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Christmas food & drink special

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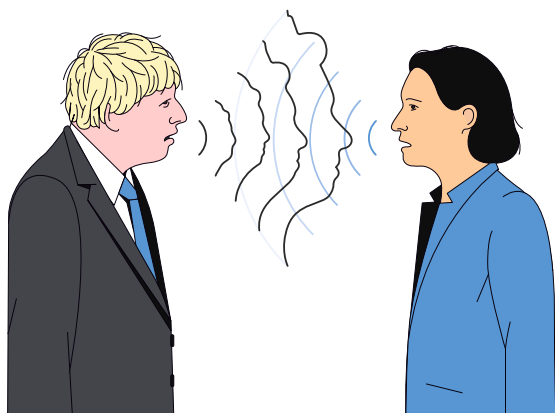




SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

The tyranny of the plummy British accent



Watching Fiona Hill testify before the impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump, many Americans noticed her gender: a woman speaking firmly to a roomful of men. But Britons also noticed her accent. Trump's former chief adviser on Russia and Europe uses an elongated north-eastern English "A" - "informaaation" - that is rare

in British public life.

If Britons switched TV channels, they heard more familiar speech patterns: the old Etonian prime minister Boris Johnson saying more than he knows. Hill versus Johnson is a story of how the UK uses talent. It also explains the dismal choice facing voters in December's election.

Very unlike Johnson, Hill is a miner's daughter who attended a comprehensive school in Bishop Auckland in north-east England. She told the inquiry that she came from a family "that had always struggled with poverty". She also described a classmate setting her hair alight during an exam, with "very unfortunate consequences": "My mother gave me a bowl haircut. So for the school photograph... I looked like Richard III."

But she and Johnson grew up with much in common: close in age (she's 54, he's 55), clever and good at languages. Both applied to Oxford. Visiting for her entrance interview was like "a scene from *Billy Elliot*: people were making fun of... my accent and the way I was dressed. It was the most embarrassing, awful experience I had ever had." Notably, she said this in a public discussion between Guardian newspaper members in 2016, in which she was identified simply as "Fiona Hill, 50".

Accent discrimination is standard in Britain. In a poll by ComRes and ITV in 2013, 28 per cent reported experiencing it. Recruiters favour the 3 per cent of Britons who speak "the Queen's English", says Lance Workman, psychologist at the University of South Wales. Many British class migrants eradicate their accents, or even their original selves. North-eastern accents are especially low status: the comic character Alan Partridge famously interrupts his north-eastern "Geordie" sidekick with, "That was just a noise."

Johnson's accent and dress were assets at Oxford. His "plummy speech... and frequent 'aaaahs', 'errs' and 'grsss' became widely imitated", writes his biographer Sonia Purnell. His "sagging cords, ragged tweeds and haystack coiffure" were markers of old-fashioned eccentricity. In fact, like many British displays of eccentricity, Johnson's dishevelled dress is a class statement. It says: my privileged status is so secure that I'm free to defy etiquette. Contrast that with Hill's sober dress and diction at the inquiry. Outsiders have to look serious or they won't be taken seriously.

Hill ended up studying at St Andrews in Scotland, but got her break in the US. Her origins and working-class accent never impeded

her career there as they would have in 1980s-90s England. A Harvard PhD channelled her into Washington's foreign-policy establishment, where an exotic accent enhances status (see also Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski). Like her Soviet-born colleague in Trump's National Security Council, Alexander Vindman, she had to emigrate to advance.

Of course, the US discriminates too - against its own working class, non-whites and women. Trump once mistook Hill for a secretary. But most Americans couldn't identify her as working class.

'Fiona Hill's origins and working-class accent never impeded her career in the US as they would have in England'

Tellingly, rightwing radio host Rush Limbaugh mislabelled her as "either Oxford or Cambridge". In the US, she simply sounds English. Britons fleeing their class origins have long found refuge in a country where everyone loves their accent.

In Britain, north-eastern accents still impede careers. The current list of power brokers who have one barely extends beyond football manager Steve Bruce. Another contender, former Labour minister Alan Milburn, departed public life when his entire Commission on Social Mobility resigned in 2017 over the government's inaction on fairness.

One rising north-easterner, Labour's shadow cabinet minister Laura Pidcock, said in her maiden speech to parliament: "This building is intimidating... built at a time when my class and my sex would have been denied a place within it." She suggested the intimidation was "not accidental". It scares off outsiders, much as Oxford did Hill.

And so Britain wastes talent. The Sutton Trust reports that just 7 per cent of Britons are privately educated, but 39 per cent of those in leading professions are. Most are men. Yet even these lucky winners rarely maximise their talent. To borrow a line from US writer John Scalzi, being a privately educated British man is like playing the computer game of life with "the lowest difficulty setting there is". Consequently, these men can suffer from high self-esteem or get lazy. Think of Johnson's own teenaged brush with Richard III. Playing the king at Eton, writes Purnell, "he omitted to learn the lines so he had them pasted behind various pillars". It's less funny now he's prime minister.

In next month's election, Britain must choose between two underwhelming, privately educated male party leaders. Prince Andrew's hapless, immoral TV interview about Jeffrey Epstein was another shout from this select class. Despite my personal interest in white middle-aged men remaining overrepresented, I suspect the UK needs more Fiona Hills. **FT**

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INVENTORY TOM KITCHIN, CHEF

‘I used sugar instead of salt in a risotto. A proper schoolboy error’

Tom Kitchin, 42, and his wife Michaela established their first restaurant, The Kitchin, in Edinburgh in 2006. He gained his first Michelin star at the age of 29. The Kitchin Group now includes four other enterprises.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

To be a footballer. By 13 or 14, I had taken a job in a local pub washing dishes, and that’s where I fell in love with hospitality.

Where did you go to school?

Where did you train?

Two schools: Portmoak, then Dollar Academy. Perth College for a year. Then I went to Gleneagles and started a proper apprenticeship. It was very good, also very daunting. I was ambitious; I wrote to Raymond Blanc, to Le Gavroche, to Pierre Koffmann at La Tante Claire, and I did a *stage* [internship] with all of them. I didn’t know my life was going to be turned upside down. I was a young boy from Scotland, thinking I was a bit of a hotshot, and quickly realised I wasn’t. It was proper hard-core. I was just trying to survive.

What was the first dish you learnt to cook?

Steak pie or maybe Scotch broth or Cullen skink. Those were the first three dishes a lovely lady called Avril, a proper pub cook, taught me.

Who was or still is your mentor?

Koffmann, Guy Savoy, [Alain] Ducasse, three great chefs I worked with. Koffmann especially. When we opened the restaurant, he was there for me.

Breakfast or dinner: which?

I need both. But I couldn’t miss dinner.

Which technique did you struggle to perfect?

My wife is Swedish. No matter how hard I try to recreate the Swedish classics, it’s never quite as good as her mum’s and family’s versions. And I give it a good shot - I really try.

Which flavour always pleases you?

Crispy pork skin.

Which flavour can’t you abide?

I can always tell when something has been fried in dirty oil and that makes me go, “Ugh”.

What equipment could you not do without?

My knives.

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

An old farmhouse in Provence, surrounded by vineyards.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

Liverpool football club. I am an absolutely diehard Liverpool fan.

What is your guilty food pleasure?

Haribos.

When are you happiest?

On a Sunday with the family.

Who or what makes you laugh?

Our twins. When they’re on form, they can stop traffic. We have four sons - they’re the youngest.

How physically fit are you?

Sport is an important part of my life - I need to keep fit. I did my first marathon last year.

What ambitions do you still have?

To get better at what we do. There’s nothing more satisfying than having a full restaurant, day in day out.

What is the luckiest aspect of your life so far?

You make your own luck. I’ve never shirked hard work, but I’ve met the right people at the right time, no more so than when I met my wife. We would not be where we are today without her.

What has been your greatest kitchen disaster?

At Gleneagles, I’d been entrusted with the risotto, making it in a humongous pan where you could do 100 portions. The rice looked lovely and the chef came to taste it. I’d used sugar instead of salt. A proper schoolboy error. Rule number one: always taste what you’re doing.

Do you consider food waste?

Koffmann drummed it into me. We’ve never wasted anything in our restaurants.

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

I don’t think in his wildest dreams he could have dreamed I’d get this far - 20-year-old Tom would be pretty blown away.

Do you see yourself as an artist?

Yes, very much. France has influenced my career. When I think of food, I think in French.

What do you want for Christmas? And what do you want to give your wife?

I must be getting middle-aged - I don’t need anything. My wife will drop a few hints but every year I go for something high-risk - you need the surprise element. Does that always work? No. Last year I pulled it off with a lovely bracelet, so my confidence is high for this year.

What makes Christmas special for you?

It feels like the world stops for one day - you can relax. Because my wife is Swedish, we celebrate on the 24th, have a traditional Christmas on the 25th, then the 26th is my mum’s birthday, so it’s a three-day celebration.

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

Ten. **FT**

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Interview by Hester Lacey

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BY TIM BRADSHAW

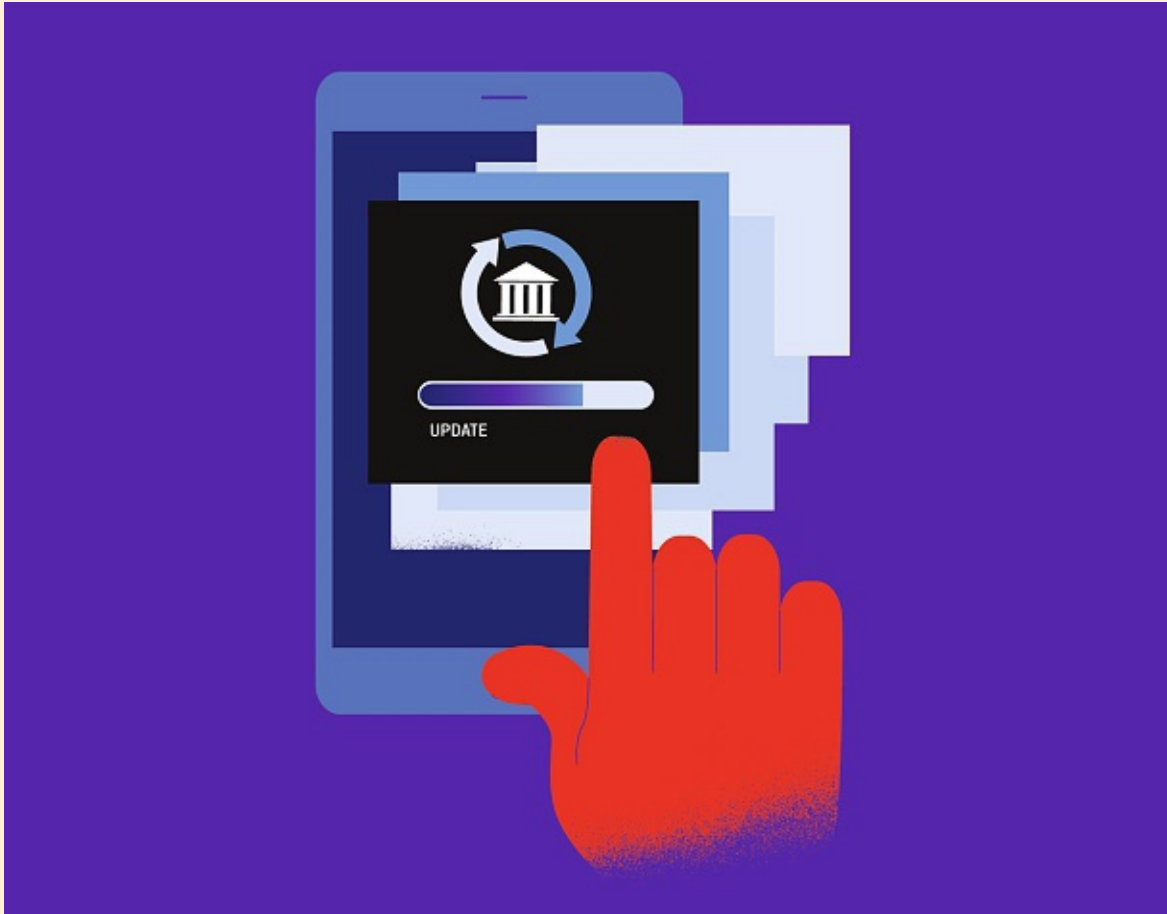


ILLUSTRATION BY ULLA PUGGAARD

The hidden dangers of 'tech debt'

I had been back in the UK for less than 24 hours when my bank let me down. Returning home after several years in the US, I discovered my debit card had been cancelled in error. I had cash in the bank but no way to get at it. My bank - with whom I had been a customer for more than 10 years - said a replacement would take several days to arrive.

A friend suggested I open an account with Monzo - a banking start-up that did not exist when I left for America. Within minutes of downloading the app, I had passed the security test and had a virtual debit card ready to use in Apple Pay. It was a reminder that no industry - even a highly regulated one like banking - is invulnerable to a start-up with a better approach.

Monzo has seen user numbers leap from one million to more than three million in the past year. I can see why some would find it hard to entrust their money to a bank that is barely five years old. But in many ways, youth is Monzo's greatest asset. My traditional bank may have been storing capital for 150 years but it has also accumulated decades of technical debt.

"Tech debt" has nothing to do with money - though it can become expensive - and everything to do with software. In simple terms, it refers to the mounting cost of having to maintain and build on top of old, poorly written code.

Short cuts taken early on in a product's development can cause a total breakdown years later. For a bank like mine, decades of underinvestment in technology can make it almost impossible to speed up an everyday process such as issuing a new card.

The term was coined in 1992 by US programmer Ward

Cunningham. "Shipping first-time code is like going into debt," he wrote. "A little debt speeds development so long as it is paid back promptly with a rewrite." Wait too long to repay the debt, however, and the "interest" mounts up. If code is not refined and tidied up over the years, warned Cunningham, "entire engineering organisations can be brought to a standstill under the debt load".

Tech debt is the hidden force that holds back innovation, especially inside more established companies. It doesn't matter if you are a swashbuckling chief executive such as Elon Musk or a pugnacious rule-breaker like Travis Kalanick - if your engineers can't produce new code fast enough, you might as well be working at, well, a 150-year-old bank.

Inside every development team, there is a tug of war between product managers pushing for new features to sell to customers and engineers desperate for more

"housekeeping" time to maintain and refine their existing code base. Stripe, a maker of payments software that has become one of Silicon Valley's most highly valued private companies, estimates that developers spend about a third of their time on tech debt and a further 9 per cent of it fixing bad code. Yet the issue is little discussed outside coding hangouts such as Hacker News or GitHub.

This obscures the problem that, for many companies, software development is still a frustratingly unpredictable and imperfect science. "No industry has figured out how to reliably turn money into software," says John Collison, co-founder of Stripe.

Architects and builders, by and large, know how to construct buildings that don't fall down. The same still cannot be said for

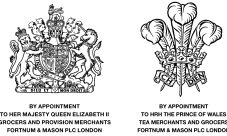
'Tech debt is the hidden force holding back innovation, especially at established companies'

software. Even the richest Silicon Valley companies struggle with tech debt. Microsoft engineers have described how adding a simple button to Windows could become a massive undertaking across several different teams. In the two months since iOS 13 was released, Apple has forced iPhone owners to download twice as many software updates as it pushed out in an entire year for iOS 5 in 2011-12.

In software, huge resources can be more of a liability than an asset. Collison says: "Hundreds of millions of dollars might produce a great marketing campaign but the same investment in software may produce something clunky and barely usable."

Many start-ups are founded by people who become frustrated by the slow pace of progress inside much larger tech companies. But even a nimble newcomer like Monzo may find that tech debt catches up with them eventually. In a code crunch, nobody is too big to fail. 

