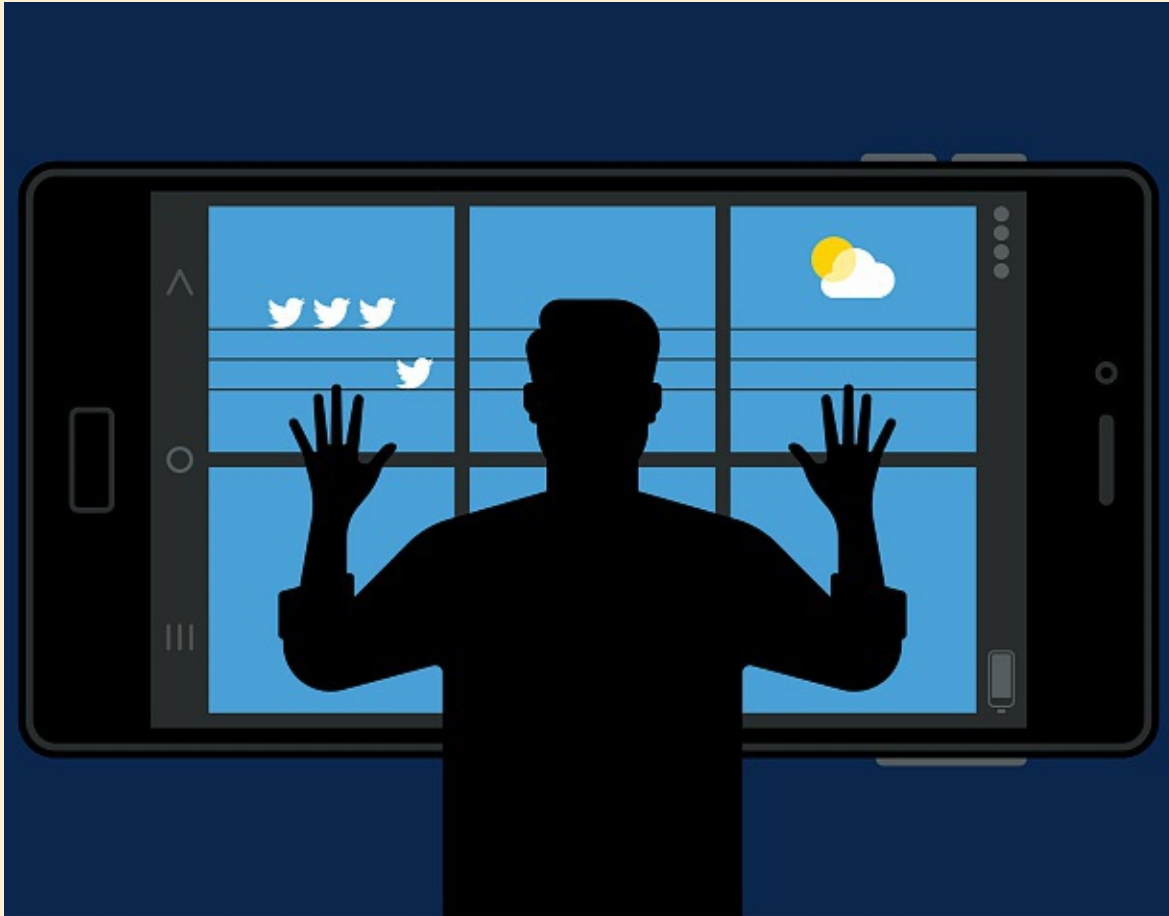


ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

A tech takeover – but we miss the real world

Of all the professional sports affected by recent bans on spectators, sumo feels to me the strangest without its crowds. In theory, 1,400-year-old traditions and ritualised channelling of the warrior spirit should preserve the sport's essence even without a roaring throng. As it turns out, loincloths and blubber lose a lot of their thrill without the cushion-hurling grannies and half-cut salarymen who normally attend such events.

The tech world should take note. Asia's various responses to the pandemic have tested – ahead of Europe and the US – both received wisdom and future projections about the way we consume content and engage with technology. Across the region, tens of millions

of people have either been obliged or strongly encouraged to remain at home for periods stretching into weeks, with tech as their uninfected ally. Efforts to convince people to swap meetings and the daily commute for laptop telework and video conferencing have bolstered the hermit ranks. School closures and remote-learning software have further increased the population of people living even more than usually through their screens.

The circumstances are horrible but, on the thinly positive side, this is tech's big moment to prove that it can step in and provide everything that normal life – for the next few months at least – cannot.

Some early forecasts of that tech/life substitution have been accurate. Investors who bet, for example, that curfews and empty streets in China would trigger a historic surge in mobile-phone gaming and use of social media were correct. In the first two weeks of February, app downloads

in China were running at a rate 40 per cent higher than the average for the whole of 2019.

Meanwhile, as parents have turned laptops into learning tools while schools are closed, they have been forced into a tortured, rolling calculus of whether children should be rewarded for the stress of learning on one screen with time mucking about on another.

Tech is sitting astride this crisis with a convincing array of distractions. When it comes to offsetting restrictions of a lockdown, for example, we already know that the offerings of Netflix, Amazon and others are formidable. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok can effortlessly gobble hours.

But arguably the most ensnaring harpoons will be fired towards us by the \$140bn games industry, which is becoming ever more efficient at fusing sophisticated gameplay with an appeal to non-playing spectators and the social media sphere that sits

around both. Earlier this month, the latest free-to-play multiplayer battle game *Call of Duty: Warzone* launched itself into a climate where real-world fun is fettered. The timing could not have been better – a big, brand new game that can engage tens of thousands of people at once, arriving at a moment where everyone is staying in.

The novelty value of the game, coupled with the virtual global communities that instantly formed around it, made for fascinating viewing through Twitch – the streaming site that, among other things, allows you to eavesdrop on the non-stop exchanges between gamers as they go about the business of on-screen annihilation. The conversations lurched between the dual-language maze of bedroom warriors (“Did anyone get a sniper rifle to f**k that guy

‘Can our screens provide everything that normal life – for the next few months at least – cannot?’

up...”), to shooting the breeze with friends (“I heard the virus lives for 12 hours on metal surfaces...”). All to a backdrop of automatic weapon fire and explosions.

From this, it is tempting to suggest that the “social distancing” demanded by the coronavirus is just accelerating the inevitable. Weren't we always destined to end up lost in cyberspace, playing to a virtual audience, hypnotised by the illusion that we can be in hundreds of places at once?

Well, perhaps not quite yet. Of course, there are those that gaming has irretrievably consumed. But listen long enough to the conversations that tech is hosting and, with surprising speed, they quickly become litanies of regret for real life that has been cancelled, curtailed or constricted. Tech's capacity to immerse, it seems, draws power from the certainty of a real-life hinterland. Take that away, and, like asking the sumo to perform in a vacuum, the fun evaporates. **FT**

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Leo Lewis is the FT's Tokyo correspondent

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY

THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Home working's fine – if you're home alone

The family has all been stuck together at home for a day and, already, I'm fed up with them. I know the arrival of a global pandemic is meant to make you appreciate your loved ones but at the moment, while we are all well, it's not quite working out that way. I'm all in favour of this policy of social distancing, but is there no scope for it at home?

Of course, our main concern is for those stuck in alone. Like many others, I have at least one elderly relative who is dreading the coming weeks. But has anyone given any thought to the impositions of a full household?

I'm on my second day of home working, drinking too much coffee and feeling I'd enjoy it more if everyone else wasn't here too. My wife is sitting opposite me at the kitchen table, also working from home, shushing me every time I get on the phone.

This was not the plan. I had to dial into an FT meeting sitting cross-legged on the living-room floor. Everybody else on the hangout was at their table or reclining in a little study with bookshelves, and there was me, tottering over the laptop like an interrupted yogi. Of course, I am lucky to be able to work from home. Many are not so fortunate. I'm just having to remind myself of this more often than I expected.

Notionally, I am always pleased to have the boy back from college and he never intrudes much on our lives before lunchtime in any case. But the idea of a full house was always leavened by it rarely being full and awake at the same time. He was around for a couple of good conversations and then off in his own world. Now he's stomping around the kitchen complaining about how boring it is all going to be and refusing to learn to play bridge.

I've never thought of the house as small but suddenly I've a strong



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

desire to work in the shed - or I would do if it had electricity, wasn't falling apart and didn't reek of fox urine. In fact, I've just ordered a cheap desk to put in the cubby hole the estate agent told us was a bedroom - and which may yet serve as the isolation wing - in order to find sanctuary. I wonder if there's mileage in a borrow-my-family website (all loaned relatives come with a certificate of immunity).

Even the dog, who is normally overjoyed to see a full house, is beginning to look a little vexed that, all of a sudden, everyone wants to take her for a walk.

The girl is still at school at the time of writing, though it is hard to see even that lasting much longer. I'm all in favour of keeping it going as long as possible but it does seem out of kilter with a policy against mass gatherings and even restaurants. Every family with school-age kids is opening its doors to a super-spreader each afternoon. Happily, as a teenager, she's been self-isolating from us for much of the past year anyway. Food I expected to see in the fridge is now just empty packets in one of the spawn's rooms.

We do at least have a garden, but we are not talking the grounds of Chatsworth here. There were spaces in *The Shawshank Redemption* that

offered more scope for exercise. If I were the type who counted his steps, that's going to be a hell of a lot of circuits to reach 10,000. I might find out how many when desperation really sets in.

Too much time at home also means too much snacking. Every time I've gone out for a breath of fresh air, I've returned with provisions from Mr Kipling. The shelves of south-west London may be stripped bare of hand sanitiser but I'm pleased to report that the cherry bakewells are still getting through.

Family time now hangs like a threat over the household. We are scouring Netflix for the box sets we never cared enough to watch before. The full horror of the coronavirus crisis hit home on Saturday when *Match of the Day* was replaced with *Mrs Brown's Boys*.

We knew, of course, that the cancellation of games would have an impact but, jeeppers, we had no idea things were that bad. The world is going to hell and that's all you've got for us: *Mrs Brown's Boys*.

I suppose the thinking was that everyone needed cheering up but, in that case, surely they might have gone for a comedy? **FT**

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Reply

Re "The future of socialism in America" (March 14/15). The fact that Bernie Sanders' policies are seen as hardcore socialism speaks volumes about how much to the right the pendulum has shifted over the past 50 years in the US. **Axel** via FT.com

@martjacques March 14
Splendid piece by Edward Luce via @FT on the future of socialism in the US. One of the best articles on America I have read in recent years

Thanks for this gentle story ("The joys of west Dorset", March 14/15) and for the beautiful pictures. It brings back memories of our first fossil found on Charmouth beach, a heavily eroded piece of rock that on close inspection turned out to be an ammonite. **Huismus** via FT.com

What an artist and intellectual ("Marjane Satrapi on directing *Radioactive* and writing *Persepolis*", March 14/15)! I love her curiosity for everything in life and the drive to try, whatever may be. **Mia** via FT.com

Re Gillian Tett on "A deadly disease, globalisation and me" (March 14/15). I find it intriguing that there is so little reference to those at the margins in society for whom this pandemic will have tragic consequences. It is only a matter of time before refugees in camps become infected. What will the world's reaction be to that? **Nuuk** via FT.com

Further to Robert Shrimsley's column ("Why coronavirus is making me miss Brexit", March 14/15). A woman on a podcast said that she had loaded up on survival staples but had already eaten all the snacks. Anyone else out there like that? Our extra beer is getting consumed a lot faster than the newly purchased stocks of rice. **Trey Co** via FT.com

To contribute
Please email magazineletters@ft.com. Include a daytime telephone number and full address (not for publication). Letters may be edited.



This week, Lilah and Gris discuss how coronavirus is already changing daily life - and how it might impact culture. Will we stop flying so much? And can the thrill of a live performance be replicated online? **ft.com/culture-call**

Quiz answers The link was words without any of the five vowels 1. Myrrh 2. Theatr Clwyd 3. Gypsy 4. Sphynx 5. Nymphs 6. Sky 7. Lynx 8. Rhys (Ernest and Jean) 9. Lymph 10. Rhythm method **Picture quiz** Lady Gaga + John Bird = Ladybird

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'Reaching the top is about endurance'

Daniel Humm wanted to be the best chef in the world but when he made it, his life fell apart. Now he's back at Claridge's, where he first cooked when he was 15. Over duck-tasting at Davies and Brook, he talks to *Alexander Gilmour* about his new vision. Photographs by *Cian Oba-Smith*

Daniel Humm at Claridge's hotel, London, in January



Most chefs in Britain will not admit to being an artist for fear of ridicule. Some won't even admit to being a chef. The word is French, after all.