Tim Bradshaw is the FT's global tech correspondent



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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Right royal cases of corporate hypocrisy

You know things are going badly wrong when KPMG decides that its association with you is tarnishing its image. In recent years, the Big Four accountant has been something of a standard-bearer for corporate scandals. It has been fined on both sides of the Atlantic for errors and malpractice in auditing a raft of firms, as well as using information stolen from a US regulator to improve its inspection results.

This is how bad things have now got for Prince Andrew, the Duke of York. You befriend one paedophile and, suddenly, all those years of golf count for nothing.

Even KPMG - the firm denounced by the SEC for "ethical failures", and with questions to answer over Carillion, Ted Baker, Quindell and its links with South Africa's Gupta family - is beginning to fear that associating with Andrew is bad for its brand. When you consider some of the people who stayed in KPMG's good books, you know there's no easy way back from this for the Duke.

So, reluctantly, KPMG has ended its association with the Duke's business mentoring scheme Pitch@Palace. There is no suggestion that there was anything untoward in the scheme itself, but obviously a firm with KPMG's reputation needs to be more careful when kissing up to royalty.

It wasn't troubled by all the previous stories about his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein - or "Ep-shtine" as Jeremy Corbyn decided to refer to him in the TV leadership debate - but once the Duke started talking about it incompetently on television, well, KPMG just had to walk away.

Others have also cut the cord. Standard Chartered - fined \$1.1bn for lax money-laundering controls and sanctions-busting with Iran, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Sudan and Syria - has now abandoned the



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

Duke's scheme amid fears he's no longer good for its image.

Apparently StanChart's sanctions issues were all the fault of two (inevitably junior) employees. The seniority of those previously happy to scrape an acquaintance with the Duke is unclear. Barclays, whose list of scandals would take this column over length, has also concluded that cocktails with the Prince are not quite what they were and so has decided to find other business mentoring schemes to back. Like Claude Rains, crooked gendarme in *Casablanca*, all these businesses were "shocked, shocked".

Students at the University of Huddersfield want him to resign as chancellor and even the Golf Foundation is monitoring his position. For the English National Ballet and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Duke's interview was the day the music died. By the end of last week, he was stepping back from some 230 patronages.

Few will feel any sympathy for the Duke after his high-handed, tone-deaf and unsympathetic TV interview. Whatever the truth about some of the murkier allegations, it is clear that he found Epstein sufficiently useful not to ask too many awkward questions. Royals, especially the minor ones, have long relied on networks of

unsavoury hangers-on who facilitate the less public aspects of their lifestyle. It benefits both parties: the royal gets discreet access to that circuit and the host gets access to royalty.

But the Duke's Epstein issues were well-known long before the TV interview. The Duke had been forced to stand down as the UK trade envoy in 2011 over his friendship with Epstein, who by then was already a convicted sex offender. Had all those highly moral financial firms forgotten about that when they rushed to back his new initiative, or did they just think the issue had subsided? Perhaps they were badly conflicted; on the one hand, uncomfortable associations with a discredited Duke, on the other, sherry at Sandringham.

A sudden burst of publicity really does focus the minds of business sponsors and clearly there is no percentage in standing by the Duke right now. After all, if his own family don't want him tarnishing the brand, you can hardly blame a company for taking a similar view.

Still it is a warning to all who might associate with royals - approach with caution, you don't know where they've been. **FT**

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Reply

Re "Betrayed by the Big Four" (November 23/24). As a former Big Four partner, I have a modest suggestion. Many readers are, I suspect, clients in some way of these firms (one of them is the auditor of my company now). How about every one of us ask the partner to come in and provide a reaction to this piece, and for an explanation of how their firms plan to address it? Nothing will strike more fear into the hearts of these firms than clients pressing for change.

Adam, NY via FT.com

Absolutely fantastic article. It sheds light on behaviour that is widely known but rarely commented on. This is not bias or exaggeration - staff who don't participate in a culture (which may be toxic) get pushed out of professional services regardless of talent or ability. If you join, go in with your eyes open.

Avocado via FT.com



@MatthiasFi November 21
Fascinating and heart-wrenching story via @FT on illegal wildlife trade in Mongolia from snow leopards to Gobi bears

The heroic efforts of people trying to stop the destruction mentioned in your article ("Extinction crisis", November 23/24) deserve maximum support and admiration. Sadly, this is another conservation battle we are losing. Human beings and their lifestyles have overwhelmed the planet's ability to reach any equilibrium.

The ghost of the future via FT.com

Thanks for a very well case-studied article ("The great Brexit dilemma", November 23/24). I have voted Tory in the past but will not vote to facilitate Brexit. While I want to vote Lib Dem, they have a lot less chance than Labour in my seat, so I might have to back Labour to get the anti-Brexit message across. It's not a great situation we find ourselves in.

Another angle via FT.com

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INCREDIBLE EDIBLES

From sugar almonds to a truckle of cheddar, edible presents are the best kind. *Bee Wilson* recalls the childhood magic of making marzipan fruits and peppermint creams – and explains why sweets are still a near-universal symbol of happiness.

Photographs by *Kellie French*. Stylist *Rosie Scott*





The first coins I ever owned for myself were chocolate ones, buried at the bottom of a Christmas stocking. Fingering the shiny gold through the netting in the cold, early-morning darkness, I felt a tingle of excitement at my sudden wealth. Some years, I would hoard the coins, stacking them up like goblin treasure, to nibble over the coming weeks as a reminder of Christmas morning. Other years, I ripped open the golden foil and quickly devoured the chocolate inside while reading the *Fighting Fantasy* books from my stocking.

In secular times, the closest many of us get to a state of wonder on Christmas Day is when we have something delicious in our mouths. For most of us, food gifts are the currency through which we first learn the complex joys of giving and receiving and the mysterious ways in which generosity can either hit the mark or misfire. It's an early lesson in how to match a gift to a particular person's tastes.

"Everybody wants a box of chocolates," as Leonard Cohen sings - or, rather, they don't. I remember being perplexed on learning that my mother would be disappointed if you gave her chocolate but that her eyes would light up if you gave her a box of soft-centre fruit jellies or Turkish delight. Edible Christmas presents are still the best kind, if you ask me, though not everyone agrees, as I also learnt at a young age.

When we were children, my sister and I would spend hours making marzipan fruits to give as presents. A week or so before Christmas, we would sit at the kitchen table side by side with a block of yellow marzipan, a selection of food colourings, cocktail sticks and cloves to use as stalks. The ritual of making these was an essential part of the magic of Christmas.

In our hot little hands, we rolled the marzipan into balls to transform into apples and oranges. With a little cleft added down the middle, the ball of marzipan would become a peach. For the oranges, we added a realistic sprinkling of dimples using a cocktail stick. We brushed the apples with green food colouring, then a rosy dab of red to make it resemble a Cox's Orange Pippin - or so we hoped. My sister is two years older and her fruits were always a lot more artistic than my clumsy offerings. I watched, awestruck, as she made plausible lemons and pears that actually curved in the right places.

Looking back, I now see that the satisfaction of making these Christmas marzipan sculptures - apart from the thrill of sneaking pieces of marzipan from the block - was largely that we, as incapable children, could feel powerful for once. I loved seeing the fruits take shape and become

Food gifts are the currency through which we first learn the complex joys of giving and receiving

something worthy of presenting to grown-ups. We packaged the wonky marzipan into cardboard boxes and fondly imagined how happy our uncles and aunts and babysitters would be to receive such a prize. Some years, we also made peppermint creams from clouds of icing sugar and peppermint essence, mixed together and stamped out into sugary circles, or rectangles of pink and white coconut ice.

I would have happily kept going with this Christmas ritual for ever but one year, my sister stopped it. One of the problems with being an annoying younger sibling is that you want the game to continue long after everyone else has lost interest in playing it (the same was always true of Monopoly). After that, I started buying most of my food gifts instead of making them and would spend ages browsing the cheapest chocolates and toffees I could get with my pocket money.

But then my sister placed a veto on food presents altogether. I would ask her what she wanted for Christmas and she would reply, "Nothing edible." I did not understand at the time that she was suffering from anorexia. To me, her proclamation of "nothing edible" was like switching off all the fairy lights.

The association between Christmas and sweet gifts goes back centuries, as Judith Flanders explains in her excellent book *Christmas: A Biography*, published in 2017. All of the early versions of Father Christmas have him bringing food gifts to the good little children. In the Netherlands in the 17th century, St Nicholas was ►

Giving sugar was a way to end the year with sweetness and forget hard times



◀ believed to hand out apples and nuts to good children, along with honey cakes and spice cakes.

Sweetmeats and fruits have also always been an important part of Christmas tree decoration. As long ago as 1419, the city of Freiburg in Germany erected one of the first-ever Christmas trees. It was decorated with tinsel, wafers, gingerbread and apples. By the 19th century, Germans in the US decorated their trees with “cornucopias”, which were paper cones filled with various sweets, cookies, dried fruits and nuts.

Marzipan animals were another treat for children to collect from the tree. I now think that my childhood marzipan fruits were pedestrian. Judith Flanders describes a Victorian American tree decoration that consisted of “a rabbit munching a marzipan cabbage-leaf”.

During an era when sweetness was a rare commodity, it makes sense that people should have given each other sugar for Christmas. It was a way to end the year with sweetness and forget the hard times of the previous 12 months. The books of Laura Ingalls Wilder about growing up in a settler family in late 19th-century America bring home the sheer bliss of Christmas sweets at a time when sugar was still a luxury.

In *Little House on the Prairie* - when the family is living in a remote South Dakota farmstead - Laura and her sister Mary are given little cakes of sugar sprinkled with more sugar for Christmas. “Mary and Laura pulled out two small packages. They unwrapped them, and each found a little heart-shaped cake. Over their delicate brown tops was sprinkled white sugar.”

But why are Christmas gifts still dominated by sugar today even though we live in a world drenched in sweetness? According to food writer Elisabeth Luard in *Seasonal European Dishes*, “Celebrations are credible only if they are the reverse of daily habits.” The cornucopias that Victorians hung on their trees once a year are available to us every day of the week as a snack to go with our morning coffee. Yet we still treat sugar as if it were the greatest seasonal gift.

I once went to dinner with a primary school teacher just before Christmas and her living room was so full of chocolates that there was hardly room to sit down. When you walk around the food-gift section of a department store, it's like a sweet shop, but one where the prices are higher and the flavours are stranger: here are tubes of jelly beans as long as a beanpole and jars of sweets as big as a bucket; sugar almonds and chocolate-coated Brazils; hampers of cakes and cookies and giant tins of panettone, in every variation from chocolate chip to gin.

If we ruled out sugar, we would have to reimagine Christmas food gifts completely. I like the idea of giving someone a more delicious version of something they use in their kitchen all the year round, because then you know it will actually be used. One of my favourite things to give as a present - to adults, anyway - is good olive oil because it feels like giving edible gold. If you have never tasted really good extra-virgin olive oil, the difference in flavour can be a wonderful shock. It tastes like fresh olive juice. Another lovely possibility is French nut oil, such as the walnut and hazelnut oils ▶

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Perhaps the greatest of savoury Christmas presents is cheese, assuming you are neither vegan nor lactose-intolerant. To have a whole cheese in the house – whether it’s a Stilton or a small truckle of cheddar – is the kind of luxury that doesn’t come around very often, for most of us. One year, I was given a huge hunk of Gorwydd Caerphilly and we based our Christmas meals around it for days. When it first arrived, we ate chalky slices of it after dinner with apples and dates. As the Caerphilly matured and became softer and more Brie-like in the middle, we ate it on toast for lunch, with warming bowls of chestnut and lentil soup.

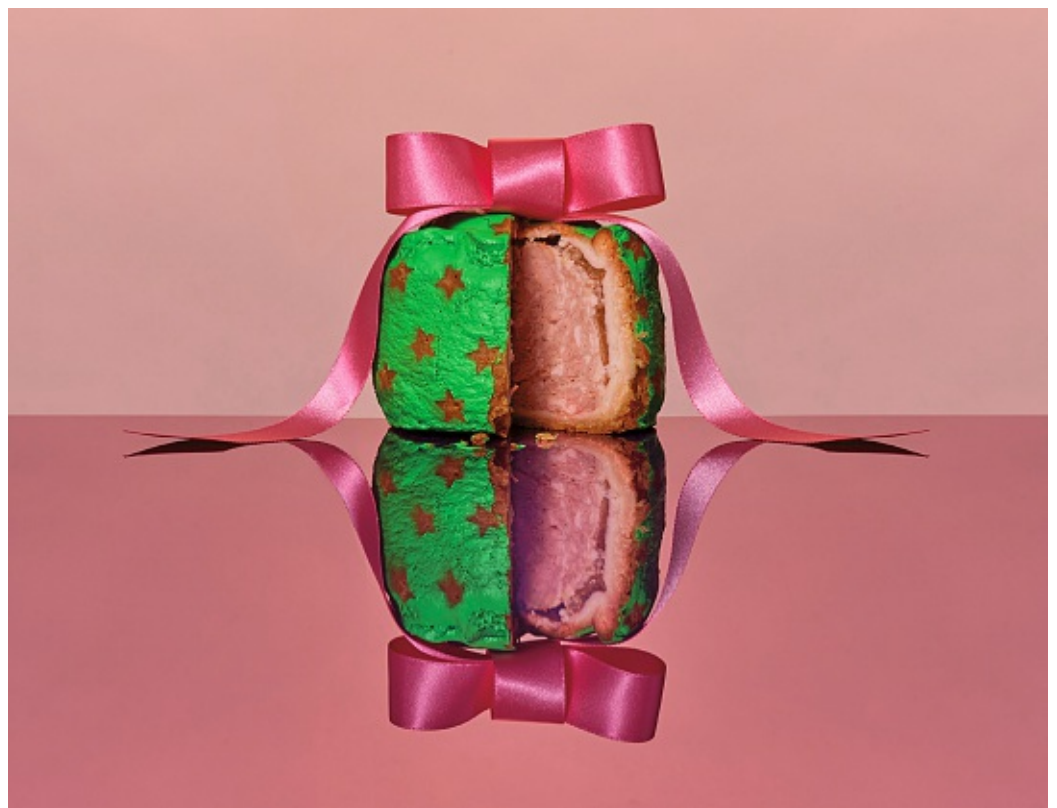
I can’t imagine a more pleasing Christmas present than a large piece of cheese and *A Cheesemonger’s History of the British Isles*, a new book by Ned Palmer. Having said this, tread carefully. When my oldest son started college, knowing how much he loved cheese, I sent him a big selection from Neal’s Yard Dairy, only to get a furious message telling me that it had made his room stink.

Maybe this is why we fall back on sweets as a gift: they don’t stink, they keep for ages and they are a near-universal symbol of happiness. Elisabeth Luard says that despite the excess of sugar in our lives, she still feels that sweet gifts are the surest way to trigger memories of celebration. Luard, who has spent much of her life in Spain, notes that a gift of salt cod can never send the same message as “a pound or two of fudge”.

Luard’s own favourite Christmas gift – both to give and to receive – is Spanish *turrón*: “either the soft, halva-like *turrón de Jijona* or *torta imperial* (flat disks of almond nougat sandwiched between rounds of rice paper)”. She points out to me that good *turrón* is expensive, because of the almonds. “There’s a fine sense of excellence in Spain: however poor, people will save up for just a little of the best at Christmas.”

Another way to make sugary Christmas gifts feel special again is to make them yourself. I love giving people jars of home-made mincemeat (my basic formula follows a recipe from Tamasin Day-Lewis except that I replace the brandy with dark rum) or whole fruitcakes or damp gingerbread. A friend makes the most wonderful candied walnuts for gifts every year, which are more delicious than the fanciest *marrons glacés* from Fortnum’s. The only tricky part is obtaining non-rancid walnuts. You boil up half a cup each of sugar and soured cream and stir in a teaspoon of vanilla and two and a half cups of walnuts or pecans, before leaving them to dry out on a baking tray in a very low oven until they are dry and powdery, and look as if coated in snow.

One of the beauties of giving home-made edible gifts is that they come with a very low sense of obligation attached. Food writer Kate Young says that she does this partly because she has always lived in small spaces and is therefore “acutely aware” that if you give people “stuff”



The idea of sitting in the kitchen calmly making things feels like an antidote to the seasonal frenzy

they will have to find a home for it. Young tells me she is “much more confident offering some biscuits, a bottle of cordial or a jar of marmalade – something that will (at some point, even if not immediately!) be useful”.

In her latest book, *The Little Library Year*, Young recalls a Christmas when she had just moved into a rented flat and had little money left after the deposit. “Cash-poor but time-rich”, she decided that all her gifts that year would have to be home-made. She collected rinsed-out jam jars and bottles and filled them with preserves and pickles and cordials, before tying the jars with ribbons. Young’s book contains some magical recipes for seasonal gifts, from cranberry cordial to almond and pistachio biscotti, scented with clementines. They are all based, she explains, on “those dream Christmases I read about in books as a child”.

Not everyone likes chutney or cordial and I suspect that edible Christmas gifts can give more pleasure to the giver than the receiver. But that is no reason not to make them. The older I get, the harder I find it is to summon up that Christmas-morning feeling of excitement, amid the frenzy of wrapping and visiting and consuming, of things to buy and people to please. The idea of sitting in the kitchen calmly making things actually feels like an antidote to the seasonal frenzy; all the more so if someone else can be persuaded to join in. “How do you feel about marzipan?” I asked my daughter the other day. **FT**

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Bee Wilson’s most recent book is “*The Way We Eat Now: Strategies for Eating in a World of Change*” (Fourth Estate)



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Ravinder Bhogal

Chef patron of Jikoni

When I first met my husband, I thought I was through with love. Yet his fine manners began to persuade me otherwise. His gallantry included standing when I entered or left a room, kissing the back of my hand *à la française* and carrying my bags. He organised dates that took us to romantic spots in London and beyond. We had moonlit walks and long talks on the phone about philosophy, religion and politics, beginning early and ending just as the rising sun was flooding my bedroom.

In return, I dabbed on hints of expensive perfume which he had to lean in to sniff. I wore dresses that encouraged him to stare. Laughing, I would fling back my head, displaying my powdered *décolleté* - the kind my mother would think improper. Yet somehow my opponent remained undefeated until one afternoon when, quite unexpectedly, I located his Achilles heel.

I had been testing dessert recipes for Jikoni, which had not yet opened its doors, when he surprised me with a visit. My kitchen was chaotic but there on the worktop, laid out like bait, was a beauty pageant of pretty confections: a meringue roulade bursting with Roussillon apricots, orange blossom and cream; a wobbling lime-leaf panna cotta built on faith and a whisper of gelatin; a raspberry and pink peppercorn soufflé; and a chequerboard of various sponges, cakes and éclairs.

He picked up the soufflé and handled it as though it were a piece of lost art. He raised it to the level of his chest and bent over to meet it with his nose. He dug a fork into its interior and, as his lips met the tines, he gasped.

"It's like eating a cloud," he exclaimed. "It's terrific." Sated, he fell on to the sofa - and fell for me.

Desserts are an opportunity to caress and cajole someone you love. They contain the calories you don't really need but desire madly anyway. They are the most indulgent part of a meal, when hunger has already been satisfied. And yes, we're South Asian and have a genetic pull towards diabetes, but in the toughest of times, puddings make my husband happy.

So, this year, I'll bake him something I know he'll love: a light choux pastry ring stuffed with a rich salted caramel *crème pâtissière* and decorated with molten chocolate, berries and gold painted almonds - an edible Christmas wreath. With such effort lavished on something so fleeting, it will be a gift of purest luxury.

What would I like in return? A marriage full of more moonlit walks before arthritis sets in. That said, if he really wants to buy me something, there is always Chanel.



Margot Henderson

Co-founder of Arnold & Henderson,
co-patron and chef of Rochelle Canteen

What does my husband love most of all? For Fergus, the answer is always "lunch".

After the chaos of Christmas, there is nothing better than delving deep into the fridge and finding a delicious pie mix. The hard work has been done already - and the love that has been poured into making it will be in the tasting.

Christmas - the shopping, wrapping, prepping, partying - can drive me crazy and sometimes I long for gentler times. There is something so warming about sitting down to a pie, a large dish of wet, tasty food with a crispy topping.

I first met Fergus when he walked in on me in the kitchen just as I was about to bone out lots of birds and cook them. He said, "No, no, we are going to keep them whole." He taught me the ways of slow and gentle cooking.

A pie has glamour. It is the perfect incarnation of edible love. Fergus has made so many pies that he lives and breathes them. The stakes for me are therefore high. Making one of his pie mixes feels almost like a love song. But which one to make? Mutton and seaweed, perhaps, or potato, Oglesfield and sage?

You can't go wrong with a pheasant and trotter pie. It is the best way to eat pheasant - and this one has the addition of Trotter Gear. Fergus came up with Trotter Gear in the early days of St John and it's a wonder. It's also easy to make: it's simply a stock of trotters with vegetables and herbs such as thyme, bay and parsley, plus a good slug of wine and madeira.

For the pie, buy a brace of pheasants - two should be enough for two hungry

pie-eaters - and a nice piece of smoked bacon. Remove the skin from the bacon, then cube. Make your base by browning shallots, celery, garlic and fennel, as well as the bacon. Season the birds and brown them all over in a heavy pan with oil and a lump of butter. Once sufficiently browned, give them a good splash of madeira and let the liquor reduce. Then pop the whole birds into a casserole dish with your browned vegetables, bacon and a cupful or two of Trotter Gear. Pour in some chicken stock to about halfway up the birds. They should look nice and snug, like they're swimming in a swamp. Season, cover and cook gently in a low oven until they are tender.

Once cool, separate the vegetables from the mixture and put them to one side. Pull the meat off the bones in chunks. Reduce the remaining liquor. Build the pie mix with mainly meat and a little veg, then pour in your Trotter Gear and bacon liquor.

When it has cooled down, find a nice vessel to put it in. And that's the hard work done. Label it, pop it in the fridge and when the Christmas leftovers have been exhausted, you'll be poised to make your pie.

I hope Fergus gives me a bottle of his new "Fergroni". I love it. We fell in love while drinking Negronis. We threw crazy Christmas parties for several years and Fergus would stand at the kitchen counter all night, mixing jugs of Negronis in true Fergus style - a slice of orange and some ice, gin, Punt e Mes and Campari - a marvellous drink. "Negronis!" he would roar and a very good time was had by all. In fact, I feel another Christmas party coming on. ►

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Daniel Keeling

Co-founder of Noble Rot, the wine and food magazine and restaurant

It has been more than five years since my father David died, a period marked by his conspicuous absence from the Christmas lunch table. A back-seat restaurateur if ever there was one, he'd dish up still-frozen prawns in cocktail sauce, fuss over whether my serving plates were the correct temperature and enthusiastically advocate opening great wines, whether a 1996 Conterno Barolo "Cascina Franca" that was so hard it almost broke our teeth or his last bottle of 1988 Lafaurie-Peyraguey Sauternes.

Although Dad was still around to see the beginnings of Noble Rot as a wine and food magazine, sadly he never made it to our restaurant in Bloomsbury, probably a good thing for profits because I would never have got the buggier out.

Dad loved wine, but especially the bonhomie it creates. We made our first trip to Burgundy together when he was ill with prostate cancer, walking among the vines in Grand Cru Musigny within an hour of arrival and drinking Coche-Dury Volnay with roast pigeon at Beaune's Ma Cuisine in the evening. Although he didn't delve into the nuances of a wine's vintage, appellation or producer, he was always a receptive participant of alcoholic enlightenment and, though a man of few words, would often then come up with a few more than usual.

So, Dad, this Christmas I want to give you a truly extraordinary wine I have since discovered - and I would love us to drink it together, as we have done so many times.

One of the big vinous lessons I've learnt over the past five years is that it's easier to make a powerful, concentrated wine than one with sensuality and finesse. If I had

to choose one ethereal, exotic, perfumed red that makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end, it's Soldera Brunello di Montalcino.

In December 2018, I was scheduled as one of the late Gianfranco Soldera's last appointments at Case Basse, his estate near Montalcino, Tuscany. But we never met. Having fallen badly the week before, the 82-year-old was convalescing in hospital while his daughter Monica explained his peerless standards in the vineyards and winery. By the middle of February this year he was gone.

I'll try my best to hold back the hyperbole, but not only has Soldera Brunello di Montalcino redefined my idea of Italian wine, it has left me euphoric every time I've drunk it. If fine wine is art, then Soldera is Tuscany's answer to Picasso, a self-made genius whose ultra-limited productions will become benchmarks of future generations of winemakers. Techniques such as discarding healthy grapes that don't fit a uniform size, or using only free-run juice with no pressing, may seem as eccentric as some of his proclamations (my favourite is that French soils are only good for growing potatoes), until you taste the wines. Delicate, rich, fresh, natural, layered, exotic - words don't do them justice, but you might imagine Richebourg ripened by Mediterranean sunbeams.

So, this one's for you, Dad. If heaven exists, I know it must be as overcrowded as Piccadilly Circus at rush hour, but if you happen to see a recently arrived Italian bloke in a flat cap with a white moustache and outlandish opinions about French wine, do say hello. And if by chance you get to break bread together and share one of his spectacular Sangioveses - which he no doubt will modestly proclaim to be the best in the world - raise a toast and send me a "Cheers!". I'll know you'll be doing just fine.



Daniel Humm

The chef's new restaurant, Davies and Brook, will open in Claridge's, London, in December

My true loves are my three daughters and the best gift for those we love the most is time, sharing beautiful moments. That's what I want to give my girls this Christmas.

I cherish passing on memories and flavours that are meaningful to me and my family. When I was young, my mother Brigitte used to make me warm milk with wildflower honey and *fleur de sel* before I went to bed. Her milk has inspired many dishes at my restaurants and I share our ritual with my daughters.

First, I simmer the milk in a copper pot over a low flame, stirring it occasionally until it develops a light foam. Next, I pour it into mugs, just as my mother did for me. Then I drizzle in some honey and add just a pinch of *fleur de sel*. My mother and I would sit and talk about the day over this treat, and I want to do that with my daughters. The ingredients themselves are humble, but the beauty is in the simplicity - just as, perhaps, the gift of time is simple.

In return, I would like the girls to make me the second part of this tradition: beeswax candles.

After we collected our honey, my mother and I would melt down the wax on the stove, pour it into little jars, add a wick and let it cool overnight. Making these candles was one of my favourite things growing up and the sweet scent of the wax evokes memories of home. Even when my daughters are far away, the candles are a beautiful reminder of them.

I hope they will look back at the time we spend together with the same fondness that I feel for the times I spent with my mother when I was young. These moments grow more precious with each passing year. ▶



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Claire Ptak

The baker, food writer and stylist owns and runs Violet Cakes in London



I often get asked in interviews about work-life balance and that inevitable “How do you do it all?” I have a great team and I try to delegate as much as possible. But I feel the one thing I don’t get to do enough is cook for my family and friends. Not like I used to, at least.

Sure, there is Thanksgiving and Christmas, birthdays and occasional Sundays, but that simple, pure, everyday cooking, which doesn’t come from a recipe or a TV show, seems to be harder and harder to come by. And if I don’t have enough time to cook and food is my work, then surely my friends in fashion, finance, law and medicine don’t either.

Wouldn’t it be lovely to have a dear friend who could fill your cupboards with shopping, your counter with fresh produce from the market and your stovetop with bubbling pots?

My gift to my working women friends (mothers, godmothers and otherwise) would be to go to their

homes and do that. I’d roast a chicken with small waxy potatoes and a large leafy salad to go with it. I’d request the carcass be saved and return the following day to make a stock with it for my pumpkin risotto. With what was left, I’d make a chicken pot pie. There would be fruit for pudding or baked cinnamon apple pie with ice cream.

This could go on for a week, me slipping out just as they were about to sit down at the table, like a phantom who cooks their favourite dishes.

For me? A holiday in a hammock on the beach and a really good book. Or just the book if a tropical holiday is too expensive. One of the best things to come from all the amazing technology out there is that I’ve rediscovered books as a way to decompress from the digital buzz inside my brain. I love my phone but it goes away by 10pm and the thick pages of a new hardback, or the slightly musty pages of an old paperback, come out.



Josh Niland

Chef patron of restaurant Saint Peter and owner of Fish Butchery in Sydney, Australia

Obviously, I want to cook my wife a fish! For as long as I’ve known her, she has loved smoked salmon. To source, prepare and serve perfect smoked salmon would be wonderful.

Begin by flying off to Scotland to find – arguably – the best salmon on the planet. Fillet the salmon, removing all the bones. Place the fillets, bones and head in a cure made of salt, sugar, caper brine and lots of dill. Turn carefully in the brine over the coming days, until it is cured through.

Remove the bones and fillets from the cure and scrape off the brine gently with a knife. Cold-smoke the fillets using applewood chips for about half an hour. Then chill.

Hot-smoke the bones that have been left behind, using the same applewood chips for 30 minutes, or until you’re happy with the aroma. Remove from the smoker and dry overnight in a low oven.

Then put the bones in a food processor and blend to a fine powder, which you can use in your blinis. Serve with sliced raw onions, marinated salmon roe, capers, crème fraîche, my VB Beer mustard and warm smoked-bone blinis. Then pull up a picnic blanket and spoil the woman you love most.

I would like something quite different: a piece of Galloway or Galician beef, seasoned with *sel de Guérande* and grilled over grapevines. On the side: a green salad dressed with shallots and black pepper, Chardonnay vinegar and first-pressed extra virgin olive oil. And a drop of red Burgundy.



Alain Ducasse

Chef and founder of Maison Ducasse Paris

If only I were a faïence maker. I discovered this ceramic art when I opened my country inn, La Bastide de Moustiers, almost 25 years ago. Moustiers Sainte-Marie is a tiny village in the Provençal Alps, just below the point where the climate becomes too harsh for olive trees to grow. In the 17th century, it was synonymous with faïence. Today, it has 10 workshops, including Franck Scherer’s Atelier Soleil. Scherer is a great artist and he has created a number of pieces for La Bastide.

I am riveted by the way he transforms clay – an earthy, humble medium – into something so bright and elegant. Every step of his intricate process fascinates me: when the block of clay is turned on the potter’s wheel; when a piece is put in the glowing kiln for the first firing; or the most beautiful moment, when the painter applies the first strokes of colour.

Let me dream for a moment. If I were a faïence maker, I would craft a few big pieces for my closest friends, borrowing motifs from 18th-century Marseille and I’d present them after a good meal, *évidemment*.

For myself? I’m an insatiable collector of vintage luggage – suitcases, trunks and toiletry bags, indispensable companions to any decent traveller. This year, I would like the Vuitton *malle armoire* (wardrobe trunk) or the Bolide bag by Hermès, created in 1923, to be stowed in the door of the Bugatti Torpedo. **FT**





Eyes on the pies

As a young student in China, *Fuchsia Dunlop* used local ingredients to create her own versions of a traditional mince pie. The results were such a success that they have become an essential part of her seasonal festivities. Photographs by *Yuki Sugiura*

The problem with mince pies is their proportions. The typical mince pie is overloaded with mincemeat and intensely sweet. If the pastry is good and short, it will collapse in your hand as you take a bite, gifting you with a shatter of crumbs and sticky fingers. The solution, I have discovered, is to use the same ingredients but re-engineer the mince pie in the form of a Chinese *jiaozi* dumpling. Initially, I did this out of necessity, when I was spending my first Christmas away from home and family as a student in the Sichuanese capital Chengdu and, with my international classmates, attempting to recreate traditional festive foods in unfamiliar conditions.