"Cook", which is Anglo-Saxon and not so pompous, can do just fine. Broadly speaking, "chefs" who claim to be artists are pretentious, continental bores.

But Daniel Humm - whose restaurant Eleven Madison Park has held three Michelin stars since 2011 and was named number one by The World's 50 Best Restaurants in 2017 - skips any pretence of disguising his own artistic interests by arranging to meet at the Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens. There is an exhibition of paintings by Albert Oehlen, whom the Swiss-German chef knows all about. He is an enthusiastic guide. But first, he wants to talk about his breakdown.

It started in 2017, a week after he reached number one. "I definitely fell into a pretty big hole," he says, standing quite close. Humm, now 43, is 6ft 4in, charismatic and lean. His hair is gently thinning and he wears a mustard jersey.

He had wanted to make Eleven Madison Park the best restaurant in the world from the moment he arrived in New York in 2006, he says. "In the beginning, it was the Michelin stars. We went for that. Then the 50 Best. And that kept me busy for 10 years." The restaurant became renowned for the pared-back elegance of Humm's dishes - his black-and-white cookies, his duck glazed with honey - and the removal of any hierarchy between kitchen and front of house (his then business partner Will Guidara's domain).

"Intellectually, I always knew that the 50 Best wasn't the goal," he says. "I think the achievement felt empty somehow... when it happened, it was almost like my whole world fell apart... I didn't even want to leave the house... I was so disoriented."

At first, he avoided public spaces, then he went to India and later studied with the spiritual teacher Ram Dass. He didn't abandon work, however. Today, he looks like he could do

with more sleep. "I sleep well," he says. "I exercise an hour a day." He also visits galleries.

"I think artists are the most sensitive people," says Humm. "I feel at home around artists - it's a language that we share." Is he an artist? "I draw and I cook. Is it artistic to cook? Is it creative? Sure. If you want to call it 'art' - that's not my place to say. But when I talk to people who make sculptures, it's a similar thought process."

He likes how Oehlen's moustachioed faces couldn't be by anyone but him. By the same token, he would like to create dishes that say, unmistakably: "This is a Daniel Humm."

Lecture complete, we head off to Davies and Brook, his new restaurant in Claridge's hotel, Mayfair. It opened at the end of last year, but Humm first cooked at Claridge's in the summer of 1992, when he was 15. He had no serious ambition to be a chef at the time. He moved to London to live with his girlfriend and he needed a job to finance his budding cycling career (his parents had stopped paying for it when he dropped out of school aged 14).

But after falling off his bike when he was 21, he stopped cycling. Kitchen work had been a side hustle until then, but he made a decision in hospital: "If I can't be the best cyclist in the world, I'm going to become the best chef."

"Cooking became my new sport," he says. "I approached being a chef like I approached being a cyclist."

Humm worked in Switzerland - where he was born and grew up - and there he won his first Michelin star aged 24. He moved to San Francisco, New York and now he's back in Mayfair, where his cooking is exquisitely minimalist. To borrow a word from him, it's been a "journey".

The dining room at Davies and Brook is light and grey. Walls are lined with 40 photographs of green-grey Icelandic hillocks by artist Roni Horn, who is Humm's friend. "It's a very Daniel Humm aesthetic," Humm says. "It's very calm." It is.

A low buzz of studious precision pervades the gleaming kitchen: perfect piping, mussels tweezered into submission, little avocado fans. At some mysterious signal, everyone shouts



"*Oui chef!*" at head chef Dmitri Magi. The other cooks wear sober grey aprons but Humm is in his chef's whites, which he designed himself. Moving among them, greeting colleagues as he goes, he stands out like a ravishing white cat.

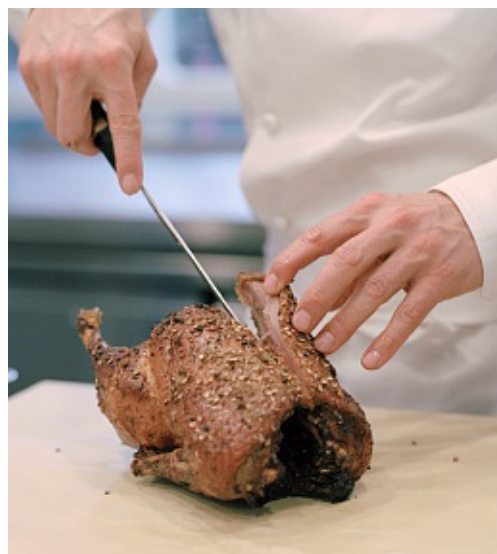
Then we taste four ducks. Humm is famous for his duck and he's always hunting for the perfect bird. Four breeds from four places, aged differently, but cooked in the same way. The breast of the one without its legs is grey around the edges, Magi observes: the legs will stay on next time. Humm carves a breast and hands me a succulent chunk. Much will be done to fluff things up in the final dish, but even nude, like this, it makes me want to cry.

Humm and his top lieutenant discuss the intricacies of the four frankly fairly identical fowl, which is thrilling. It's a blind tasting - my first-ever blind duck-tasting - and my winner is the one they use already, which can't help the hunt much.

On reflection, the most revolting of the four ducks we tasted is still the fourth best duck I have eaten. And Humm's duck, regal as it is, is not a patch on his scallop creation: raw scallops dressed with pickled apple, a scallop broth, a warm bread roll, scallop butter... that butter... it is surely the loveliest thing in Mayfair today. Except for his magical broth - for to sip this, is to know that God is on his cloud and all will end well.

We move back to the private dining room, which is full of soft jazz and silvery light.

Was he a competitive child? "Yes. Very. Always." In what? Cross-country running, for example. "I was Swiss champion... I wanted to win, I always wanted to win." Did winning make ▶



**'The kitchen is like being on a
championship team that's going to go to
the finals and every night it's a game'**



Facing page, clockwise from top: Humm with his former business partner Will Guidara, at an awards ceremony in New York, May 2010; preparing Black Cod roasted with Napa Cabbage; carving a duck; plating up Lobster with Winter Squash, Bisque and Cardomom

Above: preparing one of his signature dishes, Celery Root and Black Truffle, which is cooked inside a pig's bladder



◀ him happy? “For a moment,” he smiles. His voice is Swiss-German crossed with Dennis Hopper in *Apocalypse Now*. “Then I wanted more.”

How was school? “Strange,” he says. “In painting [for example] all the kids were drawing beaches and sunsets and rainbows – and I had a different idea.” He wanted to draw a skyscraper but his subject “was much bigger than the paper allowed for”, so he asked for a bigger piece of paper. And the teacher said no. Undeterred, Humm “drew a skyscraper that was three times the size of the paper. There was some on the paper, some on the table, on the floor.”

And everyone “freaked out”, he says – parents and teachers. “I was eight years old. And it was a problem.”

All because of this skyscraper? “Because of that. That’s how it was. It was insane. I just needed a bigger piece of paper. I always needed bigger paper.”

His parents sent him to a psychologist. “She’s like, ‘What are they thinking? Of course you need a bigger piece of paper. She was proving me

right... At first, I thought something was wrong with me. And she said, ‘No, no, this is good.’” She made him understand that some perceived weaknesses were really gifts. “It was actually the first time I ever felt understood.”

How do his parents feel about the skyscraper now? They were so young, he explains. “They feel bad about it but they couldn’t understand it.”

Humm’s dishes are joyful to eat, but he has suffered for them – or at least the German version of suffering, “*Leidenschaft*”. “It means passion,” he says. “For a lot of people, passion seems more like a hobby, but the German word names it – it’s sort of like ‘willing to suffer.’”

Is it worth it? He pauses. “Yes.” Is it important? “Yes. It’s beautiful also – if you care that much.”

For many years, he cared greatly about winning, which meant being the best. “I believe in talking things into existence,” says Humm. “We need to have goals and we need to talk about them if we want them to happen. I tell my kids that.” (He has three daughters.)

The kitchen purrs next door. “As you can see, it’s pretty full-on,” says Humm. “The career has always been so important, there hasn’t been so much room for other things... It’s just a choice you make. I knew that if I wanted to reach the top that’s what it required.” Talent is part of it but “the biggest part is who has the most endurance. And that’s what sport taught me – to go into that red zone and stay there... It’s about who can hurt, who can put themselves through more pain.”

After the 50 Best, he felt like he lost control of his “destiny”. There were too many people, wanting too many things, all at the same time. So, he started paring back. “I deleted 70 per cent of the people on my phone. I changed my phone number. I just started editing.”

His business partner Guidara had been integral to the success of Eleven Madison Park and other ventures, including the Nomad restaurants. But last July, Humm bought him out. He also split with Nomad six months later. (Currently, he has Davies and Brook, Eleven Madison Park and Made Nice, a fast-casual joint in New York. A new restaurant on Park Avenue is also in the offing.) Does he feel liberated without Guidara?

“Yes, 100 per cent.” But he’s sick of this subject. “In a way, it was a beautiful thing: we were very successful together, until we were not.”

Why did he leave Nomad? “It started to become too much about the revenues and the profits and there was too much compromise... I want to do fewer things. I want to do them better.” He’s very focused, very watchful; a warning light flickers behind the charm.

How does he nurture creativity? Every cook, every three months, has to present an idea. (Mid-blind-duck-tasting, in fact, a young chef presented his new cheese course with honey and potatoes. Humm seemed quite taken by the taste but thought the whole thing was so muddling he didn’t know how to eat it.) Do they get nervous? “In the beginning, of course. But then it’s like a muscle you train – creativity. Some people say, ‘Oh, I’m not the creative type.’ That’s bullshit.”

Like his hero Miles Davis, Humm believes in the importance of knowing rules before breaking them. Odd combinations might appear on the plate, but there is nothing random.

“For example, the caviar dish that we’re doing right now,” he says. “It’s caviar and squash; there’s the naan bread and the squash purée and the crème fraîche on top, with the slice. I know that the classic caviar service is with blinis and crème fraîche, for example. And, also, caviar goes really well with potatoes, it’s very classic. So here, I break the rules by making a naan instead of a blini, but I know I’m doing that.” Then he talks about the texture and sweetness of the squash and how his naan speaks to the English soul or something. I’ve tried this dish and it spoke to my soul: lots of thought, plenty of technique and rules smashed to smithereens.

But some rules must not be broken. Earlier, Humm had been prowling about the pass, when he identified warm food malingering on a cold plate. He commented drily to the offending chef, who blushed but took no other immediate action. Until Humm suggested that he might. At which point, the man assumed a ragged Burgundy complexion and moved the plate. It was like watching a prize tiger discuss a few issues with a faltering goat.

Yet Humm had behaved calmly, even kindly. He hadn't shouted, just growled - and no one else missed a beat. (Yelling has never been his style, he says, but he was "a little bit more aggressive" when he was younger. "Today, I never even raise my voice.") Still, the cold-plate chap clearly hadn't relished the moment. "Yes," ponders Humm. "But he will like this moment, I believe, because he'll think about it and he'll be like, 'Wow, he didn't yell at me.' And he's not going to make that mistake again."

What does Humm look for in a chef? "Certain things are more difficult than others, but it's no brain surgery. If someone has the right attitude, someone is smart, curious, passionate, a good person - we can teach everything." Could he teach me? "Of course. If you have the mindset." The more I talk to Humm, the more I know I don't.

Humm estimates that 40 per cent of his chefs are women; he would like it to be 50:50. Can work hours be flexible? "Only to a point. In this kind of kitchen? It's like when we talk about sports - this is like being on a championship team that's going to go to the finals and every night it's a game."

About a third of the Davies and Brook menu is vegetarian. Humm himself is 90 per

cent vegetarian, he says. Is the future vegan? He pauses. "Yes. It's an absolute yes." But it's not that simple. "I have thought about going completely vegetarian in the restaurant but it's a risk - and it's not just my life that depends on this." No, indeed, he pays 90 members of staff. "Main courses cost £40 on average. Could you charge that for a dish of broccoli? Probably not."

These days, Humm wants every dish to be four things: "delicious", "beautiful", "creative" and "intentional" - he calls these his "fundamentals". The first three are self-explanatory; "intentional" means having a story. As he wrote in his cookbook *Eleven Madison Park: The Next Chapter* (2017), "An intentional dish is one with soul."

"For any artist, it's about a dialogue," says Humm. "Somehow, I need to connect with you. Does it need a story in a gimmicky way? I don't think so. But does it need roots? I think it does."