Mince pies were essential, of course, but I couldn't buy mincemeat, or even dried currants, let alone a mince-pie tin, so I was forced to improvise. I fashioned a sort of mincemeat out of green Xinjiang sultanas, candied jujubes and citrus peel, cheap Chinese *bai-lan-di* (the local brandy) and strawberry jam. And then, tinless, I used a large glass to cut circles out of shortcrust pastry, folded these in half around a dollop of filling, brushed them with beaten egg and baked them. To my surprise, they were much better than traditional English mince pies. Small and dainty, they seemed to have just the right balance of jammy sweetness and fragile crust, and didn't fall apart in my hands.

The following year, I made *jiaozi* mince pies for my family in Oxford - everyone loved them. That was it: I haven't used a mince-pie

tin in the quarter century since. My Chinese-style mince pies have become as much a part of our traditional festivities as roast turkey and Brussels sprouts. They've also proved perfect for Christmas parties: the most elegant of seasonal canapés, a dainty bite rather than a serious commitment.

Though the Chinese don't have English-style mince pies themselves, they do have lots of pies, both sweet and savoury. One of my favourites is the barbecued pork puff (*charsiu su*), often served in Cantonese dim sum restaurants. The delectable filling is made from finely chopped barbecued pork in a sweet-savoury sauce: it's the same as the stuffing in a fluffy barbecued pork bun (*charsiu bao*). If you live near the kind of Chinese restaurant with ducks and barbecued meats hanging in the window, feel free to buy your pork ready-made. Otherwise, make your own *charsiu* pork: easy, although it does require an overnight marinade. (Any leftover pork will be delicious simply reheated and served with plain steamed rice and a stir-fried green vegetable, or fine-chopped and added to an egg-fried rice.)

Given that the ancestry of the modern, meatless Christmas "mince pie" lies in medieval pastries stuffed with chopped meat and liver, the Cantonese pork pie seems an entirely appropriate Christmas snack. I'd serve both these pies, reheated in the oven, with mulled wine or, perhaps, if you really want to mix things up, with some gently warmed Shaoxing wine with shreds of peeled ginger and a few preserved Chinese plums (*meizi*). ▶

Chinese sweet and savoury mince pies

The following recipe makes 20-25 little pies. If you are making both sweet and savoury versions, I suggest you distinguish them by sprinkling the savoury ones with white and/or black sesame seeds.

Ingredients

- 375g shortcrust pastry (bought or home-made, recipe overleaf)
- 400g jar of mincemeat
- One quantity of *charsiu* stuffing, made with bought or home-made barbecued pork (recipe below)
- 2 tbs white or black sesame seeds, or a mixture of the two
- 2 eggs for glazing
- You will also need a pastry ring about 8.5cm in diameter

Charsiu stuffing

(If you have any pork stuffing left, eat it with plain rice or noodles.)

- 1½ tbs cooking oil
- ½ tbs finely chopped ginger
- 4 tbs finely chopped shallot
- 200ml chicken stock

- 2½ tbs caster sugar
- 1½ tbs oyster sauce
- 2 tsp light soy sauce
- 1 tsp dark soy sauce
- 2 tbs potato starch mixed with 4 tbs cold water
- 150g *charsiu* pork, finely chopped

1 — Heat the oil in a seasoned wok over a high flame. Add the ginger and shallot and stir-fry briefly until they smell wonderful but are not coloured. Pour in the stock and bring to the boil. Add the sugar, oyster sauce and both soy sauces and mix well.

2 — Give the starch mixture a stir and add to the wok in a few stages, stirring as the liquid thickens, until you have a thick and gelatinous mixture (you may not need all the starch). Set aside to cool.

3 — When the sauce has cooled, stir in the chopped pork.





Small and dainty, they seemed to have just the right balance of jammy sweetness and fragile crust – and didn't fall apart in my hands

Rich shortcrust pastry

- 375g plain flour, plus more for dusting
- A pinch of salt
- 210g chilled butter
- 3 egg yolks

1 — Combine the flour and salt in a mixing bowl. Cut the butter into small cubes and add to the flour. Rub the butter into the flour with cool fingertips or a few brief pulses in a food processor: stop when the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Place in the freezer and chill for 20 minutes.

2 — Mix the egg yolks with 6 tbs cold water. Remove the "breadcrumbs" from the freezer and mix in just enough of the egg to bind to a dough. Do not overwork the pastry. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for at least 30 minutes before rolling out.

Making the pies

1 — Set the oven to 200C. Line your oven trays with baking parchment paper.

2 — Mix the two eggs with 4 tbs cold water to make the egg wash. Fill a small cup with cold water for sealing the pies.

3 — Roll the pastry out to a thickness of 2mm-3mm on a work surface dusted lightly with flour. Use your pastry cutter to cut rounds. Place a generous teaspoonful of mincemeat or *charsiu* stuffing on to each round. Dip a finger into the cupful of cold water and run it around the edge of each circle, then fold in half and press tightly to seal. Lay the dumplings on your lined baking trays. For best results, chill in the fridge for 30 minutes before baking. (If you have any scraps of pastry left over, you can make some little stars to decorate the serving dishes.)

4 — Brush all the dumplings with eggwash. Prick with a fork to allow air to escape. Sprinkle the savoury pies with a few sesame seeds.

5 — Bake the pies in your hot oven for 15-20 minutes until golden. Serve warm.

To make your own charsiu pork

There are many different recipes for the marinade for *charsiu* pork. Some cooks add a little sesame paste; others chopped shallots and a dash of the strong, rose-flavoured liquor called *meigui lu jiu*. In the following recipe, I've tried to minimise the specialist ingredients: the crushed yellow bean sauce, red fermented tofu (*hong furu* or *nanru*) and maltose syrup can be found in most Chinese groceries, while oyster sauce and Shaoxing wine are available in mainstream British supermarkets. I hope you'll agree that the results are scrumptious: just try not to eat all the pork before you've made the pies.

- 500g pork neck or shoulder fillet
- A little cooking oil

For the marinade

- 15g ginger, skin on
- 1 spring onion (white part only)
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tbs caster sugar
- ½ tsp five-spice powder
- 2 tbs crushed yellow bean sauce
- 1 tbs mashed red fermented tofu, plus 1 tbs of the juices from the jar
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tbs Shaoxing wine (or 2 tsp Cantonese rose liquor)

For the glazing syrup

- 40g maltose syrup
- 40g rock sugar

1 — Cut the pork into strips about 4cm wide and 1.5cm-2cm thick. Make a few shallow, criss-cross cuts into the meat, without cutting through: this will help the flavours to penetrate.

2 — Smack the ginger and spring onion white with the flat of a cleaver blade or a rolling pin to loosen them,

and place in a small cup with 2 tbs cold water.

3 — Combine the salt, sugar and five-spice powder in a large bowl. Add all the other marinade ingredients, including the ginger, spring onion and their soaking water and mix well.

4 — Drop the pork into the marinade and mix well, massaging the seasonings into the pork. Cover and chill for at least four hours, and preferably overnight, turning once if possible.

5 — Place the glaze ingredients in a small pan with 60ml water. Heat gently to dissolve the sugars, and then stir as you bring to the boil. Set aside until needed.

6 — When you are ready to cook the pork, set an oven to 250C. Line a roasting pan with kitchen foil. Arrange a roasting rack in the pan and brush with a little cooking oil.

7 — When the oven is hot, discard the ginger and spring onion from the marinade and then lay the strips of pork on the rack. Place in the centre of the oven and roast for about 25 minutes, turning halfway through, until the pork is a little browned.

8 — Remove the pan from the oven. Brush the glaze generously all over the upmost side of the pork. Return to the oven for 5-10 minutes until it looks glossy and extremely appetising. Remove from the oven, quickly turn the meat, brush the other side generously with glaze, then return to the oven to colour the other side.

9 — Remove the meat from the rack, brush all over with more glaze and then serve or set aside until needed. **FF**

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Fuchsia Dunlop's latest book, "The Food of Sichuan", is published by Bloomsbury



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M E L O N



M A D N E S S

For centuries, the winter melons of Uzbekistan have been prized for their sweetness. *Caroline Eden* meets the people who look after these coveted gifts. Photographs by *Hassan Kurbanbaev*

By the cotton fields and pomegranate stalls lining the road from Samarkand to Tashkent, hundreds of melons lie scattered in the dirt. Some have skin smooth and yellow as butter while others are knobbly and crocodile-like. Karim Qarshi, a 57-year-old trader, wearing aviator shades against the late-autumn glare, watches over them.

Inviting me closer, he places a bizarre-looking seaweed-green melon into my hands. Round as a football, heavy and full, its skin is deeply ribbed, like thick corduroy, and its wrinkly stalk is as curved as a coat hook.

"This is called old lady melon. It is very sweet, very soft," says Qarshi, running his hand over the tight folds of the melon.

Then, taking a knife, he carves a triangle-shaped wedge from it, exposing, almost indecently, the melon's flesh, creamy as magnolia. In the middle, a tightly packed glistening jelly-ball of seeds manages to hold its form despite the cut. From this strange melon comes a unique and powerful fruitiness, mixing overripe pear flavours with Bourbon vanilla. As I pay for the fruit, which costs less than a dollar, two passengers spring out of a white Chevrolet and go darting into the fields, leaping over the golden wasp-attracting rinds that lay strewn about. They pick through the piles, carefully inspecting, sniffing and selecting melons.

Just as France is the land of the croissant, Uzbekistan is the land of the melon. During the melon harvest of autumn and early winter, Qarshi, along with half a dozen others, sleeps by the roadside in eastern Uzbekistan's Jizzakh region. On guard until the cold sets in properly in mid-November, they overnight in the heart of melon-bed land in what is a melon-mad country, home to 160 varieties. Small steel beds, topped with makeshift floral fabric canopies, provide a place of rest around the clock, allowing the melon sellers to remain alert and ready.

In the west, melons are seen as thirst-quenching tropical fare, symbols of summer - think of novelty watermelon-shaped beach balls, icy melon sorbet and hydrating scoops of cantaloupe - but in Uzbekistan it is the winter varieties, those harvested from mid-September, that are favoured for their vitamins and antioxidants. Taste aside, what makes these melons so remarkable is the peculiar and particular way in which they are stored.

Nearly all winter melon varieties, such as those Qarshi sells, spend time in a dark and cool specially built melon shed called a *qovunxona*. There, strapped to the rafters with thick string or netting, they ripen in slow motion over the cold months, all the while growing softer and sweeter, skin shrivelling, while the flesh amasses maximum sucrose, becoming ever more melony. Matured that way, they are good to keep for up to eight months, making them available most of the year and suitable to travel overland, across vast deserts and steppe lands, if necessary.

Before *qovunxonas* existed, farmers would simply shovel up snow or sand and bury their melons deep underground, away from the chill. Unlike in western supermarkets, which tend to stock a trifling selection of varieties - honeydew, galia and watermelon, maybe a mottled-skinned

Spanish *piel de sapo* ("toadskin") if you're lucky - it is the farmer who decides when a melon is ready. There are certainly no stickers ordering the buyer to "ripen at home".

Uzbekistan's harsh continental climate - very hot summers, very cold winters - is perfect for growing melons. According to one exporter, 22,000ha of melon fields produce 400,000-500,000 tonnes a year. And, just as they are embedded in the terroir, the economy and the Uzbek imagination, they are entrenched in history and customs.

Uzbek melons have been written about over centuries. Wrapped in cotton, they were regularly transported great distances along various strands of the silk routes that criss-crossed Central Asia. Ancient Uzbek kingdoms would send forth their prized winter melons - fruits of rare and strange beauty - as much-coveted gifts. They would go by camel caravan to the Abbasid capital of Baghdad, to Russian tsars and Mughal emperors.

Many of the world's greatest travellers to Central Asia were bewitched by regional melons, ▶

Previous page: Ilyor, an Uzbek farmer, at his 'qovunxona', or winter melon shed, in the Fergana region

Below: a vendor of winter melons at the Qorasuv bazaar in Tashkent

Right: different varieties of winter melons from the October harvest at the Qorasuv bazaar





**Just as France is the
land of the croissant,
Uzbekistan is the
land of the melon**

◀ often writing them into their stories and diaries. One of their earliest mentions, also concerning the art of gifting them, was by 10th-century chronicler Muhammad Abu al-Qasim ibn Hawqal, who wrote a travelogue of his journeys through Islamic lands. In ancient Khorasan (a territory extending over north-eastern Iran, parts of Afghanistan and Central Asia), he noted that melons were prepared and dried “for export to numerous places of the world, and I do not know of any other place where such a thing might be possible”. A better remembered traveller today, the 14th-century Moroccan wanderer Ibn Battuta, wrote: “No melon can be compared with the Khorezmian ones except, maybe, for the melons from Bukhara.”

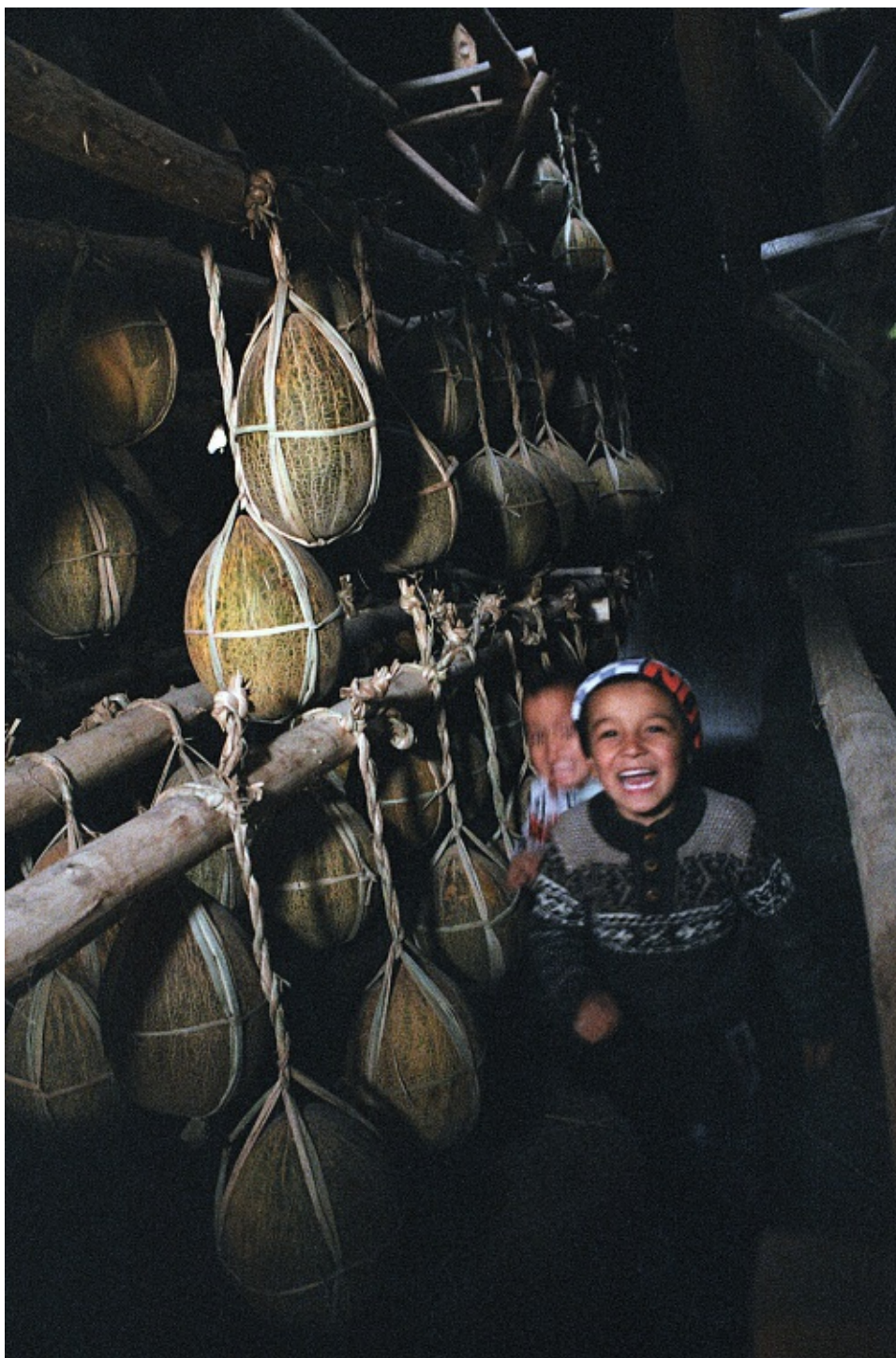
In the 15th century, Castilian envoy Ruy González de Clavijo was granted an audience with the empire builder and “conqueror of the world” Tamerlane in Samarkand. He noted that, as well as palaces, there were great orchards, Persian-style gardens and lavish parties in ornate tents decorated with looted treasures. “The melons of this countryside are abundant and very good, and at the season of Christmas there are so many melons... Every day, camels bring in their loads of melons from the country and it is a wonder how many are sold and eaten in the market,” he wrote.