Yet there are moments at Davies and Brook that could be accused of gimmickry. First, the pig's bladder, in which Humm cooks a gorgeous morsel of celeriac. Midway through preparation, it arrives at the table, basted by its carrier. Then it's whisked off and the celeriac returns beside a delicate black truffle concoction. It's an important



dish for Humm - very refined, very pared-back. "All my cooking life, I have been concerned with addition," he writes in his book. "Now, finally, I have changed my focus to subtraction."

But what's the point of the bladder? "It's the original way of sous-vide," he explains. "It's an airtight container that you cook at a low temperature and it really concentrates the flavour inside." Why the basting? "Because it has to stay moist. When it gets too dry it can crack." Could he achieve the same flavour...? "In a plastic bag?" he intervenes. "Yes." So, it's just theatre? "You could call it that. But it's beautiful to show the cooks an old technique; it's beautiful to show the guests an old technique."

Similarly, if you order a bottle of wine at Davies and Brook, a sommelier might remove the cork and pour some into your glass. But they might also heat the neck of your bottle and snap it off with a pair of tongs. "There is definitely some theatre to it," Humm concedes. More than some, in fact. It's a game. "We don't do it that often but if someone orders a really nice bottle..." Does he have a silly, playful side? "Yes, of course."

Humm's friends are all "artists or professional athletes", but his girlfriend is neither, so far as I know. She is, however, Laurene Powell Jobs, the philanthropist and widow of Steve Jobs. May we talk about her? "I don't know what to say," Humm says with a rather shy giggle. "We're extremely happy and she's the most incredible person I've ever met," he offers. They have known each other for two years. Does she cook? "No!" Further giggles. "No, actually we cook together a lot," he adds, correcting himself. "We're very connected on many levels - but also in terms of eating healthily and we've got very similar palates. We cook so much at home, which is really nice."

Is he as competitive as ever? Does he worry about what his peers are up to? "Yes, I worry, but I'm inspired by the art world. By greatness in general. I want to be great. I want this restaurant to be great." What is greatness? "I think if it has a clear voice, if it's unique," he says. "I want to bring beauty to this world, beauty and beautiful moments. That's my contribution." **FT**

'I am inspired by art... by greatness in general. I want to be great. I want this restaurant to be great'



Facing page: in Davies and Brook
Top: preparing Milk and Honey Ice Cream
Above: with his chefs in the kitchen

Alexander Gilmour is FT Weekend Magazine's Food & Drink editor

BREAD OF HEAVEN

Sandwiches have long been a British addiction – now they're undergoing a creative flowering. *Tim Hayward* tucks in. Photographs by *Kellie French*. Styling by *Rosie Scott*

The British proudly lay claim to the sandwich. We have a fond origin myth in which the eponymous earl, sitting late at a game of cards, ordered his manservant to whip up something he could feed himself without putting down his royal flush.

If it's true that this servant was the first genius to stick a lump of cheese or meat between two slices, it's a pretty poor reflection on the creativity of working people over millennia. The earl might have been the first aristocrat to do such a thing in public but humans without access to tables, plates and cutlery have been eating sandwiches since about 20 minutes after we baked the first loaf.

Even so, we Brits have something else to back our claim to be the world's great sandwich makers. In 1985, the first fully packaged, premade sandwich was sold by Marks and Spencer, thanks to the invention of an "easy seal" pack by Hans Blokmann, technical director of packaging supplier Danisco Otto Nielsen. It was, since you ask, a prawn and mayonnaise sandwich – still a national favourite for the swiftly grabbed lunch. OK, it wasn't

quite the moon landing, but it was the start of something pretty huge for a small nation.

Today, the UK's premade sandwich industry is by far the largest in Europe, worth about £8bn a year. The British Sandwich & Food to Go Association estimates that 43,000 tonnes of chicken, 16,000 tonnes of cheese, 15,000 tonnes of ham and 14,000 tonnes of egg are consumed by the sandwich industry each year. And how do we respond to the abundance of choice and novelty? A ridiculous number of us choose exactly the same sandwich every day.

Sandwiches are a national addiction. But alongside our slightly shabby descent into meal deals and "grab'n'go" (are there 2.3 more depressing words in the English language?) something marvellous has happened. Over the past few years, we've seen a creative flowering of the sandwich. If you know where to look, there is astonishingly good food to be had in hand-held format.

The first stirrings of the New Sandwich movement could be seen in about 2013. Instagram had just started to gain a foothold in the UK and there was a buzz of excitement around an extremely photogenic sandwich, the katsu sando. This was

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Japanese fast food: a fried, breaded pork cutlet, some shredded leaves and two kinds of proprietary sauce in soft, white "Shokupan". It was undeniably delicious, but hardly gastronomically distinguished. Yet Japanese cooks cut the sando very carefully and it was always photographed with the cut face exposed – a visually pleasing stack of strata and a very palpable 'Gram hit.

I seem to remember my first sando was at Tonkotsu, a noodle restaurant in London, but soon they were all over the place. Today, the simple idea persists in the magnificent Ibérico sando served by Tayēr + Elementary in Shoreditch. Still simple, still beautiful... and you still feel as compelled to photograph it as you do to eat it.

Meanwhile, across town, Jeremy Lee, a chef with roots deep in the best of British cooking, was beginning a process of moving the sandwich upmarket with his now famous smoked eel number.

"I used to do it at The Blueprint [Café] way back in the day and it was a much bigger affair. Folk loved it," he says. "They would ask for Guinness with it and I'd say, 'No, we don't have Guinness but it's awfully good with Muscadet.' And so it began."

What's most impressive is the long and gentle process that's brought the simple eel sandwich to perfection. As much thought and work has gone into it as any "molecular" chef's "signature" foamy erection.

"Poilâne is the only bread that will work," says Lee. "Every other one we've tried is too rich, too vibrant, too exotic to handle something as simple as smoked fish. I find that endlessly fascinating. Poilâne, when it's not toasted is quite a toothsome little project, but when grilled with butter and served with smoked fish, suddenly becomes another thing... and I just fell in love with it.

"The reason it became smaller was that we wanted something that could become just a very beautiful 'bite' rather than a massive Reuben-scale thing, which, filled with that much smoked fish, would be far too rich and daunting," he adds. "The little pile of red onion is vital. It's not just to make it look pretty. And rather than put the pickle in it, we put it on the side, so we rather moved away from piling everything between two wedges of bread. Hot, crisp, toasted bread with just warm smoked eel inside with a smear of horseradish and mustard, it seemed to come together quite nicely." ▶



'We struggled for a long time to come up with a sandwich that was turned up to 11'

Chef James Ramsden

◀ That's an understatement. Today, the smoked eel sandwich is a fixture on the menu at Quo Vadis, the swish restaurant and private members' club on Dean Street in Soho, alongside the most elegant knife-and-fork courses.

No one is quite sure who first brought the *banh mi* to the UK. It's the result of a terrific cultural mishmash, a street food evolved in Vietnam from local food traditions and those of French colonials. What's fascinating is how almost every element is completely alien to our indigenous sandwich tradition, and yet now it's almost ubiquitous.

Kêu is a Vietnamese deli with branches in Soho, Shoreditch and the City, which, according to the online chatterati, who have taken it upon themselves to arbitrate such things, serves one of the best available - the Cantonese roast duck *banh mi*. It arrives on a white baguette, as it would in Ho Chi Minh City, where the French left a tradition of bakery that continues to this day. The bread is toasted crisp on the outside but remains steamy and soft within. For authenticity, the crumb texture should be more Sunblest than sourdough. At street stands in Vietnam, the bread would be "buttered" with cheap commodity liver pâté, but this is possibly a step too far for most English palates. The sandwich combines a good mayonnaise with a sweet pickled daikon radish and carrot slaw, cucumber and lots of fresh chilli and coriander. As if this weren't enough to give the cultural purists a nosebleed, the Vietnamese acknowledge their Chinese influences with shredded duck in hoisin sauce.

There's something pleasing about this. I remember when the streets where Kêu has sprung up housed Italian snack bars, making sandwiches to order and frantically frothing proto-"expressos" to the parents of the kids now chomping into a *banh mi*.

Americans have always understood the sandwich. There are counters in Manhattan where the combinations of fillings, seasonings, bread and condiments are so numerous and complex as to be effectively infinite. A proud "melting pot" culture has fearlessly stirred together the influences of all its immigrant cuisines - and it's America that inspires the astonishing Highway Dan sandwich at Bodega Rita's in Coal Drops Yard behind King's Cross. Co-founder Missy Flynn is one of many young food entrepreneurs who have



seen the sandwich as a way to stay in the business they love while staying independent of increasingly rapacious backers and rocketing costs. "We started out in 2012 doing a pop-up in Mare Street in Hackney. The core concept was North American with a bit of Mexican in it, Jewish deli food, pasta. For us, it was all the great immigrant cuisines of the US," she says. "We closed the restaurant in 2016 but we had this really nice brand in Rita's and so we thought, 'What can we do with it?' We didn't necessarily want to open a new restaurant, so we sat on it for a while, watching how food and retail were becoming pally. And we came up with Bodega Rita's, 'bodega' being a reference to our memories of the little delis and corner shops in the States.

"We really wanted to bring Rita's back in a way that was interesting

but less reliant on big spaces, big funding and just do our thing. We distilled what we did in the restaurant into a sandwich menu. At Rita's, we used to do devilled eggs as a bar snack with Chinese hot bean paste and sesame oil. Essentially, we just turned that into The Highway Dan sandwich... but this flavour, this taste, has been part of our business journey for eight years."

There is something pleasingly complete about a prawn sandwich at Sons + Daughters near Rita's. It's been put together by a couple of young restaurateurs who won a Michelin star for a place where the menu changed every week. Their neat little neighbourhood sandwich shop has a mainly unchanging menu of complete classics - an egg salad, a mortadella and, best of all, a prawn and mayonnaise... the sandwich where it all began.

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James Ramsden, chef and co-owner, seems to have put an extraordinary amount of thought into something so simple. “We struggled for a long time to come up with a sandwich that was ‘turned up to 11’ but maintained the simple integrity of the prawns. The mayo had to be right. The prawn crackers really had to be right. We tried gem lettuce in there, pickled cucumber, God knows what else. Eventually, we landed on what we have and we’re pretty happy with it – the mayo receives the double MSG hit of sriracha and Maggi.

“Instead of lettuce, we’ve a slaw of thinly sliced napa cabbage, coriander cress, amaranth and pea shoots. Somehow, the idea of a pickled ginger and jalapeño vinaigrette presented itself. We searched until we found prawn crackers that delivered that intensity of shrimp with the added bonus of spice and, well, funk. And it’s the only sandwich we serve on granary because that malty nuttiness just pulls the whole thing together.”

But could Ramsden answer the really tough question about the New Sandwich trend? Better ingredients, harder work on a meal that customers still regard as a snack or “grabbed” convenience – how can that work financially?

“We’re six months in and haven’t figured that out yet. We have brilliant lunchtimes and are steadily busy throughout the rest of the day, but the challenge is to convert the coffee and tea drinkers into sandwich eaters. Until then, it’s going to be hard work – you have to sell a lot of sandwiches to make a business work with London overheads.”

Standing in a queue at the petrol station or the corner shop, it’s hard to look at the huge fridges full of premade sandwiches and not feel a little downhearted. An uninspiring canon of flavours, bread laden with additives, squished salad and awash with industrial mayo. We can only wonder at the supply chain that’s assembled the thing, sealed it into a plastic pod with a puff of inert gas to extend the shelf life and transported it to a “grab’n’go” fridge on some outer arm of the road network. Is this really something we want to lay claim to?

What feels a lot better is the knowledge that the sandwich is also a medium for some serious creativity and a place where young talent can still find a foothold. **FT**

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Tim Hayward is an FT food writer and restaurant critic





Spring awakening

As winter melts away, it is time to welcome the bounty of spring. *Ravinder Bhogal* shares recipes that herald the coming season. Photographs by *Aaron Graubart*



According to the calendar, spring begins in March. The temperature might barely teeter above a few degrees, but, dotted among those dreary days, appears the odd bright, balmy afternoon like fool's gold. In those moments, the winter's chill barely chased from the still foggy air, I watch people throwing themselves into patches of wan sunlight. Spring at its best is so bewitchingly beautiful, it's hard not to throw yourself at it.

Several cultural festivals herald the beginning of spring - the colour and chaos of Holi in India, the saffron-scented Persian feasts of Nowruz and Sakura Matsuri beneath the bubble-gum-pink cherry blossoms in Japan, not to mention the eccentric cheese-rolling festival in Gloucestershire. For the cook, spring is about celebrating the sudden bounty of fresh, new ingredients after a long sparse winter.