Melon madness badly affected the Mughals, who longed mournfully for Central Asian melons, the incomparable fruit of their homeland. When the Timurid prince Babur, great-great-great grandson of Tamerlane, first conquered northern India in 1526, he bemoaned the Indian climate and the lack of melons. In his memoir, *The Baburnāma*, he wrote of his conquered home: “No grapes or muskmelons, no good fruits, no ice or cold water, no good bread or food in their bazaars.” Where he came from there were melons with “skin yellow and puckered like shagreen leather... pulp four fingers thick”.

Packed in snow and put into lead containers, winter melons were sent by Uzbek nobility to China to impress its emperors. Captain Frederick Burnaby, the British Army’s swashbuckling balloonist, who stood 6ft 4in tall and was said to have once carried a pony under one arm, wrote of these exotic presents in his 1876 book *A Ride to Khiva*. “The melons here have a fame which is celebrated all over the east. In former years they were sent as far as Peking for the Emperor of China’s table.” Burnaby, who was especially fond of the strange and flavourful melons of Uzbekistan, procured some seeds and tried, but ultimately failed, to grow them in England.

Given their melons’ wide-ranging fame and long-term appeal, it is no wonder that Uzbeks have called them fittingly fantastical names. There is “white feather”, “wolf head”, “golden eyebrow” and “black lake”. At Alay bazaar, in the capital Tashkent, I find traders Sobitali and Komil packing up for the day. They have been there since daybreak but, when it comes to talking about melons, they are full of enthusiasm. One of their favourites, they tell me, is extra soft and extra sweet and its name literally translates to “have stepped on it”. This, they explain, is both a way of describing its yielding pulpy softness and a reminder to the buyer to be careful not to squash it accidentally as it is relatively small.

Such a flavourful journey from just one slice of melon is so otherworldly that sublime wouldn’t be too big a word for it





Above: melon sellers testing their goods before sending them to market
 Left: children playing in a winter melon house

There is even a local idiom for such calamities in life: if you fail an exam, trip over or miss your bus, you have “dropped the melon”.

Komil takes out his mobile phone and proudly shows me a video of his personal melon shed.

The walls of a *qovunxona* are studded with saucer-sized porthole windows to provide natural air conditioning. A melon shed should have clean, cool air and not smell of melons. If their scent is present, they are already starting to turn. Grown in the fields of the Jizzakh region, Komil’s melons are stored and hung 320km to the east, in Kokand, in the Fergana Valley. “This is where the wind blows,” Komil says. And wind is essential for good ventilation.

Keeping them makes economic sense too, as the cost of melons peaks during the Uzbek winter, when they can go for 10 times what they cost at the start of autumn. It is during the coldest months that vitamins and melony goodness are most needed. “When do we harvest the winter melon? As soon as the first frost of the season comes. We say of winter melons, ‘Hang, don’t cut’, as they take time and you have to wait patiently for them to become ready,” Komil explains.

Also for sale at Alay market are strips of sun-dried melon that have been thinly sliced and plaited, or rolled, and then studded with raisins and nuts (“Uzbek Snickers” as the traders call them). These make handsome, easy-to-transport

gifts. Perhaps Marco Polo tried them. He certainly wrote of something similar in his book *The Description of the World* (c1300): “They [pieces of melon] are preserved as follows: a melon is sliced, just as we do with pumpkin, then these slices are rolled and dried in the sun; and finally they are sent for sale to other countries, where they are in great demand for they are as sweet as honey.”

Komil slices open a yellow melon and hands me a slithery wedge. I try to unpick the flavours. First, an intense sugariness similar to sherbet, then a little honey mixed with almond essence and, finally, pineapple and the smoothness of rum. Such a complex and flavourful journey from just one slice of melon, so otherworldly that sublime wouldn’t be too big a word for it. He puts another melon in a bag and then in my hand, a gift, despite my insistence on paying.

Waving goodbye, he yells the warning that melon traders like to dish out: “Do not eat it in the evening.” Uzbeks believe the calorific and sweet melons are hard to digest and are therefore best eaten at breakfast.

The melon in my bag, as round and golden as a full moon, will later be sliced and cut into curved sickle crescents. The kind of melon that made Babur weep homesick tears. **FT**

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Caroline Eden is the author of two food and travel books, “Samarkand” and “Black Sea”



How to bring the perfect bottle

Don't go for something quirky. Magnums make a splash. Never palm off a nasty wine on your host. Champagne is always welcome... *Alice Lascelles* shares a drink writer's tips on how to arrive in style. Illustration by *George Wylesol*

Gold, frankincense, myrrh... merlot? Deciding what bottle to take to someone's house, especially during the season of giving, can be enough to bring some people out in a cold sweat. And it doesn't get any easier when you're a drinks writer, either, since you know full well that your host will be googling whatever you brought as soon as you leave the room.

A piece of advice that's often given - particularly to those who are anxious about impressing their host - is to shun the classics and go for something a bit quirky instead: a Texan natural wine, a Chinese Riesling or something like that. This is a very high-risk strategy and not one I'd recommend unless you know your host really well (in which case you should actively compete to bring the weirdest wine possible - I've had some real fun doing this).

A respectable bottle of burgundy, Italian Nebbiolo or an aromatic white from Alsace (currently very on-trend) will always be appreciated by anyone with their head screwed on (and will be much easier for them to re-gift down the line, if they actually prefer Chinese Riesling). If you don't know

what to get, seek the advice of an independent wine merchant - this is where they really excel.

Everyone loves champagne, of course, and at this time of year there are some fantastic bargains to be had. Alternatively, you could bring something to grace the end of the meal - a bottle of golden Tokaji, perhaps, or the sommelier's favourite: madeira.

Large formats are guaranteed to make a splash (and can be better value than two bottles, in many cases): a magnum of icy-cold Sancerre or an outsized claret would feel very festive. You can get away with a lot if you take a magnum - people are usually so distracted by the scale of the gift they forget to be too critical about the contents.

Don't worry about whether the wine you've brought goes with the food or not - if it tastes nice, no one will give a hoot whether it's a scientifically proven flavour match for Beef Wellington. But do ensure, if it's white or fizz, that it's already chilled when you hand it over.

If you've poured a lot of money and time into choosing the wine you're taking to dinner, the chances are you're probably hoping to drink it. Nothing is more agonising than seeing the lovely Pinot Noir you

selected being squirrelled away in the wine rack beside the tumble dryer and replaced with a bottle of lukewarm Yellow Tail.

If you want to avoid this scenario, you need to be a bit wily about it. One ruse employed by several wine writers I know is to arrive with the bottle already open and say: "I wanted to make sure it wasn't corked/It needed decanting first." This has the benefit of making you look extra thoughtful, while leaving your host no choice but to serve it. "I wanted to save this wine until I could taste it with someone who I knew would really appreciate it," is another popular ploy.

You can get away with a lot if you take a magnum - people are usually so distracted by the scale of the gift they forget about the contents

Some people I know take two bottles - one for the host to serve and one for them to keep. This makes sense, but there's always the risk that neither bottle gets opened, in which case you wind up spending double the amount of money and drinking twice the amount of Yellow Tail.

Never try to palm off a nasty bottle of wine on your host. Not only is this very rude but it will almost certainly backfire on you.

Even a relatively ordinary bottle can be "premiumised", so to speak, if you give it a bit of thought. If you're giving a bottle of gin, why not throw in some nice tonic and a few fancy lemons, as well; if you're giving a bottle of sherry, accompany it with a bag of smoked almonds.

A friend of mine once came to dinner with a bottle of champagne and a round of smoked salmon bagels he'd baked himself, which I thought was incredibly chic. A lot of Tuscan wine estates also make olive oil - you could give a bottle of each.

A ready-made Negroni also makes a nice gift: stir together equal parts gin, Campari and red vermouth, pour the mixture into a swing-top bottle, stick a nice label on it and bob's your uncle. Other drinks that work well as bottled cocktails include the Old Fashioned, the Manhattan and the Sazerac. All the boozy ones, basically.

In the end, it's important to remember that the primary purpose of what you're bringing isn't to show off your wealth or create some cosmic food-and-wine match or to demonstrate your encyclopaedic knowledge of first growths - it's simply to say thank you. And if you enjoy choosing the bottle you bring, your host - and, God willing, their guests - will almost certainly enjoy drinking it too. **FT**

@alicelascelles. Alice Lascelles is Fortnum & Mason Drinks Writer of the Year 2019 and an FT contributing editor

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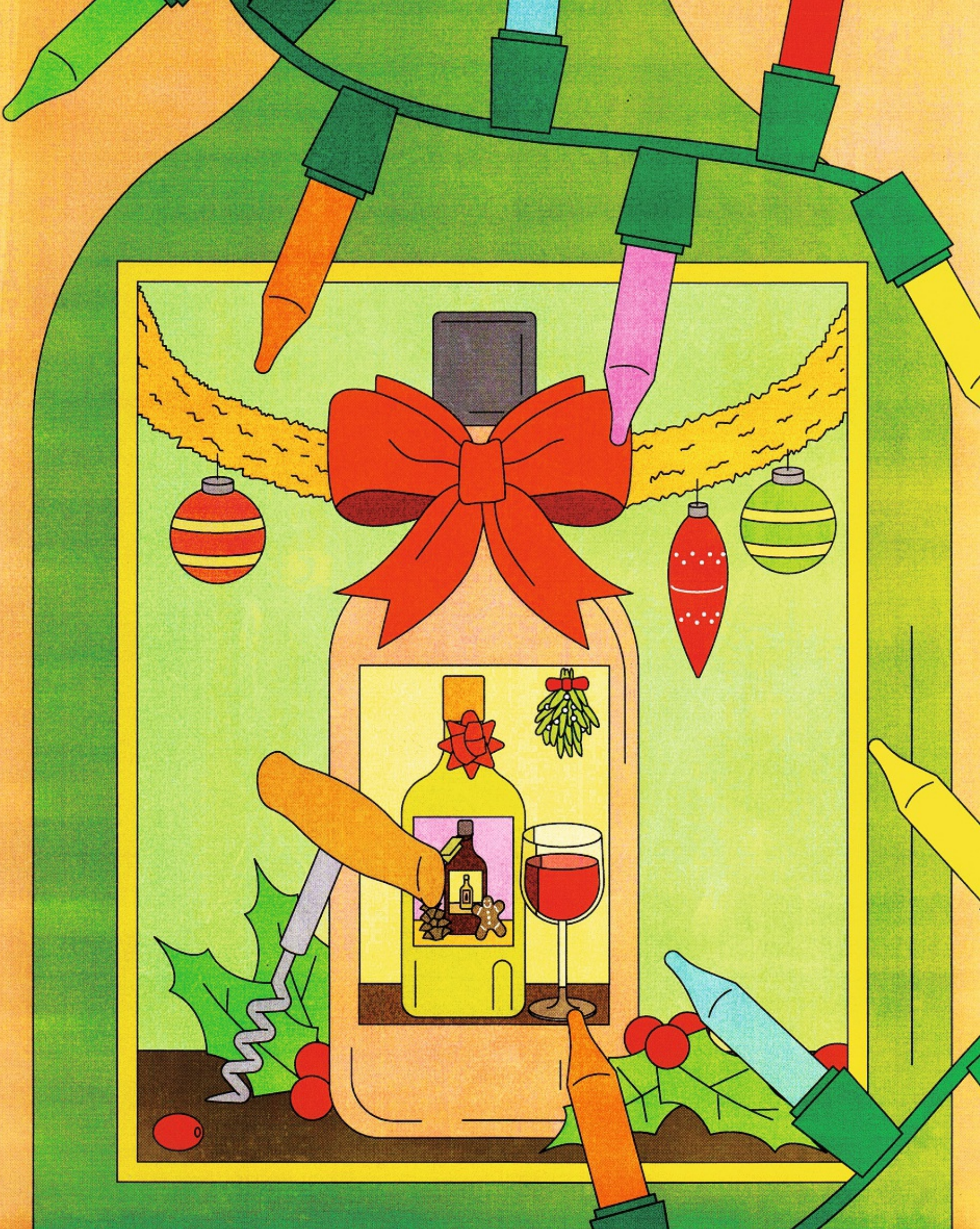
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Honey & Co Recipes

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A glass act

From chocolate and tahini spread to apple and raisin chutney, *Honey & Co* serve up some recipes guaranteed to preserve the spirit of Christmas. Photographs by *Patricia Niven*



We have a tradition of exchanging edible gifts with Julia Chodubska, our head chef and constant inspiration. She brings us Israeli pickles from Kosher Kingdom, the Jewish supermarket in her neighbourhood, or smoked sprats from the Polish deli. Every year, we give her a large tin of olive oil for her birthday, plus a few extra bottles that we pick up from our travels.

If I am in Marylebone, I will stop in La Fromagerie for a few slices of truffle Mortadella; every time I go to Israel, I bring back a few kilos of small crunchy cucumbers – some for us, some for Julia.

In season, Julia goes to Kent to pick porcini and, if we're lucky, she gives a little bag to us. (Once, we made the mistake of leaving it in the fridge at work overnight. The next day, it was gone. Finding us undeserving of this precious treasure, Julia had taken it back – and rightly so.)

A gift is a little test. How well do you know me? How much thought have you put in? How much money/energy/time have you spent? If a good gift is a matter of taste, then a tasty gift is surely the best. We are not alone in thinking this. Our kitchens go into a production frenzy at this time of year, and cookies, crackers, chutneys and spice mixes fly off

the shelves of our deli. Our jam supply, full to the brim at the end of summer, is swiftly depleting. The last jar of apricot and elderflower has gone and the fig jams are selling fast – they always run out before Christmas, no matter how much we make. To keep up with demand, we have started to jam the winter fruit – pears, quince and citrus.