Asparagus appears thin and handsome, and from places much closer than Peru. Rhubarb - celery's glamorous sister - makes a brief scene-stealing appearance in a hot-pink frock. And wild garlic, with its exceptionally pungent waft and vernal flavour, bursts prolifically across British woodlands. There are chubby scallops that want for little more than a knob of butter and the kiss of a hot pan, woolly heads of cauliflower, sweet crab, rugged Jersey Royals and exquisite spring lamb, as tender as the night.

All these ingredients bring a lighter mood to the kitchen. And ingredients so delicate and fresh demand cooking methods that are gentler too. Here's to shifting from winter's long braises and carb fest of root vegetables to the lighter, more delicate delights of spring. **FT**

Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of Jikoni; jikonilondon.com



Crab salad with Jersey Royals, nuoc cham and puffed rice

This is a glorious celebration of two stellar spring ingredients. There are endless ways to make a crab-and-potato salad but this one avoids the heft of mayonnaise and relies instead on a sprightly Vietnamese dressing that is clean and light enough for the delicate crab meat to shine through.

Serves four as a starter

- 250g Jersey Royal potatoes
- Knob of butter
- Tiny drizzle of sesame oil
- 500g white crab meat
- 1 long green chilli, finely sliced
- Large handful of Asian micro herbs or some picked coriander
- Large handful of pea shoots
- 50g puffed rice
- Lime wedges to serve

For the nuoc cham

- 50g caster sugar
- 50ml white vinegar
- 50ml fish sauce
- 1 small garlic clove, very finely chopped
- 1 red bird's-eye chilli, finely chopped (deseeded if you don't like too much heat)
- The juice of one lime

1 — To make the nuoc cham, dissolve the caster sugar in 100ml of boiling water in a small pan.

2 — Cool briefly and then stir in the remaining ingredients and set aside.

3 — Slice the potatoes in half vertically and boil in plenty of salted water until tender.

4 — Melt the butter in a frying pan and drizzle in the sesame oil. Lay the

potatoes in the pan in a single layer cut-side down and fry until they are crisp and golden.

5 — Remove from the pan and add some of the dressing while they are still hot - they will really absorb the flavour this way.

6 — Set aside to cool a little.

7 — Dress the crab with about four tablespoons of the dressing and mix together with the potatoes, green chilli, half of the micro herbs and pea shoots.

8 — Pile the salad on to a platter and top with the remaining herbs and puffed rice. Serve immediately with some lime wedges.





Miso-poached chicken with soba noodles and charred sprouting broccoli

Comfort food doesn't have to rely on stodge. It can be light and elegant, yet still reassuring. Here, the chicken is gently poached in a milky sweet miso and Shaoxing wine broth to yield silky tender meat that pulls cleanly away from the bone. And there is the slurp of springy noodles to be had too. The vibrant bite of bitterly robust sprouting broccoli adds friction to an otherwise mellow meal.

Serves four to six

- 1 litre chicken stock
- 250ml Shaoxing wine
- 60g white shiro miso paste
- 6 spring onions, thinly sliced including green ends

- 1 large knob of ginger, sliced
- 1 free-range or organic chicken, jointed, skin removed and reserved – or 6 chicken thighs and leg joints
- 400g purple sprouting broccoli, trimmed
- 400g soba noodles
- 100g bean sprouts
- A little sesame oil
- 100g frozen edamame beans, defrosted and blanched

To taste

- Freshly sliced small red chillies and light soy sauce
- 50g roasted peanuts
- 1 tbs black sesame seeds
- Toasted nori roughly cut into shards

1 — Combine the chicken stock, Shaoxing wine, miso paste, white

parts of the spring onions and ginger in a large saucepan. Stir. Add the pieces of chicken and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, cover and simmer for about 25 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through.

2 — While the chicken is cooking, heat the oven to 180C (fan assist). Roast the chicken skin on a wire rack placed on an oven tray for 20-25 minutes or until it's golden and crisp. Cool. Then shatter into shards.

3 — Meanwhile, boil salted water and blanch the sprouting broccoli for one minute or until tender. Pull out with tongs and refresh

in icy cold water. Boil the soba noodles in the same water, according to the instructions on the packet, drain and divide them into four bowls. Add the bean sprouts.

4 — Drain the broccoli, season with salt and pepper and drizzle over a little sesame oil. Heat a griddle (or any pan) over a high heat until hot and then char the broccoli on it.

5 — Spoon the chicken and broth over noodles. Season to taste with chilli and soy sauce. Lay over broccoli and edamame beans and sprinkle with the green ends of the spring onion, peanuts, sesame seeds, chicken skin and nori. Serve at once.



Rhubarb, custard and Sichuan peppercorn pavlova

For some, rhubarb – good looks aside – can be difficult to fall in love with. Its scarlet stalks are so mouth-puckeringly sharp that they need to be sweet-talked into being more agreeable with a ton of sugar. Here, however, its astringency makes a perfect foil to the marshmallow sweetness of meringue. I have also added Sichuan peppercorns, for their grown-up complexity and pleasing tingle.

For the rhubarb

- 500g rhubarb, sliced into 1cm lengths
- 200g caster sugar
- Thinly peeled rind and juice of three oranges
- 1 tsp Sichuan peppercorns, roughly cracked

For the meringue

- 8 egg whites
- 300g caster sugar
- 1½ heaped tsp Sichuan peppercorns, toasted and coarsely ground in a pestle and mortar plus another teaspoon to garnish
- 50g light brown sugar
- 2 tbs corn flour
- 2 tsp distilled or white vinegar
- 35g toasted flaked almonds

For the custard cream

- 500ml double cream
- 500g good quality ready-made vanilla custard

1 — Preheat the oven to 180C (fan assist). Arrange the rhubarb snugly in a baking dish. Scatter sugar and orange peel, drizzle with juice and scatter the peppercorns. Cover and roast for 10-15 minutes until the rhubarb is tender but not falling apart. Leave to cool in the syrup.

2 — For the meringue, preheat oven to 140C (fan assist). Line two baking sheets with baking parchment and draw on two circles about the size of a 22cm dinner plate.

3 — Whisk the egg whites and a pinch of salt in an electric mixer until you have soft peaks then gradually add the caster sugar a little at a time, whisking to combine. Meanwhile, crush the peppercorns in a pestle and mortar and mix in the brown sugar and corn flour. Add this mixture to the egg whites and continue to whisk until it's firm and glossy. Whisk in the vinegar.

4 — Divide evenly onto the lined trays and bake for one hour and 15 minutes, swapping and turning occasionally, until the meringue is crisp and dry to touch. Turn off the heat and leave meringues in the oven with the door slightly ajar for about 45 minutes to cool completely. Carefully remove from the trays and set aside, while you prepare the cream.

5 — Just before serving, whisk the cream into soft peaks, the texture of rumpled sheets and carefully fold in the custard. Drain the rhubarb and add a couple of tablespoons of the rhubarb juice to create a rippled effect. The remaining juice makes an excellent cordial for drinks.

6 — To assemble, place one meringue on a serving platter, spread with half the cream, top with the remaining meringue, then the remaining cream. Pile on rhubarb, scatter with more crushed peppercorns and toasted almonds, drizzle with a little more of the juice and serve immediately.

The real Easter egg hunt

Forget mass-produced chocolate, there are other seasonal food traditions we should cherish, writes *Bee Wilson*. Illustration by *Madalina Andronic*

When Irina Georgescu moved to the UK from Romania 11 years ago, she kept asking British people what their traditional Easter foods were. What special breads did people bake for Easter weekend and what foods did they celebrate with at family gatherings? Georgescu was puzzled to receive the answer that our main Easter food was chocolate – lots and lots of mass-produced chocolate. As a food writer and author of a wonderful new cookbook called *Carpathia: Food from the Heart of Romania*, this hardly seemed possible to her. Growing up in Bucharest, she never ate chocolate eggs. Instead, the flavours of Easter were the flavours of spring produce: of spring onions and garlic, of the green herbs and the newest raw vegetables, of lamb, of incredibly rich yeasted cakes, of young cheeses and, above all, of eggs – real golden-yolked eggs, not sugary ones wrapped in foil.

In theory, Easter food should comprise the freshest flavours of the whole year, reflecting this moment of green shoots and new beginnings. In the Valencia region of Spain, Easter is traditionally celebrated with vegetable soups (or *menestra*) filled with all the fresh green leaves and pods of the season such as chard, cardoons and peas, as food historian María José Sevilla explains in *Delicioso: A History of Food in Spain*. Sevilla tells me that another of her favourite things to eat at Easter is a dish of

spinach with pine nuts and raisins that is beloved among Catalans. “You are tasting the vegetables of spring,” she says.

Easter traditions are changing, though, even in Spain. There is Spanish Easter cake with a brioche-like texture called *Mona de Pascua*. For centuries, it was topped with boiled eggs as a symbol of new life but now, Sevilla tells me, it is usually flavoured with chocolate instead.

There is something about all this chocolate that deadens our palates at just the moment we should be waking them up. Commercial chocolate eggs have dominated British Easter celebrations for so many years that we can’t even see how strange it is that we mark a festival of rebirth with the same claggy-sweet confectionery that we eat year-round. Aside from hot cross buns and roast lamb, we have almost completely lost our collective memory of older food traditions at Easter.

The first chocolate Easter egg was produced by JS Fry in Bristol in 1873 and, gradually, chocolate established itself as the British Easter food par excellence. Even in 1967, a folk historian called Venetia Newall complained that “today unfortunately”, instead of boiling and decorating fresh hen’s eggs, “English people tend to buy chocolate eggs at the confectioners”. These days, you don’t need to go to a sweet shop to find a chocolate egg. You just walk to the nearest supermarket and find yourself stumbling over towers of

them in heavily promoted, huge, colourful boxes.

I’m not denying that a chocolate egg – or bunny or Darth Vader – can be joyous. Some of my happiest memories of family life are of doing Easter egg hunts in the garden with my children or watching them break open a larger chocolate egg and marvel greedily as the seemingly impenetrable shell cracks open into rich, shiny shards. We have also made our fair share of chocolate nest cakes topped with mini eggs. But I also wish that we could have a few more cultural associations for Easter food that don’t revolve around chocolate.

Most people in Britain would regard you as crazy if you handed them a boiled egg for a gift instead of one from Hotel Chocolat. Yet, for generations, it was perfectly normal to exchange real eggs that

people had boiled and decorated themselves. From the Middle Ages until the second world war, Easter wouldn’t have been Easter in Britain without boiled coloured eggs, which were eaten both for their symbolism and because Christians denied themselves eggs during Lent.

“Oh when will Easter come, bringing with her red eggs?” is an old children’s rhyme in Macedonia. These coloured eggs are still a festive feature in many European countries. The old name for them in Britain was paste eggs (from the word paschal) and they were tinted with various natural dyes that went into the water as the eggs boiled: cochineal for red, spinach for green, onion skin for yellow.

To make them look even prettier, they were boiled with leaves or flowers tied on to the shell, which left mysterious markings like a

Easter food should comprise the freshest flavours of the whole year, reflecting this moment of green shoots and new beginnings

fossil. Mrs Herdman, the champion egg decorator of Northumberland in the 1960s, was said to use a wide range of leaves on her eggs including wild carrot, roses and fern. She learnt how to decorate them from her father, a milkman, who gave a coloured egg to each of the customers on his Easter milk round. He wrote each name on the shell using hot wax from a tallow candle before dipping it in dye. I find this such a lovely idea.

Like modern Easter eggs, these decorated ones were part food and part toy, used for children’s games such as egg-rolling competitions. Sometimes, children played “egg conkers”, tapping them against each other until one broke open. Georgescu tells me that this game still happens as part of the Orthodox Easter in Romania. Two people each hold up a dyed hard-boiled egg.

One says: “Christ is risen”, and the other replies: “Indeed he is risen.” The first person then tries to crack the second person’s egg. “Often,” she says, “both people lose”, but that doesn’t matter because then they get to eat the eggs.

In Romania, these dyed eggs still form the starter for the main meal on Easter Sunday, which sounds like an extraordinary feast even for non-believers. Traditionally, as Georgescu explains, in Carpathia it was the only time of year that Romanians ate lamb. Her father would head to the market in Bucharest and buy a whole lamb. “We used every bit of it, nothing went to waste,” she tells me. Some of the lamb would be made into a kind of herb-scented terrine called *drob*, for which there is a recipe in Georgescu’s book. The terrine looks very fine, with a seam of bright

hard-boiled eggs running through it. On the Easter table, there would also be sour lamb broth – *bors* – and roast lamb rubbed with garlic and rosemary and “a lot of fresh, raw vegetables, all seasonal: spring onions and garlic, radishes, fresh gherkins and tomatoes”.

The Romanian Easter dish I now most long to eat is *stufat*: a lamb stew made with the green tops of spring onions and garlic, and then finished with lots of dill and parsley and eaten with polenta. In spirit, perhaps it is not so far removed from our own roast lamb and mint sauce. In both cases, the bitter herbs allude to the bitter herbs of Passover. The difference, however, is that the British leg of lamb is usually served without much sense of ritual, whereas in Romania, at least in Georgescu’s family, the meaning is very much alive. Her mother always makes a point of having “something new” on the table, whether it is the first cucumbers of the season or the newest garlic, because all the ingredients for Easter needed to be “meaningful... to symbolise renewal”.

In the absence of shared food traditions, we need to reinvent our own (or borrow them from others). There are certain things I make each year for my family during the Easter holidays that make me feel especially spring-like, whether they are strictly traditional or not. Most years, I make a crisp fish pie from filo pastry, seasoned with masses of green herbs. I also love to make anything featuring egg yolks, whether it is a garlicky salad of watercress and new potatoes with squidgy boiled eggs or super-citrusy lemon curd (so good on a hot cross bun).

Another treat that I associate with Easter is an omelette made with wild garlic and sorrel, a simple meal that makes me feel somehow more alive with each mouthful. I had been making this for years before I read in a book by Elisabeth Luard that a herb omelette was what she ate every year for Easter lunch as a child in northern France. The Easter omelette of her childhood was cooked in foaming butter until it was a “plump juicy bolster” and the children took it to the bottom of the garden and ate it with their fingers. It’s worth remembering that our current chocolate glut is something new and that there was once a time when real eggs were the Easter prize. **FT**

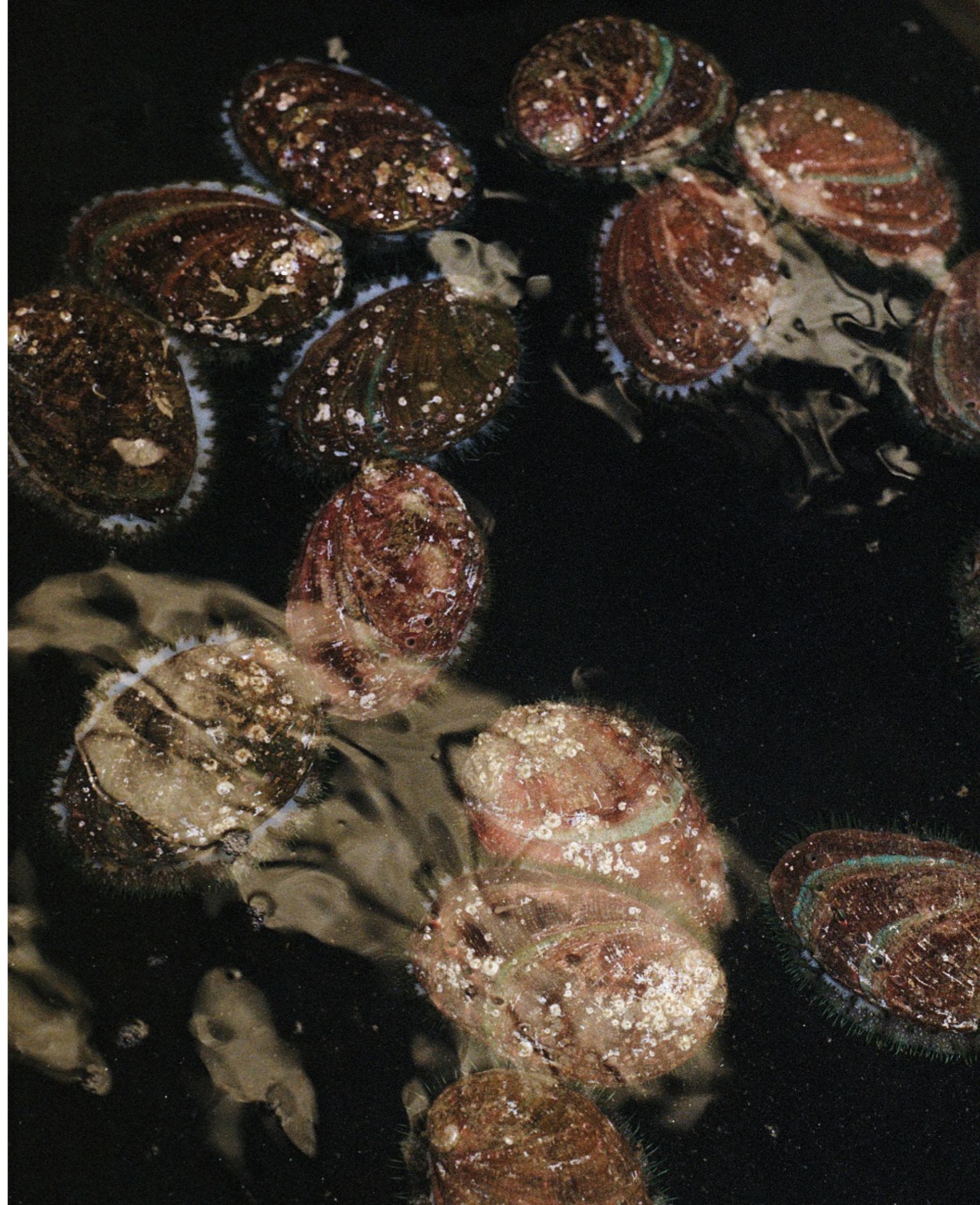
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Bee Wilson is a food writer and author of “*The Way We Eat Now*”





REFLECTIONS IN A ROCK POOL

Farmed fishing is the future. But can it be ecologically sound? *Wendell Steavenson* visits a French abalone farm to find out. Photographs by *Rebekka Deubner*



was holed up in Brittany this winter, pretending to write. At high tide I swam, at low tide I walked along the seashore staring into rock pools. After Brexit was formally begun on January 31, there was a series of storms. One left a scrim of multicoloured plastics along the high-tide mark, another cracked a concrete jetty in two. All sorts of creatures were heaved up from the depths and caught in rocky crevices: big spiral whelks, the long elegant razor clams, bright orange starfish, a whole gasping bass of some kind, wild oysters, a whole live scallop that I took home to eat. I also found shells of the rare European abalone, whose opalescent interiors shimmer so enticingly.

The Asian abalone, big and meaty, is far more famous than its smaller, browner, European cousin, which can be found - with difficulty, because they are nocturnal and hide under rocks - from Morocco to the Channel Islands. In France, they are called *ormeaux*; in the Channel Islands, ormer. It turns out there is an abalone farm at Plouguerneau, in a rocky bay a little north of Brest, so I went to visit.

Sylvain Huchette started the farm, named France Haliotis, in 2004, after he came back from Melbourne University with a PhD in abalone ecology. In a yard outside were 40 or 50 big seawater tanks. In these were slotted plastic slides covered in algae fields and spotted with grazing baby abalone. When they are about 10 months old, the babies are transferred to big cages and set in the open sea to grow for a further two or three years.

Inside a big warehouse shed, where France Haliotis has its offices and rudimentary research lab, a few tanks of live abalone are kept for direct sale. Huchette picked out some to show me. Their mollusc-muscle bodies, with a ruffle of black feelers around the edge, stretched and contracted like a big fat snail.

A sought-after Asian delicacy, wild abalone have been fished to the brink of extinction around the world. Most of the species are on endangered lists. The Japanese first began to rear them in fisheries to bolster wild stocks in the 1970s. About the same time, as Asian markets were opening up and refrigerated transportation methods developed, abalone populations were ravaged, first in California, then in Australia and South Africa. Prices have always been high and poaching, even in the shark-infested waters off South Africa, is common. In the 2000s, the Chinese started abalone farming; they now produce 150,000 tonnes a year - compared with about 10,000 tonnes fished wild globally.

We have farmed the land for millennia; we are now turning to the sea. Overfished species - salmon, shrimp, sturgeon for caviar - are being raised in pens. A generation ago, almost all the fish we ate was caught in the wild; in the past few years, the tonnage of farmed fish produced has overtaken the amount of fish caught at sea.

Much of this new aquaculture is as environmentally problematic as much of our conventional chemical agriculture. In most farms, for example, abalone are fed on pellets, which are partly fish meal - in essence, feeding meat to vegetarians, with unknown long-term



Prices for wild abalone have always been high and poaching, even in the shark-infested waters off South Africa, is common



Clockwise from far left: Sylvain Huchette holds a live abalone at the France Haliotis farm he started in 2004; abalone are hauled ashore in a cage at France Haliotis; seaweed and crustaceans in the cage

consequences. Huchette's abalone farm is part of the new "blue economy" that hopes to follow the ecological and ethical example of the "green economy". He has organic certification and feeds his abalone only fresh seaweed, the food they eat naturally. He pointed out the green and brown stripes on their shells, which showed the progression of their diet, from brown kelps in winter to purplish dulse in autumn and green sea lettuce in summer.

Huchette has begun to grow his own seaweeds and is investing in new larger tanks. At the moment, the economics of growing seaweed in Europe are unclear. It takes quite a lot of energy to aerate and agitate the water in the tanks, a big operation needs a large amount of coastal land, which tends to be expensive, and Asian farmed seaweed is cheaper. But as aquaculture grows, that may change. It's not easy, admits Huchette, but he can turn his seaweed into abalone, a premium product. France Haliotis became profitable three years ago and that profitability has been improving ever since.

In the offshore abalone cages and in the nursery tanks, Huchette likes to keep small rockfish and wrasse to eat the shrimpy amphipods that eat the seaweeds, as well as anemones to help filter the water. "I love to eat anemones fried up," he said. "The batter is crunchy and inside is soft with a strong taste." He is thinking too about raising complementary species. An experiment ►

◀ with queen scallops didn't go so well last year. Sea cucumbers, a favourite Asian dish, might work; they have been overfished and prices are rising. "We are trying to recreate an ecological system in the tank or in the cage," Huchette explained. "It's called a multitrophic approach."

Twenty years ago, France fished 120 tonnes of abalone a year. Then, disease all but destroyed the population in Normandy; overfishing has also reduced stocks in Brittany. Now wild abalone are down to 40 tonnes a year, "less than truffles, less than caviar", said Huchette. They are so rare that you are unlikely to glimpse them even at a fancy fishmonger, where they can go for €80 a kilo or more and are tagged with a special red or blue seal to show they were not illegally foraged.

France Haliotis produces about seven tonnes of abalone a year. (There is only one other abalone farm in the country and it is smaller and raises all its abalone in tanks on land.) Huchette works with scientists to understand the life cycles of the abalone and the seaweed they eat. He breeds them selectively, just as farmers do cows, pigs, chickens and sheep so they are suited both to their environment and to human needs. "What we are really trying to do is to domesticate the species," he told me. "Farmed animals have lived with man for aeons and are bred for that; abalone, for the moment, are still wild animals, they are less adapted."

Frederic Laurans, Huchette's foreman, fished one out for me, shucked it easily with a single knife stroke, bashed it twice with a mallet to tenderise and fried it up, a few minutes each side, in foaming butter. Its flesh was denser than scallop, smoother than octopus; a little crunchy outside, inside tender. It didn't taste at all of briny iodine like oysters; it tasted instead of hazelnuts and mushrooms. It was unexpectedly delicious.

When he started, Huchette exported most of his abalone to Asia, but now almost all is consumed in France and half in Brittany. France is the main producer and consumer of European abalone and France Haliotis is the main player in farmed abalone in Europe. But overall, Europe has a net trade deficit in abalone (about €500,000) - and imports farmed abalone from Australia, Chile and New Zealand, the majority for the UK market. France Haliotis hosts tours from schoolchildren and pensioners; anyone can come and buy their abalone directly. The local market, said Huchette, just made sense. "We are very happy that we can feed our communities," said Laurans.

Huchette comes from the north of France but he chose to farm abalone at the very western tip of Brittany, because that's where the Iroise Sea - a microclimate at the confluence of the Bay of Biscay, the Atlantic Ocean and the entrance to the Channel - provides the European abalone's perfect Goldilocks temperature range, stable and relatively cold. It also hosts a wonderfully diverse marine ecosystem. For this reason, one of the oldest marine laboratories in France was established in Roscoff, just a little along the north coast.