Coolly, Julia presides over all this and comments that the many names the English language has for different kinds of jarred foods – jam, marmalade, preserve, compote, curd, spread – is like the different words that some languages have for snow. “Growing up in Poland, we had one thing,” she says. “It was called *marmolada* and it was brown.” And so she makes sure our jams are brightly coloured, shiny and delicious. She is a lady who understands the importance of a good, tasteful gift.

If, like us, you turn to the kitchen when the festive season begins, then these recipes are our gift to you. Whoever you give these to will think fondly of you as they open a little jar of something sweet for their morning toast, something sharp to accompany the evening roast or for a sprinkle of crunchy salt on their salad. These are gifts that will keep on giving. **FT**

By Itamar Srulovich. Recipes by Sarit Packer

Apple, celeriac and golden raisin chutney

To make four jars of about 400g each

- 1 celeriac, peeled and diced small, about 400g net weight
- 3-4 apples, peeled, cored and diced small, about 400g net weight
- Juice and zest of one lemon
- 200g golden raisins
- 50g ginger, peeled and thinly sliced, 30g net weight
- 2 large cloves of garlic, peeled and thinly sliced
- 3 onions, peeled and diced small, about 400g net weight
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 2 dried Persian limes (replace with zest of a fresh lime if dried ones aren't available)
- 1-2 whole dried chillies (depending on how much heat you like)
- 2 whole star anise
- 2 bay leaves
- 300ml cider vinegar
- 250g light brown sugar
- ½ tsp salt



Swirl jar of chocolate spread and sweet tahini (halva) spread

To make three large jars (about 350ml to 400ml each)

Because we don't use any of the horrible preservatives that commercial brands might, this spread should be kept in the fridge. Consume within a couple of weeks.

For the sweet tahini spread:

- 250g tahini
- 60g honey
- 60g sugar
- 150g coconut milk
- Seeds from half a vanilla pod

For the chocolate spread:

- 200g coconut milk
- Seeds from half a vanilla pod
- 150g dark chocolate (use semi-dark – about 50% to 60% – or it will set too solidly)
- 4 tbs vegetable or rapeseed oil
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tbs rich cocoa powder

1 – For the tahini spread, simply mix all the ingredients together until they

thicken. Set aside until you are ready to fill the jars.

2 – For the chocolate spread, heat the coconut milk with the vanilla, pour over the chocolate and whisk until the chocolate has all melted. Add the rest of the spices and cocoa powder, and whisk until smooth. Set aside to cool. Stir occasionally until the mix thickens to the same consistency as the tahini spread. You can pop it in the fridge for five-minute intervals, but don't leave it there for too long or it will set before you have a chance to jar it.

3 – Once both mixes are the same consistency, fill the jars. You can do this using two piping bags, holding both at the same time into the jar, or simply spoon in the mixes in alternate layers. Close and store in the fridge. This won't last as long as jam – two or three weeks at most – but, frankly, once the jar has been opened, that won't be an issue.

1 – Put the diced celeriac with the apple, lemon juice and zest in a pan on a medium-low heat. Mix well and cook for about 10 minutes, stirring now and then. Add the golden raisins, ginger, garlic and onions and stir again. Cook for a further 10 minutes.

2 – Let the fruit start to catch on the bottom of the saucepan – this will give it lots of flavour – add all the spices and mix again for another 10 minutes.

3 – Add the vinegar, sugar and salt and mix well, scraping off all the residue on the bottom of the pan. Reduce the heat to very low and simmer slowly, stirring every 10 minutes or so until thick; there should be no visible liquid and the apple and celeriac dice should be super-soft. Remove the cinnamon stick and other spices, if you can find them easily.

4 – Place in hot sterilised jars and seal until ready to use. Once opened, store in the fridge and consume within two to three weeks.





Flavoured vanilla, orange and coriander salt

Three small jars (40g-50g each)

This is a great salt for either sprinkling sparingly on cookies just before baking or adding to a chocolate mousse for a little something extra. It will also work well for salting a chicken or large piece of meat overnight before roasting or slow-cooking. It is a great way to use a vanilla pod once the seeds have been used in a pudding – the pod carries so much flavour it's a shame to throw it away.

- Zest of one orange
- 120g flaky sea salt
- 1 used dried vanilla pod
- 2 tsp whole coriander seeds
- 1 tsp granulated sugar

1 — Heat an oven to a very low heat, about 110C-120C. Zest an orange directly on to a dry clean tray. Sprinkle with 1 tsp of the salt, cut the used vanilla pod into small pieces and add it to the tray with the orange zest.

2 — Place in the oven to dry for between 10 and 15 minutes. Add the coriander seeds to the tray and roast for the final five minutes.

3 — Take the tray out of the oven and cool entirely, before crushing in a pestle and mortar or a small spice grinder. Mix the salt with the spice mix and add the sugar. Fill very dry jars and seal.

Orange, saffron and pomegranate jam

To make two to three jars, about 850g of jam

The juice from the jewels of pomegranate seeds tends to dissolve after a few days and the jam becomes a little redder. It's still delicious – just not as pretty. To prolong the beauty, store in a cold fridge.

- 3 whole oranges (about 600g)
- 200ml water
- 400g sugar
- Generous pinch of saffron strands
- 4 cloves
- 1 small pomegranate, broken to seeds (approx 160g)

1 — Cover the whole oranges with plenty of water and boil for one hour, topping up the water occasionally. Take the oranges out of the water and let them cool until you can handle them.

2 — Cut the oranges in half, leaving the skin on. Remove the central white core and any seeds, and blitz in a food processor until you have a chunky purée.

3 — Pour the orange purée into a saucepan and add the water, sugar, saffron and cloves. Mix well, place on a medium-high heat and stir occasionally until the mixture boils. Skim any foam and reduce the heat to medium-low. Continue cooking until the mix thickens, stirring occasionally so that it doesn't catch the bottom of the pan. This stage should take about 30 to 40 minutes, and will allow the saffron colour to spread into the jam.

4 — Add the pomegranate seeds and bring it back to a boil. Test for thickness – a little on a cold plate should stay together in a thick blob without any liquid seeping away from the fruit pulp. If you know how to do a ripple test, you can try that too. Once cooked, place in hot, sterilised jars and seal.



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HAVE A COOKIE

It started in middle America but cookie decorating is now a global craze, with millions of 'cookiers' from Kansas to Minsk. Meanwhile, a lucrative cottage industry sells tools, sprinkles and bespoke biscuits in shapes from sneakers to kittens, turkeys to Trump. *Wendell Steavenson* reports. Photographs by *Jason Andrew*

I fell down the cookie-decorating rabbit hole while scrolling Instagram one afternoon. Mesmerised, I watched video after video of royal icing being piped on to different sugar cookie shapes. Lulled by the fluid and precise flow of sugar, I found myself waiting with awe and suspense to see what the cookie would be: a slice of blueberry pie, a pair of Air Jordan Retro Mocha sneakers, vampire fangs dripping in blood, weirdly life-like kittens, Harry Potter glasses, Freddie Mercury in drag, intricate Portuguese blue-and-white tiles, the sofa from the Central Perk coffee shop in *Friends*, gingerbread men in bondage outfits, a *trompe l'oeil* slice of tomato, a rainbow turkey for Thanksgiving, a marshmallow snowman melting into a puddle of white icing.

It turns out I am not alone. YouTube cookie-decorating videos attract millions of views - but then, who hasn't tried to glop icing on to a biscuit at some point? From cartoony graphics to painterly watercolours, extraordinary filigreed lace work, calligraphy homilies, sculpture effects made with gum paste and rice paper, and satire (I have seen Brexit cookies and Trump caricatures), the level of artistry and skill - deployed on a medium that is, well, fleeting - is frankly jaw-dropping. You can roll your eyes at all the sugary-cute llamas and unicorns; and, sure, it's an internet trend, but cookies are

not so much memes as platforms for memes, edible greeting cards for any occasion: onesies and baby bottles for christenings, cakes and quilted numbers for birthdays, diamond rings and champagne flutes for weddings. Cookies make us smile and, these days, that is of no small value. What was once a sticky afternoon activity for kids has spread through social media and craft sites, such as Etsy, Pinterest and Blueprint, to events including classes, conventions, competitions and even a TV show, *The Christmas Cookie Challenge* on the American Food Network. Practitioners call themselves cookiers and their hobby supports a thriving cottage industry.

Recently, I moved to Washington, DC. There I found Meghan Cassidy's cookie-decorating class through her Instagram @meghan_bakes and I joined her and a group of beginners in the US capital. A dozen women sat around a long table and listened attentively as Cassidy described how to hold the piping bag in a way that could also be a philosophy for life: "Don't squeeze too tight, but you have to squeeze enough." The women practised tracing lines and curves and shapes on worksheets.

"It's harder than you think," said one woman, blobbing a blob at the end of a line.

"Don't worry, you can always eat your mistakes," said Cassidy.

The heartland of cookie decorating is middle America, but the trend has gone global and cookiers log on from Kansas to Canton, Ohio, Winnipeg, São Paulo, Minsk, Adelaide, Singapore, Iran and Paris. The community is almost exclusively female; cookiers describe themselves on their

Instagram bios as "wifey-mama, home-make", "work-at-home mom, mother of four cookier-wife", "loving wife and mom to 3 wonderful boys". Karen Summers, one of the godmothers of the craft, began her career almost 20 years ago. She had just had her first child and found herself at home with a bit of time on her hands. With a background in baking, she began to post how-to videos online.

"I didn't really know what blogging was, but that's what I was doing," she told me on the phone from her home in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Her small, dedicated following grew steadily in number. She noticed that cake-decorating supply companies such as Wilton (high-end and perhaps the best known) were not catering for cookie decorators and pretty soon she and her husband Mike, a web designer, were selling cutters and food colours online. In 2012, she started the conference, Cookie-Con, which one professional cookier described to me as "like the nexus of the cookie world".

When I talked to Summers, she had just sold 1,000 tickets for the 2020 gathering in an hour. People come to meet their Instagram heroes, to see other people's work, to sign up to classes with professionals - which can cost up to \$450 - and to check out a large array of specialised tools that vendors bring to show and sell. More than anything, they come for the people.

"The cookie community is just so supportive and open and sharing," Summers told me. "People reach out and they lift each other. It sounds corny but that's very much the draw for cookie decorators - as much as the art, it's just the inclusiveness." ▶

'People reach out and they lift each other. It sounds corny but that's the draw for cookie decorators - as much as the art, it's just the inclusiveness'

Karen Summers, founder of Cookie-Con



Meghan Cassidy (centre) teaches cookie decorating in Washington, DC; students Alair Choquette (top left) and her mother Alana (above)

◀ Cassidy showed us a few techniques: outlining a cookie and then “flooding it” with icing; shaking gently to allow it to settle into a smooth surface; piping different-coloured dots and lines on to it before it could dry - called wet-on-wet technique. She showed us how to feather and swirl the icing with a pointed metal “scribe”. Then she brought out boxes of plain cookies for the class to decorate themselves.

“Wish me luck!” said Finley Bonham, aged 12, hovering over a sweater-shaped cookie with a bag of red icing.

“I don’t care,” said her friend Alair Choquette, also 12, “as long as it’s delicious.”

Finley’s mother Jaime was not happy with her outlining of the star cookie and she wiped it off and began again. Alair’s mother Alana piped a red sweater with green stripes and added snowflake sprinkles.

“Oh Mom, that looks so good,” said her daughter.

The group fell into a concentrated silence.

“Don’t forget to breathe,” advised Cassidy.

There is something very soothing and absorbing about cookie decorating. Cassidy, who is in her twenties, trained as a schoolteacher, but she told me she has only recently started teaching cookie classes. She had always baked at Christmas with her mother, and icing cookies for friends and family had become her party trick.

“After teaching high-school boys for five hours,” she said, “I was so burnt out I thought, ‘I need to put some creativity in my life.’ I would go home and cookie decorating was just very calming.” Last year she posted a series of cookie videos on Instagram during the holiday season and “weirdly, it just took off”.

“It’s definitely therapeutic,” agreed Summers. “I remember when I had my store online and I heard so many stories from people who had got through something difficult, a divorce or a death in the family or an illness, through cookie decorating.”

Amanda Hamilton-Smith - who has a business, The Cookie Collaboration, baking custom cookies at her home in Ormskirk, Lancashire - told me cookie decorating had helped her when she had suffered with anxiety. “I was in a pretty bad place and I needed to start working, and I needed to be able to do something at home. I began to see what you

‘Companies are using cookies to generate social-media traffic, and it works. Cookies stop people in their tracks’

Marisol Morley, Tiny Kitchen Treats

could do with cookies, and I thought, "That's amazing."

"You get better after you've done a few," said Lauren Shields, in Cassidy's class.

"It's very relaxing," echoed her friend Lindsay Button, "not to think about anything for a couple of hours." They both had small babies at home and were glad of a quiet afternoon.

"This would make a good gift to your neighbour," said Finley, piping fluffy whipped cream on top of a biscuit mug of cocoa.

"Yes," I said, "if you really love your neighbour." And everyone laughed.

"This is really a labour of love," said Finley's mother Jaime, a perfectionist, bemoaning that her green-iced Christmas tree looked "like a messed-up football field".

This season, Cassidy plans to sell some of her Christmas cookies - a polar bear carrying a Christmas tree and foxes in Santa hats - at pop-ups and craft fairs, but she acknowledged that considering the amount of effort involved, cookie decorating is an economically irrational enterprise for most people.

In New York, I met Marisol Morley of Tiny Kitchen Treats, a top cookier who has managed to establish a thriving business.

Morley was a bundle of high-powered energy and marketing savvy. "My parents are straight off the boat," she told me; her father is from Spain, while her mother escaped Medellín in Colombia during the drug rule of Pablo Escobar.

Morley is in her early thirties. She started making cookies in 2013, in her tiny apartment, while also working full time and studying at night. Then one day she was asked to make 1,000 cookies for an event at the planetarium at the Natural History Museum. She enlisted the help of her entire family, baking in batches and swirling icing galaxies, to get the order done.

Now she shares a storefront and kitchen space in Brooklyn with a cake decorator, employs four people and has made quilted handbag cookies for Dior, portraits of Ellen DeGeneres for her TV show, lipsticks for Revlon and, most famously, the cookies for Meghan Markle's baby shower.

Her cookies cost between \$7 and \$50 each, depending on the work involved. Corporate orders can be in the tens of thousands of dollars and this year

she projects sales of \$300,000. Brands give her cookies out to clients, customers, influencers and journalists who can't help but post pictures of them. "Companies are using cookies to generate social-media traffic," Morley explained, "and it works. Cookies stop people in their tracks."

Selling cookies or teaching classes, Morley told me, is just the tip of the piping bag of the cookier industry. As the hobby has become more popular, hundreds of home-based online entrepreneurs have popped up, selling self-published books and videos, custom cookie cutters made with 3D printers in their garages, cookie-making kits, design stencils and multicoloured mixes of sprinkles.

Morley showed me something called "jewel dust": "It's edible glitter, magical stuff like pixie dust from Tinkerbell." New techniques emerge all the time and, along with them, new products designed just for cookiers, such as mini turntables to rotate cookies as they are decorated, or dry pumps that can spray edible lustre more efficiently. "Everything sounds crazy," said Morley, "until someone does it."

Now that she is so busy, I asked if she still bakes cookies at Christmas for her family as she used to. "I do," she laughed. "It's

expected. Everyone gets very excited. My father-in-law brings them to his Christmas party. I give them to all my cousins and aunts and they always save one and don't eat it and it drives me crazy. I made snowglobes last year and no one ate them, they said they were too beautiful - it just burnt me up!"

Back in Cassidy's class, Alair iced red-and-white polka-dot boxers on her gingerbread person, while her mother dressed her gingerbread person in a pink tutu with pink ballet slippers. Lauren Shields gave hers a string of shiny *dragée* bauble pearls. "I love seeing all the different things people do with the same shape," said Cassidy, helping Jaime to correct a wobbly edge of aqua icing.

Two hours flew by. Decorating cookies takes time and thoughtfulness; it is a form of artistic expression; and cookies are made to be given. "It's as if nostalgia and joy were mashed up with self-expression and dessert," Morley told me. "I am more than a cookie maker; I am definitely a joy maker. The world is burning down but, hey, look at this cute cookie!" It helps to bring us out of our depths."

Indeed, the cookies everyone made were delightful and colourful. It was impossible not to feel warm and fuzzy. The photographer had

been covering the impeachment proceedings all week and now he was taking pictures of cookie mittens and Christmas trees and mugs of hot cocoa and couldn't stop grinning, admitting, "I literally just emailed my wife and said, 'Do you want to have a cookie party next weekend?'"

The class was held in a gift store and, towards the end, a small boy came in with his mother. The boy walked around the table, fascinated by all the different cookies. I told him I was a journalist and asked him his name.

"Abbas Ginwala," he said, carefully spelling it out.

"And how old are you?" I asked, pencil poised over notebook.

"Six and three-quarters," he replied, "but you better write seven because my birthday is next month." Abbas told me his aunt brings a different cookie cutter every year for him and his cousins to bake and decorate cookies at Thanksgiving. "Last year it was a leaf, the year before it was an acorn." He said he liked decorating cookies a lot. "It's really fun. But I always layer up the icing and it's too sweet." His mother, Alefiyah, laughed. "Don't worry, he eats them anyway." **FT**

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Wendell Steavenson writes about food and other things



Top row: cookies from Amanda Hamilton-Smith's The Cookie Collaboration
Bottom row: samples from Marisol Morley's Tiny Kitchen Treats



Go go gadget

The pestle and mortar, the Coravin, the Thermomix...
 Tim Hayward on why he can't handle any more kitchen kit. Illustration by Matthias Seifarth

It's that time of the year again, the time when earnest manufacturers send countless press releases suggesting their gadget as the ideal gift for the "cook who has everything". This week alone they've proposed a pocket-sized heat sealer, folding barbecue tools, a sous-vide egg boiler and a Japanese toaster, costing £300, which does a single slice of bread with surgical precision. And herein lies the problem - and probably the reason that, yet again, I'll beg my family not to buy me anything food-related this year.

I'm a cooking zealot. It's my life, my work, my hobby and my obsession. If I felt a need to find Japanese-sized bread and toast it to perfection, I'd not only think £300 was a fair price to pay, but I'd have bought it for myself, instantly, two weeks before it was released to the public. I think I've got all the kit. I mean literally everything from an Ethiopian millet grinder to a digital induction ring that I can control to a tenth of a degree with my phone.

Every one of these things was vital when I acquired it and I know I'm going to want to use them again... one day. It's just that the day when I'm going to fascinate my friends with authentic handmade pasta cut on a chitarra seems a very long time coming and, meanwhile, stuff is building up.

I have, in my hand, a Coravin. I first encountered this gadget at The Quality Chop House restaurant, which has a cellar full of wines I could never afford to drink. "Not true," said my charming waiter, waving the appliance in front of him like a priest with a monstrance. "For we have a Coravin."

The Coravin is a sort of corkscrew, but instead of removing the cork it inserts a slender, Teflon-coated needle into the precious fluid below and injects inert gas so you can extract a glass of wine without extracting the cork. It's close to a miracle. It meant the restaurant could sell me a glass of something life-alteringly sublime and then put the bottle back in the rack for another customer. It would, said my lovely waiter, let me savour the very best wine in my own cellar over time instead of having to commit to an entire bottle.

I was convinced. Pissed and delirious, but convinced. Two days later I had taken delivery of the latest model. It looked like something an evolved alien species might use to extract semen samples from abductees in rural Florida. It would effortlessly broach my bottle, harvest a single glass and, via Bluetooth, update the "cellar records" on my iPhone.

We know each other quite well by now - and I think you can see the flaw in the logic here. I took the first, large glass of Sassicaia and, lo, I saw that it was good. I called my wife and she had one too, though smaller. Then I sat, pondered my good fortune, changed the gas cylinder and had another one. I've used the damn thing eight times in almost a year, according to the app on my phone. Does it delight me? Yes. Has it resulted in me keeping a single bottle of first-class wine for more than two hours? Emphatically not. I know I'm weak, I know I'm easily seduced by gadgetry and I know I'm the wrong man for the Coravin.

On the bench in the kitchen sits the mighty Thermomix. It is a hyper-efficient blender, capable, by the looks of it, of reducing the

The Coravin looks like something an evolved alien species might use to extract semen samples from abductees in rural Florida

engine block of a 1958 Series II Land Rover to a smooth paste in less than eight seconds. But this is just half the story because the Thermomix can also cook the food inside it, with extraordinarily accurate temperature control. It even weighs its own ingredients.

The Thermomix has devotees across Europe. They use it to make soups, stews, risottos - simple family meals, for which it is a truly labour-saving device. In fact, the latest Thermomix comes with a Bluetooth connection to your phone and an electronic recipe book that orders you to insert the ingredients in the right sequence and scolds you if you're inaccurate in your weighing - a kind of fascist satnav Delia.

Chefs go crazy for the Thermomix because you can stick a bunch of ingredients in it and get on with something else. Insert a

lobster, get bisque. Drop in some eggs, butter and lemon juice, and it will produce a gallon of hollandaise without a hint of splitting. When you finally decide to buy one, you can only do so via the oddly cult-like process of inviting a Thermomix "demonstrator" into your home to show you how to use it, and parting with roughly a grand.

I have lived with mine for about a year now and I've discovered three interesting things:

- 1) The kind of cook who's obsessed enough to spend £1,000 on a blender is not interested in its pre-programmed recipe for soup.
- 2) The kind of cook who's obsessed enough to spend £1,000 on a blender doesn't need a gallon of hollandaise and quite likes making his own, and...
- 3) The kind of cook who's obsessed enough to spend



£1,000 on a blender is a weak and credulous idiot, vulnerable to cultists.

And don't think for a moment that my uncontrolled cupidity is restricted to expensive connected technology. Consider, as I have done, my positively Neolithic granite pestle and mortar.

I first saw one when a smiling Jamie Oliver enthused about his on the telly. So I bought one, in Chinatown; I was that "authentic". I humped it home on the bus - secretly worrying that I should have forked out for the even larger one that I could barely lift - and made a Thai green curry paste in it.

All the time I was beating the life out of the lemongrass, reducing it from an unappetising stick to a bowl full of unappetising splinters, I was thinking, "God, this is hard going. It would be OK if it was a bit more abrasive, or the thumper was a different shape, or if I had servants, or a bloody Thermomix."

Still, I persisted. I crushed coriander seed to gauge precisely that it yielded no flavour but still stuck in your teeth. I chased garlic cloves around the bowl like greasy mice. I beat a cinnamon stick until my shoulder gave out.

It seemed so important, so I kept on. I tried a mayonnaise in it but failed. I tried pesto but ended up with a kind of compost. I tried crushing achiote seeds but collapsed, weeping in frustration. It seemed that there wasn't a single job anywhere in the culinary world that couldn't be done better with something else. It makes a good doorstop.

You see? I really don't need more stuff. In fact, I need a lot less. When Elizabeth David died, they auctioned her kitchen equipment to adoring followers. I'd do that next week, without dying, and spend the money replacing the Sassicaia. Or I would if I had any adoring followers.

I realise that this is probably the most first-world problem that it's possible to imagine. That it exposes me as the spoiled, toy-obsessed nerd and fickle man-child that perhaps I am.

I know I am weak but please, as they say online, "Don't @ me". Don't hate me and, above all, please don't buy me any kitchen gadgets for Christmas. **FT**

Tim Hayward is winner of the Restaurant Writing Award at the Guild of Food Writers Awards 2019.

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Jancis Robinson

Christmas wine

And so to reds

Before I share with you 35 delicious red wines chosen because, whatever the price, I feel they represent good value, allow me a small whinge about the British wine retail scene.

To my mind, it is far too difficult in the UK to buy single bottles of good wine. It's very different in other countries, notably the US, where wine is bought in bricks-and-mortar stores that offer serried ranks of individual bottles of fine wines on their shelves.

But when I look up UK availability of many of my favourite wines on the price-comparison site Wine-searcher.com, the references are frequently to cases of 12, six or sometimes three bottles, often in bond, so it can be particularly difficult to calculate the final price per bottle. All too often, interesting wine seems to be corralled in the fine-wine trading marketplace rather than being offered to the regular wine drinker.

I approve, on the other hand, of policies such as Lea & Sandeman's, of having a single-bottle price (such as those cited below) but rewarding customers who buy mixed dozens with a substantial discount.

Ch d'Emeringes, Vieilles Vignes 2018 Beaujolais-Villages
£8.50 The Wine Society

Lovely fresh nose and floral, grainy-textured fruit on the palate. Proper, handcrafted wine for a relative song. Serve this cool, with or without food. 13.5%

Quinta do Crasto 2017 Douro
£9.95 The Wine Society

Portugal is one of the world's most exciting sources of distinctive reds and, increasingly, whites too, with port country the Douro valley leading the way. 14%

Santa Venere Gaglioppo 2017 Cirò
£9.95 The Wine Society

The floral note of the local Gaglioppo grape in its Calabrian homeland. Great value. 13.5%



As imagined by Leon Edler

Ch St-Martin 2012 Lustrac-Médoc
£10 Waitrose, 4-17 December
(usually £14.99)

A classic Merlot-dominant claret with a bit of age but also a few more years' life in it. Needs food. 13.5%

Cave de Tain, Grand Classique 2017 Crozes-Hermitage
£10 Waitrose, December 4-17
(usually £15.99)

One of the best of the 10 wines that Waitrose is offering for just £10 each from Wednesday. The Cave de Tain is among France's finest wine co-ops and this vintage is stunning. 13%

Weinert, Carrascal Corte Clásico 2015 Mendoza
£10.95 The Wine Society

It might not pass muster with a wine technocrat but this is a

warm, fuzzy, spicy delight at the price. Malbec/Cabernet/Merlot blend. 14.5%

Laurent, Polemico País 2018 Itata
£11.95 Corney & Barrow

A Franco-Chilean winemaking couple and 150-year-old vines are responsible for this light, pure, sweetish red from southern Chile. Good for drinking without food. 13%

Telmo Rodríguez, Al Muvedre 2018 Alicante
£11.95 Berry Bros & Rudd

A powerful southern Spanish Monastrell (the same grape as in Bandol) from low-yielding bush vines. A dry year resulted in notable tannins, which Telmo seems to have tamed. Proper artisanal wine - for a barbecue or sausages? 14%



Ch Tayet, Cuvée Prestige 2015 Bordeaux Supérieur
£13.40 Private Cellar

This is flattering country claret that's already a pleasure to drink. A good example of the sort of value available from Bordeaux if you steer clear of the famous names. 13.5%

Jean-François Mérieu Gamay 2018 Touraine
£13.45 Haynes Hanson & Clark

Stuffed with morello cherry fruit, this is more charming than many a Gamay grown in its homeland Beaujolais. A useful aperitif? 12.5%

Ch Beauregard Ducasse 2016 Graves
£13.95 Stone, Vine & Sun

Another classic claret, with the freshness of Graves and tannins that will see it through for another three or four years. Lightish. 13.5%

Vallet, Ritou Syrah 2018 Vin de France
£14.45 Haynes Hanson & Clark

There are some stunning north Rhône Syrahs around, thanks to a recent run of excellent vintages. This rich, unoaked example was grown just outside the limit of St-Joseph. 13%

Collemassari Rosso 2015 Montecucco
£14.99 larger branches of Waitrose

This oaked Sangiovese-dominated blend from the hilly hinterland of the Tuscan coast seems underpriced to me. Serious, concentrated wine that could be enjoyed, with food, over the next five years. No excessive alcohol or oak, just the tang of Sangiovese. 14%

The Whole Shebang XII California
£16.95 Berry Bros & Rudd and Vin Cognito

Bargains from the West Coast are rather thin on the ground but Master of Wine Morgan Twain-Peterson makes this from a solera of carefully produced wines from outlying districts and generally ►



‘What a (low) price for a 10-year-old wine! To enjoy this bargain, though, you need to be a fan of mature Chianti’

◀ unfashionable grape varieties, some of them from very senior vines. It’s a delight. 14%

Undurraga TH Cabernet Franc 2015 Maipo

£17.99 *All About Wine*

TH stands for Treasure Hunter, a series of well-priced single-vineyard wines. Undurraga, one of Chile’s oldest wine producers, is currently on a roll - as evidenced by this perfumed but substantial wine from the classic red-wine region just outside Santiago. 14%

Goisot, Corps de Garde 2015 Bourgogne Rouge Côtes d’Auxerre

£18.90 *Domaine Direct*

Pale, delicate Pinot Noir from as far north as Chablis, made with a gentle hand. Light nose. Ripe, seductive red fruits on the palate, plus a bit of fine tannin. 13%

Stefan Meyer, Aus Rhodt Pinot Noir 2017 Pfalz

£18.95 *Yapp Brothers*

Germany is another source of fine Pinot Noir now, as demonstrated by this delightful, bone-dry wine made just like burgundy, except for the price tag. 13%

La Bastide St Vincent 2017 Gigondas

£19.90 *Jaded Palates,*

£22.75 *Berry Bros & Rudd*

I’d normally be wary of a wine with such a high alcohol level but this is Grenache at its most delicate-tasting, with all the luscious rose-petal appeal of one of the finest Châteauneufs

or - my new enthusiasm - Garnacha from the Gredos mountains outside Madrid. 15%

Ch de Beauregard, Clos des Pérelles 2017 Moulin-à-Vent

£20 *The Wine Society*

A fine example of the ambitious sort of wine now being made in the best terroirs of Beaujolais. Though designed to age, this racy, juicy example could be drunk now with great enjoyment. Hugely versatile. Turkey? 13.5%

Lemelson, Thea’s Selection Pinot Noir 2015 Willamette Valley

£21 *The Wine Society (available December 20)*

As burgundy prices rise, Oregon Pinot becomes increasingly interesting - and well made. Lemelson has a fine track record and this may be slightly richer than many burgundies but is no less fine. 13.5%

Dom Sylvain Pataille 2016 Bourgogne

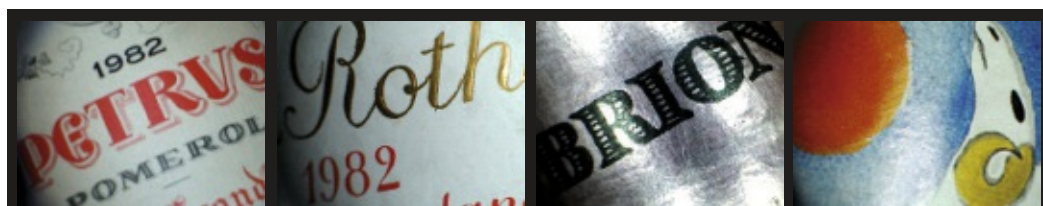
£21.30 *Domaine Direct*

A rare bargain, from the far north of the Côte de Nuits. Admirable purity. Could be enjoyed with or without food. It would turn cold turkey into a feast. 12.5%

Vieux Château St-André 2014 Montagne-St-Émilion

£21.90 *Haynes Hanson & Clark*

It pays to look outside the most famous appellations. And the less ambitious 2014s are beginning to be broachable. This has real pace and refreshment. 13%



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**Grato Grati, Vecchia Annata
1999 IGT Toscana**