I met Philippe Potin, who specialises in seaweed research at the Roscoff Biological Station, as Storm Dennis blew outside. The aquaria had a sea view, crabbing boats yawing and rolling at the quayside; clouds of water,



Clockwise from top: an abalone is picked on the boat; baby abalones are cultivated on sheets at the France Haliotis farm; starfish and other sea life at the Roscoff Biological Station, one of the oldest marine laboratories in France

'Farmed animals have lived with man for aeons and are bred for that; abalone, for the moment, are still wild animals, they are less adapted'

Sylvain Huchette

half-sea mist, half-rain swept in pocket gusts. Inside, tanks bubbled with aerated seawater and collections of local species: thick black sea slugs, sulking crabs all piled up on each other in one corner, sponges like pinkish lumps of Styrofoam, spiny sea urchins, spidery feather stars; anemones waved purple tentacles, "some of these are edible", and a tank of bulbous condoms, "two siphon tunicates, very simple creatures", explained Potin, as he fished one out and it squirted a jet of water. "They act like filters for the sea."

Scientists - Nobel Prize-winners among them - come here to study the marine fauna of the north Brittany coast. "A lot of these animals are very interesting to study to understand human evolution and development," said Potin. "Starfish eggs, for example, are really important in understanding how cells divide."

The old taxonomy of animals is becoming obsolete. We are not the individual, separate organisms we imagine ourselves. Instead, scientists now talk about a "holobiont" - a living microecosystem - to describe the complex relationships between a host and all the bacteria and viruses and fungi that inhabit it and influence its function.

Potin has been working with Huchette to investigate how different seaweeds affect the microbiome of the abalone. Seaweed may also have an effect on the human microbiome. His eyes sparked as he described this new world of discovery. For example, just three months ago, Chinese scientists claimed to have isolated a sugar compound found in kelp that acts not on human cells, but on certain bacteria in the human microbiome. These bacteria affect signals to the brain that prevent the formation of plaque, the beta amyloid that creates brain damage. If borne out, this discovery could help lead to the first new drugs to treat Alzheimer's in 17 years. "So you see! There is a real connection between the gut and the brain!"

Over coffee we talked macro- and microscopic, global events and local consequences. From the biological to the ecological, we are only beginning to understand the interconnections of animals, plants, virus and bacteria and the vital importance of diverse ecosystems.

"Seaweeds are a keystone species," Potin explained. "They are at the bottom of the food chain." Changes in seaweed fields are a canary in the coal mine of ecological shifts, such as rising sea temperatures and acidification of oceans. At the same time, seaweed fields are like marine rainforests, absorbing carbon dioxide. Over the past 50 years, more than a third of the world's kelp forests have declined.

Fish are moving too. The local cod fishery, a fisherman in Roscoff admitted to me with a grimace, had all but collapsed; the quota this year was practically zero. Mackerel has migrated north to colder waters. Another fisherman told me the fish has been caught recently in Iceland, "where they never were before". Potin nodded: "Species are changing their habitat. Ecosystems are moving. The question is, can species adapt as fast as the sea is changing? That is the challenge. Some species are adapting quite well; octopuses, for example, are appearing in Brittany, where they never were. Octopus are very adaptable."

We need to adapt too. Brittany in February was full of talk about what Brexit would mean for coastal ports that relied on fishing and tourism. The mayor of Roscoff worried that the "Roscoff corridor", with its ferry terminal, transporting goods and passengers to and from Plymouth and Ireland, would turn into a border. Boris Johnson said he wanted to "take back control of Britain's seas." In Brussels, Michel Barnier, the chief EU negotiator, said UK access to European markets would be directly linked to access to British waters for European fishing boats.

One French fisherman I talked to told me that if he was shut out of British coastal waters, he didn't know how he could continue to make a living. The head of the fish auction at Roscoff hoped an intelligent solution would be reached. On the way home from the Roscoff Biological Station, I stopped at the big booze supermarket on the turn-off to the ferry terminal. The proprietor told me (in perfect English) that he was not sure what would happen to his business if there were import restrictions for Brits, who represented a third of his customers. The uncertainty was difficult, he said. "It's like when there's a cloud in the sky and it could be a storm, a small shower or no rain at all."

I bought a dozen abalone from France Haliotis and cooked them up for friends with a seaweed salad of local dulse and kelp. The storms subsided and the weather returned to its usual rotation of rain and sun. There are a lot of rainbows in Brittany. I swam in the harbour, jade water glowed against a dark grey sky, and watched as one of the perennial fishermen on the pier swung a freshly caught bass into his bucket. At the market one morning, I bought a spider crab and some live shrimp from Isabelle Biannic the fishmonger, whose husband used to be a fisherman but is now retired. Holobiont is a wonderful word. We are all of us communities within and without. **FT**

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Wendell Steavenson writes about food and other things

Green shoots

The dawn of spring means British asparagus season is also approaching. *Jacob Kenedy* on three of the tastiest ways to prepare the prized vegetable. Photographs by *Rick Pushinsky*

One of the first reviews of Bocca di Lupo

pondered whether we were the first green shoots after the downturn of 2008 - we opened right at the nadir of the recession. Morale is also low today: the UK is consumed by coronavirus, divided by Brexit and suddenly - excruciatingly - aware of climate change. Yet spring is coming, buds will break and British asparagus season starts on April 23. Let's hope those tender spears represent the first green shoots of happier times.

We Brits invented football, rugby and tennis - and everyone else seems to win these sports except us (as Flanders and Swann observed, "they practise beforehand, which ruins the fun"). But we still grow the best rhubarb. And the finest asparagus.

Tasteless imposters, flown from far-flung corners of the world, sit on supermarket shelves all year round. Come the European season, however, we get something different. First Ligurian and Emilian purple spears, which should be on your plate already, then French green, then Spanish and German white. Finally, in a brief crescendo of verdant joy, England climaxes with fat green spears thrust from the sod.

Asparagus spears are the immature shoots of a perennial plant with finely divided fronds, like a fern or fennel. The fattest are the most prized - and a great number of weedy sprouts are sacrificed to give room for these plump spears to grow. Yet fine, gangly sprue is arguably the best asparagus you can get because it has more of the tasty green exterior relative to the pithy innards. At the very start of the English season - or even just before - savvy shoppers can pick up great bunches of it for a song. The season continues, with fatter and fatter spears, until it ends abruptly on midsummer's day, when the remaining shoots are allowed to grow and open, to photosynthesise and nourish their rootstock.

To boil asparagus properly, first snap the bases at their natural break. Most people do this wrongly. You must not just bend the spear and see where it snaps. Hold the tip of the woody end firmly in one hand. Use your thumb and forefinger on the other to grasp it just above and apply some pressure to the stem - it won't break, because it's too tough. Slide this second hand gradually up the spear, maintaining constant firm sideways pressure, until you reach the lowest

point on the spear, where it's fragile enough to break. You will sever the woody stub at precisely the point where all that is good to eat remains, no more, no less. Bring well-salted water (12g/litre - salty enough to season the asparagus as they cook) to a rolling boil, immerse the asparagus and cook for three minutes until just tender, just crunchy, not raw. And cook far too many - it's surprising how many you can eat and leftovers can be served cold or in salad or added to another recipe (all three below can be prepared with cooked asparagus). Serve with abundant warm butter (melted butter, hollandaise or butter whisked into boiling salted lemon juice to emulsify) and a big smile.

After a great number of these binges, like a once-faithful spouse of many years, you may yearn for something different. Such desires are dirty and immoral, of course - asparagus should only ever be boiled in well-salted water until just tender, then served with butter. But here are three recipes to satisfy them anyway. ►

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Jacob Kenedy is chef-patron of Bocca di Lupo in London; boccadilupo.com





Tortellini and asparagus

Tortellini is one of the many great pastas from Emilia-Romagna. They should be tiny (shaped after Venus's navel as spied through a keyhole by a lusty innkeeper, according to legend), fine and handmade, filled with prosciutto and Parmesan, and most traditionally served in clear chicken broth. Or with ragù or cream or – in spring – cream and asparagus.

You can use leftover cooked asparagus here, in which case don't boil it with the pasta but add to the frying pan with the hot, cooked pasta, chopped in 2cm chunks, from cold.

Serves two to three as a main course, four to six as a starter

- 2 bunches (500g) asparagus
- 50g butter
- 150ml double cream
- Nutmeg (a few grates)
- Freshly ground pepper
- 250g-300g fresh tortellini (or prosciutto cappelletti)
- 50g grated Parmesan

- 1 — Bring a pan of well-salted water to a boil (10g-12g salt per litre).
- 2 — Break the woody bases off the asparagus and

discard. Cut the edible parts into 2cm lengths.

3 — Put the butter, cream and a good few grates of nutmeg in a wide frying pan, along with a fair bit of freshly ground pepper.

4 — Boil the tortellini and asparagus together.

5 — Heat the frying pan with the butter, cream and nutmeg on a medium heat until it just comes to a boil.

6 — Depending on thickness, fresh tortellini (or cappelletti) normally take about three minutes to cook. Taste them regularly and drain when still al dente, reserving a bit of the cooking water.

7 — Put the drained asparagus and pasta in the frying pan of boiling cream and turn up the heat. Cook until the cream is reduced enough to coat the pasta. If it's too dry (or if the pasta is too al dente), add a splash of the pasta water and cook until you're happy.

8 — Serve with grated Parmesan on top.

Grilled asparagus with walnut sauce

There is a delightful contrast between charred smoky flavours and the bright green freshness of spring vegetables. Grilled asparagus are great on their own, but even more seductive draped with lardo or pancetta – or served with a walnut sauce.

This recipe will yield about 300g of walnut sauce, twice as much as you'll need, but the minimum that seems practicable. Use the other half as a sauce for stuffed pasta, green beans or roast chicken. Or just eat it as a dip.

Serves four as a starter, two as a main

For the walnut sauce (twice as much as needed)

- 100g shelled walnuts
- 1 clove garlic
- 4 tbs extra virgin olive oil
- 30g grated Parmesan

For the grilled asparagus

- 2 bunches (500g) asparagus
- 1 tbs extra virgin olive oil

For the walnut sauce

1 — Soak the walnuts in boiling water for 15 minutes. Cool to tepid, then drain. This softens them and removes excessive bitterness – a scourge of poor quality or older nuts.

2 — Finely process the walnuts and garlic in the bowl of a mini food processor or with a stick blender. Or, with a little elbow grease, you can use a pestle and mortar.

3 — When the walnuts won't get any finer, add the oil and process or pound again – the oil will lubricate them and allow you to take a step closer to creaminess.

4 — Add 125ml water, season generously with salt and pepper, and process until smooth.

5 — The sauce can be used immediately, warmed in a small pan or refrigerated for up to three days. If warmed or stored, you will need to add more water, as in either case the nuts will absorb the water added beforehand.

For the grilled asparagus

1 — Preheat a barbecue or griddle pan until smoking hot.

2 — Break the woody bases off the asparagus and discard.

3 — Rub the asparagus with the oil and season with salt.

4 — Grill for about 10 minutes, turning a quarter turn every few minutes, until each side has just as much char as you like.

5 — Spoon some of the walnut sauce on each plate (two tablespoons for a starter, four for a main), and divide the asparagus equally between them.



Asparagus and potato frittata

It's funny how tortilla has become emblematic of authentic Spanish cooking – at least in Britain – while the Italian frittata has a frisson of desperate home cooking and Tupperware. Up to a point, they are the same dish – a thick, tepid omelette with various inclusions.

Yet the Spaniards have standardised their version and, just as you know what to expect in a bowl of ramen or bottle of Burgundy, so you know that tortilla should contain softened potato and very softened onion. The frittata knows no such bounds, however. It can be whole egg or egg white, thick or thin, buttery or oily, studded with wild asparagus or mushrooms or fresh Tropea onions or baby fish or spaghetti.

This one is laced with spring: cultivated asparagus and wild garlic, if you can get it – which is to say, if you live in reach of a green space or farmers' market.

Serves four

The frittata can be cooked on the stove top (flipped in the pan), or finished in the oven. In either case, you need a 22cm non-stick frying pan (+/- 2cm). If finishing in the oven, ensure the handle is heatproof and preheat the oven to 200C (fan assist).

The trick to cooking a great frittata is to make sure the mixture is warm before it goes in the pan. It will take less time to cook it, which means the outside needn't overcook and the inside can be kept slightly gooey without being runny.

- Leftover cooked potatoes – 350g of baked or boiled potatoes or 250g roasted – or a large waxy potato, cut into wedges and boiled or roasted.
- 2 fresh wet onions in the green (with their leeky tops), or a bunch of spring onions (or one medium leek) cleaned
- 1 bunch (250g) asparagus
- 2 tbs extra virgin olive oil (plus a teaspoon more if cooking the frittata on the stove top)
- 6 large eggs, room temperature
- 70g grated Pecorino Romano (or Parmesan)
- ½ small bunch basil, leaves picked (15-20 leaves)
- 50g wild garlic leaves (optional)

1 – Cut the cooked potato and raw onion (including the greens) into 2cm chunks.

2 – Break the woody bases off the asparagus and discard. Cut the edible parts into 2cm lengths.

3 – Set the asparagus and onion in your frying pan over a high heat with one tablespoon of the oil. Add salt and pepper and fry, stirring every minute or so, for six minutes until properly hot throughout, the vegetables will still be pretty raw.

4 – Break the eggs into a bowl, add the Pecorino and plenty of pepper and beat well.

5 – Cut the basil and wild garlic leaves (if using) into 2cm pieces and stir into the egg.

6 – When the vegetables are hot, add them into the beaten eggs and stir immediately. Unless you are fearful of raw egg, taste for seasoning.

7 – Return the pan to the heat until smoking. Add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil followed immediately by the egg mixture.

8 – Shake the pan over the heat for 10 seconds to settle the mixture and ensure it doesn't stick.

9 – Cook the frittata:
a. EITHER: Lower the heat to minimum (just bubbling round the edges), cook for seven minutes and turn out on to a plate (which must be precisely the diameter of your pan). Return the pan to the heat, add one teaspoon of oil, slide the frittata back to the pan, tuck in the edges with a spoon, and cook for a further seven minutes until still, but not very, wobbly. Turn again and cook for 30 seconds to perfect the shape. Then turn out on to a plate.
b. OR: Put the pan in the oven and cook for 15 minutes or until almost set, but still a touch wobbly in the middle. Then turn it out on to a plate.

10 – Allow the frittata to cool before eating – I like to serve it still warm from the oven but no longer hot.



ASPARAGUS SUPPLIED BY NATOORA

Cook far too many – it's surprising how many you can eat and leftovers can be served cold

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Jancis Robinson Wine

Jewels of the valley

How could one resist a wine district with its own dialect, Boontling, which, according to Wikipedia, is “now mostly spoken by ageing counter-culturists”? Its northern limit is known locally as “the deep end” and the district’s special, tiny, mint-scented flower, whose perfume some pick up in its wines, is called pennyroyal. But it wasn’t vocabulary that drew me to Anderson Valley in Mendocino County during a recent visit to northern California. It was the quality of its wines, especially its Pinot Noir.

This grape is hugely fashionable in the US and trend-conscious producers have been seeking out the coolest (in both senses) California wine regions where it’s grown – from the Sonoma Coast in the north to Sta Rita Hills down south in Santa Barbara County. But Anderson Valley, while being decidedly cool – too cool to ripen grapes on some valley floor sites – makes wines that have fragrant charm, rather than austerity. And they can be quite reasonably priced.

Named after a family who helped wrest California from Mexican control in the mid-19th century, the valley is about 15 miles long, narrow and heavily wooded.

It’s even further north than the fashionable newish vineyards of Sonoma Coast, just one coastal ridge away. The only way in is via the two-lane Highway 128 that threads through its redwoods and apple orchards. Give or take a logging truck, it’s very much off the beaten track.

Entirely different in ethos from slick Napa Valley and even Sonoma, Anderson Valley provided hideouts for marijuana growers long before weed was legalised. There had been small-scale experimentation in growing grape-based intoxicants over the years. Navarro, for example, have been making some of California’s finest Riesling and Gewürztraminer since the 1970s. Yet it was only when champagne



As imagined by Leon Edler

Some lovely Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs

With alcohol levels and recommended retail prices in the US

I scored these 17 out of 20 (a high mark for me):

- Anthill Farms 2018, 13.3% \$40
- Drew, Morning Dew Ranch 2018, 13% \$70
- Maggy Hawk, Jolie 2018, 13.8% \$65

I scored these 16.5 out of 20:

- Bravium, Wiley Vineyard 2018, 13.1% \$39
- Copain, Abel 2018 12.9% \$65
- Hartford Court, Velvet Sisters 2018, 14.1% \$75
- Husch 2018, 13.9% \$25
- Long Meadow Ranch 2018, 13.5% \$42
- Witching Stick, Dowser’s Cuvée 2018, 14% \$42



Tasting notes on JancisRobinson.com. Stockists via Wine-searcher.com



producer Louis Roederer came to make sparkling wine here in the early 1980s that the district was put on the international wine map. (Fellow *Champenois*, as well as some cava producers, all chose sites much further south, which have proved less resilient to climate change.)

In 1988, Kendall-Jackson (now Jackson Family Wines) – the operation responsible for the sales phenomenon Kendall-Jackson Vintner’s Reserve Chardonnay – bought the Edmeades vineyard. Today, it owns four estate vineyards in the valley, including Maggy Hawk and Skycrest. Like all the best sites, they are well above the frost-prone valley floor but also cooled by the Pacific fogs that swirl in nightly

‘Anderson Valley was put on the map when Louis Roederer made sparkling wine there in the 1980s’

from the “deep end”. The fogs extend only about halfway down the valley, so elevation is even more important for southern vineyards, which need to be high enough to catch the afternoon ocean breeze.

Other early high-profile incomers included Ted Lemon, whose Littorai Pinot Noirs – from Sonoma Coast and Anderson Valley – are now some of California’s most admired. A more recent – and controversial – arrival has been Rhys Vineyards, a producer that was initially established by burgundy-loving venture capitalist Kevin Harvey in the Santa Cruz Mountains above Silicon Valley. The re-sculpting of his Anderson Valley site earned him a fine of \$3.7m for water violations last year. Rhys’s steep, west-facing vineyard is called Bearwallow; the wine from a particularly special plot within it, Porcupine Hill.

Before taking over as winemaker at Rhys, Jeff Brinkman had worked in Anderson Valley where he’d ▶

◀ been impressed by its potential to produce wines with “that crunchy red fruit and a really pretty floral character”. Brinkman was a fan of the varied elevations and soils of the Bearwallow site. Rhys is building a new winery for Bearwallow nearby to avoid having to truck its Mendocino grapes all the way south of San Francisco. Rhys also has a new Mendocino project based on Italian grapes.

The northern deep end is the coolest, not because it’s further from the equator but because it’s closest to the Pacific. One of the northernmost vineyards is Jackson’s Maggy Hawk, lovingly tended by Sarah Wuethrich, who describes her most distant parcel of vines, the Bear Block, as “sacrificial”, so attractive is it to local wildlife, especially bears.

She has found the Anderson Valley grape-growing community “super tightknit”. That said, a current study of the local terroir is exposing a rift between younger producers, who see the development of official sub-regions as a celebration of the differences between various parts of the valley, and old-timers, who worry that developing sub-regions would be perceived as a qualitative ranking. It’s a familiar conflict.

Mendocino is the general appellation here and it’s how most of the wines made in the wider, warmer valley to the east are sold. But on this last visit, I found myself fascinated by Yorkville Highlands, the appellation to the immediate south of Anderson Valley, and even

more fascinated by Mendocino Ridge, which lies between Anderson Valley and the chilly Pacific well to the west. Mendocino Ridge is known as “Islands in the Sky” because it applies exclusively to land above 1,200ft – hills that are generally above the fog line but fully exposed to marine onslaughts. At 2,600ft, the Mariah Vineyard is the second highest in California, yet it’s a stone’s throw from the ocean. A newish part-time operation Minus Tide has made some particularly promising wines from this and other Mendocino Ridge vineyards.

One Anderson Valley grower dismissed Yorkville Highlands as “a geological mishmash”. But I tasted some pretty inspiring Syrah grown at 2,500ft on fashionable schist by a British couple who work in Silicon Valley during the week and tend their Halcon vines and wines at weekends. They fell in love with Rhône wines on a trip there with British Rhône specialist wine writer John Livingstone-Learmonth and are doing their best at emulation.

The recommendations on the previous page are based on a tasting of 21 Anderson Valley 2018 Pinot Noirs that are yet to be released. They all seemed to me quite ready to enjoy but they probably won’t reach even the US market until later this year. Whatever the vintage, I’d be confident in recommending virtually any Anderson Valley Pinot from Anthill Farms, Copain, Littorai and Rhys. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson

MY ADDRESSES — ATHENS

NIKOS ROUSSOS, CHEF



— If there’s one thing Athenians are good at, it’s coffee. **Peek A Bloom**, a stylish café hidden in the historic centre, is my new favourite place to start the day. All the beans are single origin and roasted in-house.

— For a taste of traditional street food, pop into **Kostas** on Pentelis Street for a *souvlaki* – cubed grilled meat (usually chicken beef or pork) wrapped in soft pitta bread. They have been making them in the same way for more than 65 years and there’s a huge queue every lunch time.

— There’s no better way to cool off after lunch than with a Black Forest ice cream from **Le Greche** pastry shop (above right). For an afternoon tittle, make your way to **Heteroclito** wine bar. A short walk from the Acropolis, it’s a delightful spot for a glass or two. Choose from its extensive cellar of artisanal Greek wines.

— **Kritikos** is a Greek tavern that specialises in cooking meat over charcoal. Enjoy your food while looking out over a beautiful courtyard.

— Seafood fans should try out **Travolta** (above left) for a modern twist on a Greek tavern. And sushi fans should head to **Sushimou** to experience “Greek sushi”, made with the freshest seasonal fish from the Aegean Sea. For a lighter supper, **Birdman** is the best bar-and-nibble concept in town.

— Later on, go to **The Clumsies** and explore its creative cocktails. I like to round off the night with a stop at **Tiki Bar**, home to the best bartender in town, my friend, Giannis Petris.

Nikos Roussos is chef-patron of two-Michelin-starred Funky Gourmet in Athens, and *Opso* and *PittaBun* in London; opso.co.uk; pittabun.com



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FT Weekend



I'D BE LOST WITHOUT...

Miso

Fermented soyabeans deliver the rich umami flavour behind many of chef *Nobuyuki Matsuhisa's* prized dishes. Illustration by *Anna Bu Kliewer*

One of my earliest memories is of my mother preparing miso soup in our kitchen. My bedroom was close to the kitchen so I could hear the sounds of her and my grandmother making breakfast - and I could smell the miso soup. To this day, wherever I am in the world, a cup of warm miso soup reminds me of home.

In Japan, miso has been used for centuries, from breakfast to dinner. Its cultural significance, deliciousness and the fond memories it evokes of my family are why it's so important to me.

Miso has been with me all my life - from my mother's humble soup to my most recognised dish, the Black Cod Miso. Inspired by my childhood, I have also developed a recipe for miso soup. The key thing for me is the balance between ingredients. We start with *dashi*, Japanese fish stock, made to my original recipe. Then we add organic red miso paste and let it simmer, taking care not to let it boil. We finish by adding various toppings, such as spring onion, tofu or *wakame* (seaweed).

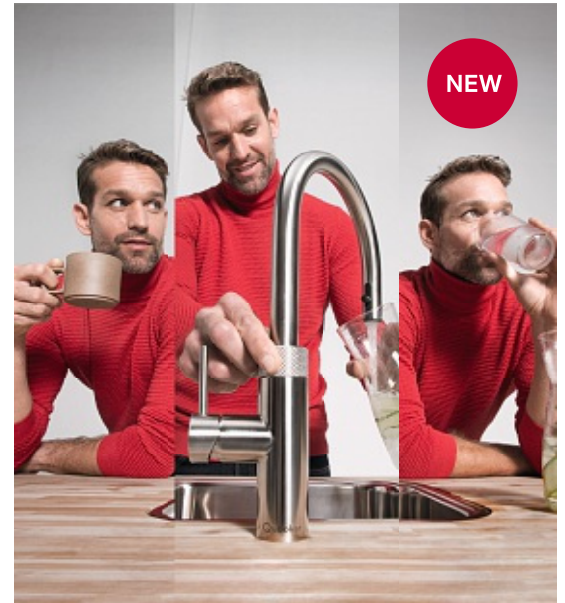
Miso provides a rich, complex flavour to dishes, packed with umami. It is produced

by fermenting soyabeans. Adding different wheats and grains during the fermentation process creates different variations, from the milder white miso to the stronger red. As a fermented food, miso is also a probiotic, which can be beneficial for gut health.

When I moved to Los Angeles in 1977, I worked at a Japanese restaurant called Osho. I used to buy black cod from the local market and experiment with it, marinating the fish in miso to give it a rich umami flavour. The dish became an instant hit. Word spread fast and the sushi counter was always full, with long lines of people waiting outside. Today, it is one of our signature dishes.

We use two types of miso. One is an organic red with a natural texture, which we use for miso soup, and the other is a smooth white, which is perfect for condiments. Miso is most commonly used as a paste but, after many years of experimentation, I also developed dry miso - which can be sampled in our Baby Spinach Salad and Sea Bass Sashimi. **FT**

Nobuyuki Matsuhisa - known to the world simply as "Nobu" - is the sushi chef-proprietor of Nobu and Matsuhisa restaurants, located in 48 cities and five continents across the globe



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Restaurant Insider

Nicholas Lander



LEFT: THE REFURNISHED INTERIOR. RIGHT: DOSA WITH CHETTINAD DUCK AND COCONUT CHUTNEY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK SCOTT

Gymkhana, London

In California recently, I found two questions preoccupying my food-conscious friends. (It should be noted this was before the outbreak of coronavirus). The first addressed the long-term implications of Brexit on the UK hospitality industry, about which I too am deeply concerned. The second, about the status of their favourite Indian restaurant in London, proved easier to answer. Gymkhana, the Mayfair-based establishment whose reputation has circumnavigated the globe, finally reopened its doors in February after a nine-month closure.

This brought to an end what can best be described as a professional nightmare for the restaurant's three owners, brothers and sister Jyotin, Karam and Sunaina Sethi. Their initials combine to form the name of holding company JKS Restaurants, which also owns Trishna, Hoppers, Sabor, Brigadiers and Flor. Karam was in their head office on June 6 last year when he received a call from Gymkhana's head chef: "Get down here! The restaurant's on fire." Karam did as instructed, although he had to plead with the fire brigade to let him through as the whole block had been cordoned off.

Once the smoke had cleared, the extent of the impact from a fire that had begun in the kitchen became clear. "The restaurant was not that badly burnt," Karam explained, "but it had been subject to heavy smoke and water damage."

The team's immediate preoccupation - what to do with Gymkhana's reservations - was made slightly easier by the fact that JKS comprises a small group of different restaurants. Customers were offered tables elsewhere. But then there was the question of how to manage Gymkhana's staff. JKS employs 750 people across its 15 sites, of which 75 worked at Gymkhana, generating sales of about £5m a year. Luckily, they were quickly absorbed into the other restaurants.

My recent meal at Trishna was the best I've ever had there and included the popular *aloo takri chat*, a potato basket filled with vegetables, tamarind and yoghurt (£11), followed by an excellent dish of Dorset brown crab, whose sweetness was offset by the subtle addition of coconut oil, garlic and curry leaf (£25).

But the most dramatic effect of the fire was on those chefs redeployed to the five branches of Motu, JKS's Indian takeaway service.



'We started with an exceptionally hot dish, described as Indo-Chinese halibut. This I would only recommend for the brave'

Gymkhana
42 Albemarle Street
London W1S 4JH
020 3011 5900
gymkhanalondon.com
Starters £8-£18
Mains £16-£50

Trishna
15-17 Blandford Street
London W1U 3DG
020 7935 5624
trishnalondon.com

"The cooks who were deputed to work in Motu really noticed the difference between being part of a larger kitchen and being at the coal face in a much smaller environment... It certainly seemed to sharpen them up," explains Karam, who began his career as head chef at Trishna 10 years ago, at the age of 26.

The fire prompted the Sethis to make another key decision: to bring the redesign of Gymkhana in-house rather than working with an independent designer. To my eye, little has been dramatically altered. The ground floor maintains its central corridor leading to the bar. Downstairs, the biggest design changes are to a semi-circular bar that now can seat four; the wine store that was on the left is now incorporated into a wine service counter on the right.

The many sporting scenes from the days of the Raj still adorn the walls, giving the impression that the restaurant has been here for longer than its six years. The kitchen has been improved with a separate section for the pastry chef.

The cocktail menu is impressive and we began with a Himalayan gin and tonic. The wine list is exemplary, the work of Sunaina and her team, and combines the expected with the more unusual, most notably a broad range of white wines from Switzerland and Portugal.

The large, still annoyingly plastic-coated menu offers the same broad choice. We started with an exceptionally hot dish, described as Indo-Chinese halibut (£18), based on a recipe brought by Chinese immigrants to Kolkata in the late 19th century. This I would only recommend for the brave.

We followed it with kid goat *keema* (£13), whose succulent meat was highlighted by the addition of ghee, garlic and chillies. We then relished a guinea fowl dish (£17.50), more spicy than hot and tempered with paratha and raita, and finished with *wattalapam*, a Sri Lankan coconut custard dessert (£8).

It was a meal that reinforced a comment I heard 20 years ago but that is almost as true today: that in the UK one would do well to eat Indian, whereas in the US one should choose Mexican. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/lander

Games



A Round on the Links by James Walton

All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. According to Christian tradition, what gift did Balthazar give to the baby Jesus (right)?

2. In 1997, Terry Hands left the Royal Shakespeare Company to become the artistic director of which Welsh theatre?

3. In which 1959 musical, with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, is the main character a stripper?

4. What's the most popular breed of hairless cat (right)?

5. In Greek mythology, what type of beings were Daphne, Calypso and Echo?

6. Which British cycling team won the Tour de France five times between 2012 and 2017?



7. Canadian, Iberian, Eurasian and bobcat are the four species of what?

8. What surname is shared by the founder of the Everyman Library series and the author of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*?

9. Which bodily fluid returns protein to the blood system?

10. What's the common term for the Knaus-Ogino method of birth control?



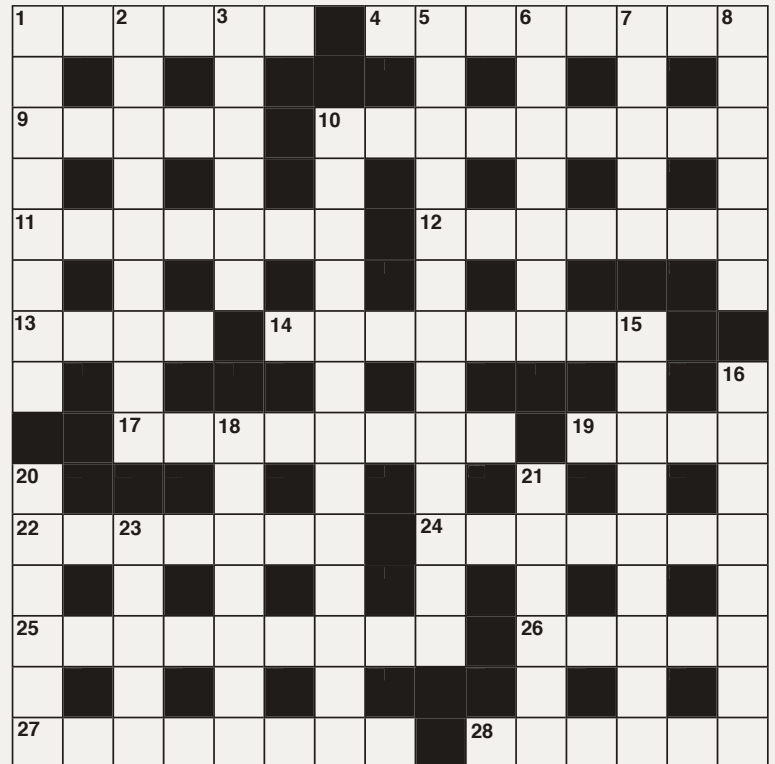
The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



Answers page 10

The Crossword No 480. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1** Delicate, nuanced (6)
- 4** East African country (8)
- 9** Repeat (5)
- 10** Lifeless (9)
- 11** Basic part (7)
- 12** Mariners (7)
- 13** Unclothed (4)
- 14** Borough of New York City (8)
- 17** Art of speechmaking (8)
- 19** Loosen, untie (4)
- 22** Canadian province (7)
- 24** Insert, embed (7)
- 25** Spotty dog (9)
- 26** Type of willow (5)
- 27** Dancing suggestively (8)
- 28** Placid, calm (6)

DOWN

- 1** Officer with various generals left out over time (8)
- 2** Pub worker gets right into beer and mixing (9)
- 3** Cloth put around top of drink of lime (6)
- 5** Swapping trains – options have changed (13)
- 6** First one I wrote in Latin, perhaps (7)
- 7** Instrument for operation – tore out vigorously (5)
- 8** One gets craftily around one that's biased against the old (6)
- 10** Grilling onion with grater – it's cooked (13)
- 15** Norwegian leader moving to Vienna as a foreigner (3-6)

- 16** Piece of music once composed without performance (8)
- 18** Set aside ancient vessel under eastern part of the forces (7)
- 20** Robber hiding computers etc under ribbon (6)
- 21** Face surgery for model (6)
- 23** Swelling arrangement for bugle (5)

Solution to Crossword No 479





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

The problem with predictions in an age of uncertainty



It is never easy to admit that you are wrong; especially when you have previously earned fame (and billions of dollars) by calling the future right.

However, Ray Dalio, founder of the world's largest hedge fund, Bridgewater Associates, has done just that. After it emerged that his flagship fund was down about 20 per cent since the start of the year, Dalio admitted that he had been caught flat-footed by the recent coronavirus-driven market swings - in sharp contrast to the 2008 financial crisis, when he and his team predicted events with such prescience that they profited handsomely.

"We're disappointed because we should have made money rather than lost money in this move, the way we did in 2008," he told the FT. It seems that the systems Bridgewater developed to analyse the flows of finance and economic activities - which have traditionally driven its bets on the direction of stocks, bonds and other securities - did not offer any guidance when looking at a rare event such as the current pandemic. "We didn't know how to navigate the virus and chose not to because we didn't think we had an edge in trading it," Dalio added. "So, we stayed in our positions and, in retrospect, we should have cut all risk."

Now, many readers may feel baffled by this, given that the whole point of investing with a hedge fund is that they are supposed to beat the markets at times of stress (Dalio himself has published extensive advice on how to handle turbulence). However, I think that scorn is the wrong response here. Never mind the fact that Bridgewater is far from the only fund to suffer big losses and that Dalio has admitted to his mistakes (which is a more honest approach than most of his rivals). What is interesting to ponder is what this episode reveals about the nature of forecasting - and our modern attitudes towards time.

As anthropologists often point out, the way we think about time is a defining feature of the post-enlightenment world. During much of human history, the future was viewed as a vague and terrifyingly unknowable blur, marked by constant bargaining with deities (to ward off disaster) or cyclical seasonal rhythms (of the sort that underscore Buddhist cognitive maps).

In modern, post-enlightenment western cultures, however, a linear vision of time emerged that presumes the past can be extrapolated into the future with a sense of progression, not just cyclicity. In the 20th century, this gave birth to the risk management and finance professions, as Peter Bernstein wrote two decades ago in his brilliant book *Against the Gods: the Remarkable Story of Risk*.

By the turn of the century, innovations such as computing and the internet were turbocharging the forecasting business to an extraordinary degree, as Margaret Heffernan notes in her excellent (and very timely) new book *Uncharted*. "Human discomfort with uncertainty... has

fuelled an industry that enriches itself by terrorising us with uncertainty and taunting us with certainty," she writes.

However, as Heffernan stresses, while the forecasting business has made its "experts" very rich, it is also based on a fallacy: the idea that the future can be neatly extrapolated from the past. Moreover, the apparent success of some pundits in predicting events (such as the 2008 crash) makes them so overconfident that they get locked into particularly rigid models. "The harder economists try to identify sure-fire methods of predicting markets, the more such insight eludes them," she writes.

'Now more than ever, we need a broader perspective - and humility - when we try to assess what might happen next'

Is there a solution? Heffernan's answer is to embrace uncertainty, build resilience, use "narrative" (or qualitative) analyses instead of rigid models and to respect the wisdom of diverse views to avoid tunnel vision. Strikingly, in the wake of the 2008 crisis, some economists agree.

Indeed, Mervyn King, former governor of the Bank of England, has just joined forces with his fellow economist and former FT columnist John Kay to pen a thoughtful tome, *Radical Uncertainty*, which echoes Heffernan's points. "Over 40 years the authors have watched the bright optimism of a new, rigorous approach to economics - which they shared - dissolve into the failures of prediction," they write, arguing that the modern community of economists and policymakers needs to accept radical uncertainty and rethink its models.

This is sensible. But to my mind there is another way to frame this debate: to treat models (whether they emerge from computer science or economics) like a compass in a dark wood at night. Navigation tools can give you a sense of direction and orientation; it would be ridiculous to toss them out entirely. However, if you rely exclusively on them, accidents occur. If you walk through a wood just looking down at the dial of a compass, you will bang into a tree or worse. The trick, then, is to use navigation aids but also to maintain your peripheral vision.

Using the insights of cultural anthropology is one way to do this, since it provides a social context for looking at our favoured tools (and thus a way to see their shortcomings). Others might argue that peripheral vision simply stems from common sense. Either way, now more than ever, we need this broader perspective - and humility - when we try to assess what might happen next, not just with the markets but with the coronavirus outbreak too. **FT**

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