£23 *The Wine Society*

What a (low) price for a 10-year-old wine! To enjoy this bargain, though, you need to be a fan of mature Chianti, with its fairly pronounced acidity and tannins that demand food. This is from Villa di Vetrice in the hills of the Chianti Rufina zone east of Florence. 13%

**Álvaro Palacios, Camins del
Priorat 2018 Priorat**

£23.50 *Berry Bros & Rudd*

Álvaro Palacios makes some of Spain's most expensive wines but this is his bargain entry ticket to the extraordinary combination of slate and old vines that is Priorat in Catalonia. Garnacha, Cariñena, Syrah, Cabernet and Merlot all play a part in this superbly judged blend that is round and ready to gulp. 14.5%

Monier-Perréol 2016 St-Joseph

£23.95 *Stone, Vine & Sun*

Scrummy. A succulent northern Rhône Syrah from 30-year-old vines on an estate that has been biodynamic for many years and is certified organic. Savoury with satin texture, and a very versatile food partner. This is great value. 13%

**Dom Monthelie-Douhairet
Porcheret, Clos du Meix Garnier
2016 Monthelie**

£25.80 *Domaine Direct*

This delicate wine from a small appellation and the most famous producer within it represents red burgundy at its purest, even if it will probably be more rewarding in a year or two. Seems underpriced to me - a rare observation about a red burgundy. 13%

**Gaylord Machon, Lhony 2015
Crozes-Hermitage**

£25.95 *Lea & Sandeman*

A ripe but muscular northern Rhône Syrah that should satisfy many over the next few years. 13%

**Frog's Leap Zinfandel 2017
Napa Valley**

£26 *Berry Bros & Rudd*

John Williams' vineyards, with their wild flowers and lack of irrigation pipes, are some of Napa Valley's most distinctive. I feel he should be rewarded for his early determinedly organic stance, and this example of California's (or Croatia's or Montenegro's, some would say) own grape is a refined, zesty red at a fair price - for California. 14%

**Dom Vincent & Sophie Morey,
Les Gravières Premier Cru
2015 Santenay**

£28.80 *Domaine Direct*

Pure hedonistic pleasure in this well-priced gentle-but-fresh red burgundy. 13.5%

Monteti 2013 Toscana

£30.95 *Lea & Sandeman*

A Bordeaux blend heavy on Petit Verdot from the south of the Maremma. Flattering. Mature with marked sweetness. 14.5%

**Tenuta San Guido, Guidalberto
2017 Toscana**

£32 *Roberson retail,*

£34.95 *Uncorked*

Sassicaia's little brother seems particularly successful in 2017 and has more than a hint of the subtlety of the Tuscan coast's most famous answer to red Bordeaux. 14%

**Dom Jean Chauvenet, Les Lavières
2014 Nuits-St-Georges**

£35 *Berry Bros & Rudd*

An unusually charming 2014 with a warm, fully evolved nose and very comforting palate, delivering a good balance of sweet fruit, firm structure and refreshing acidity. 13%

**SC Pannell, Old McDonald
Grenache 2017 McLaren Vale**

£39 *Ozwines.co.uk*

There's an international revival of Grenache going on and in Australia it's being led by Steve Pannell, one of the country's most thoughtful wine producers. He realised long ago that as temperatures rise, hot-climate vine varieties such as Châteauneuf's Grenache would be needed. This wine is extremely smart. 14.5%

**Burn Cottage, Moonlight Race
Pinot Noir 2016 Central Otago**

£35.50 *Vin Neuf*

A light, fresh New Zealand answer to red burgundy. Very subtle, savoury and appetising. A great imprint on the palate. Long. 13%

**Cullen, Diana Madeline 2014
Margaret River**

£75 *Hook & Ford,*

£80 *The Secret Cellar*

Subtle, biodynamic Bordeaux blend from Australia's blessed Cabernet territory. Irreproachable stuff from Australian Winemaker of the Year Vanya Cullen. 13.5% **FT**

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Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com. International stockists from Wine-searcher.com This is the second in Jancis's series of recommendations leading up to Christmas. Next week: white wines



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Advanced skincare brand combining French manufacture with unique formulations



The Dr Sebagh brand, co-owned by cosmetic doctor Jean-Louis Sebagh and businesswoman and philanthropist Melissa John, is one of the few privately owned skincare brands that formulates and manufactures its own products. This independence enables them to develop unique and powerful formulations using advanced bio-tech ingredients, carefully chosen for their potency and specific benefits in addressing a particular skincare need or concern.

The Dr Sebagh brand's philosophy has always been about the skin's individual needs, and that 'feeding' it properly with the correct ingredients for your skin type, in the right concentration and using the latest bio-technology available, is the key to achieving the best possible skin. Dr Sebagh was the first person to advocate the mixing of different serums to create a personal skincare regime. 'As a cosmetic surgeon, I don't believe in miracle skincare creams. But I do believe that good quality skincare can make a real difference to the skin.

Feeding the skin on a daily basis with carefully selected ingredients for your own needs is essential to maintain a youthful skin.'



Dr Sebagh and Melissa John



Having won countless awards for excellence, the Dr Sebagh brand has many 'hero' products loved by beauty insiders, Hollywood celebrities and influencers worldwide. These include Dr Sebagh Deep Exfoliating Mask, Serum Repair, Supreme Maintenance Youth Serum, Pure Vitamin C Powder Cream, winner of three awards in 2019 alone, and the just-launched Vitamin C Brightening Primer SPF15, which has already won two industry awards.

Dr Sebagh attributes the success of the brand to his and his partner's drive for quality and integrity, coupled with the best of France's manufacturing, with its long history of innovation and excellence.

Alongside producing the highest quality products the Dr Sebagh brand has a history of philanthropic work and has made substantial donations to many charitable projects and causes including the West London Action for Children, the Brain Tumour Charity, the National Homeless Charity, the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, the Dog's Trust, the Bentley Priory Museum and many others. In 2018, Melissa John, on behalf of the brand, established The Mercury Foundation, to continue and expand their charitable work both in the UK and overseas. 'Dr Sebagh and I are passionate about what we do and believe strongly in giving back. If we can help causes or charities we believe in, we do,' says Melissa.

The Dr Sebagh brand is sold globally through well-known department stores and online via the brand's website.



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25 Wimpole Street
London W1G 8GL
+44 (0)20 76370548
drsebagh.com

Restaurant Insider

Nicholas Lander



CHICKEN WITH VINEGAR SAUCE (LEFT) AND ROAST PIGEON, PERSIMMON AND CHERVIL ROOT. PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM OSBORNE

Trivet, London

Trivet, in Bermondsey, was opened recently by Jonny Lake, former head chef of The Fat Duck, and Isa Bal, the sommelier who worked alongside him. After an exciting dinner, I talked to both of them and the conversation was as memorable as the meal.

I was intrigued by an unusual dessert and a first-class *canelé*, the chewy sweet speciality of Bordeaux. Both were revealing.

The dessert was described as Hokkaido potato, baked potato millefeuille, white chocolate mousse and butter and sake gelato. It was inspired by a trip the pair had made to Sapporo, in the north of Japan, to learn more about sake.

“We followed our noses,” Lake explained, “down a side street and into an *izakaya* [bar]. In the north, they grow a lot of thick-skinned, small potatoes and we were served one topped with a lot of butter. It gave me an idea and today we roast the potato skins, incorporate puff pastry and butter in them, add some pink peppercorns to lift

the whole, and then serve these as layers of the millefeuille.”

While the humble roots of this pudding reveal something of what Lake and Bal want their restaurant to be, the single petit four suggests how practically they intend to achieve this.

A *canelé* may seem simple but it requires a great deal of patience from the pastry chef. This was a neat, sweet and thoughtful conclusion to our meal. “I don’t believe any customer, or any chef for that matter, is today looking for a selection of petits fours,” said Lake.

Trivet represents a turning point in the careers of both chef and sommelier. Both are 47. Bal was born in Adana, Turkey, while Lake comes from Burlington, Ontario. Having met at The Fat Duck, they became close friends, and first broached the idea of working together in 2018.

They had seen and liked the space at Londrino, then a Portuguese wine bar and restaurant, but thought no more about it and looked at other sites. Then, in early 2019, they heard that it was available. They went to see it again, liked it even more and took



‘A dish described simply as “chicken with a vinegar sauce” allowed both ingredients to participate fully, along with some fine potato purée and button turnips’

Trivet
36 Snowsfields,
London SE1 3SU
0203 141 8670
trivetrestaurant.co.uk
Starters: £14-£21
Mains: £26-£38

it over. The essentials were there: a modern kitchen; a wine-bar area that will double up as a wine shop; and extremely comfortable and well-designed tables and chairs. The redesign, which has made the space even lighter, was left in the capable hands of Bal’s old friend Umay Çeviker.

There is no tasting menu. Instead, Lake offers a list of five first courses, five mains and five desserts. “Nobody today wants to stay more than two hours at the table, although, obviously, if they choose to stay longer then we take that as a compliment,” Bal explained in his soft voice.

We started with two very different first courses: a succulent veal sweetbread, enhanced by a small amount of excellent cumin from Andy Harris’s Vinegar Shed; and two puff-pastry wafers filled with sour cream and onion. These were topped with caviar alongside a rice-wine sabayon – yet perhaps the finest component of the dish was a small pile of perfectly dressed, exquisite salad leaves.

Robust flavours dominated our main courses as well. A dish described simply as “chicken with a vinegar sauce” allowed both ingredients to participate fully, along with some fine potato purée and button turnips. The salt-steamed brill with coco beans and tarragon oil was enlivened by a clear fish sauce poured over it.

Bal explained how Lake’s approach affected his carefully assembled wine list. “He is not a shy chef but one who produces dishes with strong, intense and clean flavours. This leaves me and my assistant Klearhos Kanellakis with plenty of opportunity to explore the wine world to try and match whatever the customer wants.”

One of the biggest surprises at Trivet is the brevity of the menu compared with the wine list, which is as big as a family bible. We drank some Slovenian Pinot Gris 2016 from Marjan Simčič; Armenian Areni 2016 from Voskevaz; and Tedorigawa Yama Junmai sake from Ishikawa prefecture in Japan.

Trivet offers an original menu, exceptional wines and very friendly service at relatively reasonable prices (our bill for two was £171). It deserves to prosper. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/lander



SECRET SPEYSIDE

DELVE INTO THE SECRETS OF SPEYSIDE

Speyside is an open treasure of heritage, beauty and natural resources, yet deep within lie rarer treasures. Upon this outstanding landscape are four distilleries surrounded in history.

Legend has it that when the first snow fell in Speyside, it settled on the hills of Braes of Glenlivet. From these remote Scottish hills to the now vanished Caperdonich, pioneering Longmorn and the landmark distillery of Glen Keith comes Chivas Brothers' exceptional new Secret Speyside Single Malt collection.

The Secret Speyside Collection is a carefully curated selection of rare 18-30 year old whiskies from four of Speyside's most exceptional, and in many cases, unusual distilleries, some of which have never before seen the light of day and some in finite supply, never to be made again.



Offering unplumbed depths of flavour, each of these Single Malts is distinct and rich in character and has a compelling story to tell. And like all the best stories, they stay with you long after the last drop is finished.

Caperdonich Distillery, on the banks of the River Spey, is no more. From its original creation in 1898 to distilling its final Single Malt in 2002, Caperdonich has long been one of the great hidden gems of the Speyside



region. This Single Malt is all that remains of the whisky from 'the secret well' a place where clandestine lovers would meet. According to legend, one night, the Duke of Rothes killed his daughter's beloved here; this story inspired the brand crest today. Even in its heyday, Caperdonich was a little distillery, making peated and unpeated whisky in small batches. Other distilleries grew and grew, but Caperdonich stood firm and true. While the building may be gone, the distiller's craft lives on in two extraordinary ranges.

The Secret Speyside collection contains six Caperdonich whiskies: three are unpeated spirits, full of ripe orchard fruits that give the sweet malts a complex body and long smooth finish.

Three are gently peated adding a sophisticated smokiness and added depth of flavour, including the oldest in the collection, cask strength Caperdonich 30-year-old.

All six, each in finite supply, can never be recreated once gone as the distillery was taken down brick by brick in 2011 making these a rare and irreplaceable gift for any whisky connoisseur.

This is a never before experienced chance to try whiskies from some of the finest distilleries in Scotland, with only 7,675 bottles currently available, this limited edition is now available in key airports as a Global Travel Retail exclusive, priced from \$100 - \$990 (£95 - £700).

To discover more of the secrets of Speyside and explore the fascinating history of these iconic distilleries, visit www.secret-speyside.com

Treetime treats

Perfect presents for epicureans, small people and weary adults.
Compiled by *Hanna-Johara Dokal*.
Photographs by *Andy Price*

Food

From bottom left: The Classic chocolate collection, thecarelesscollection.co.uk, £12.50; Blossom Branch Cheese Board, anthropologie.com, £68; Marshmallow Snowman Hot Choc Gift Set, nakedmarshmallow.co.uk, £8.95; Coconut Bowl, wearthlondon.com, £8.99; Brandy

Butter Caramel Sauce, joeandsephs.co.uk, £5.99; Copper Mug with Brass Handle, manufactum.co.uk, £22; Olivar de la Luna Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil 50cl, brindisa.com, £16.25; Corkatoo Bottle Opener and Corkscrew, theletterroom.com, £14.95; Monkey 47,

Schwarzwald Dry Gin 50cl, fortnumandmason.com, £50; Limited Edition, Tinkture Rose Gin 50cl, fortnumandmason.com, £50; P&T Matcha Starter Kit, souschef.co.uk, £69.50; Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana Espresso Coffee Machine, smeguk.com, from £499.95





Children

From bottom left: *Funnybones* by Allan and Janet Ahlberg, waterstones.com, £6.99; Santa's Express Christmas Train Set, hornby.com, £54.99; Bashful Stardust Bunny, jellycat.com, £17.50; Personalised Kids Baking Set, notonthehighstreet.com, £16.50; Sunnlylife Balance Stacking Game, kidly.co.uk, £16; Horse Mechanoid 3D Puzzle Kit, ugears.online, £41.90; Vilac White Vintage Car, fortnumandmason.com, £160; Amusebales Pineapple Small Bag, jellycat.com, £16



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Harrogate Cimmermann 01423 524 777
Irish Republic OHagan Design +353 1 535 8555



Relaxation

From bottom right:
 Vintage Pink Tigers
 Satin Pyjamas, hm.com,
 £24.99; Myrrh Natural
 Tibetan Incense,
 mamoc.com, £12;
 Rose Quartz Massage
 Face Roller, oliver
 bonas.com, £25;
 CHPO Harold Mini Rose
 Gold Watch, weath
 london.com, £49.99;
 Laura Mercier Crème

Brûlée Honey Bath,
 harveynichols.com,
 £37; Christian Louboutin
 Oeil Vinyle Luminous
 Ink Liner, harrods.com,
 £58; Vattenkrasse
 Watering Can, ikea.com,
 £9; Pile-lined Slippers
 in Light Brown, hm.com,
 £12.99; Edwardian
 Collection: Mach III
 Shaving Set, truefitt
 andhill.co.uk, £180



James Walton's *The Penguin Book Quiz: From the Very Hungry Caterpillar to Ulysses* is out now, £9.99

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.

- Which unit of measurement was known as a Transmission Unit until 1928?
- In 1908, Ludwig Roselius patented the process behind which drink?
- What's the world's largest retailer of sporting goods?
- What was introduced in Britain on February 15 1971?
- Who played Duncan in the TV youth drama *Byker Grove*?
- Thanks largely to Marie Kondo's book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (right), which verb entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2015?
- Due in part to the TV show *Ground*



Force, B&Q's sales of what increased from £9,000 a year to around £8m?

8. Which record label turned down the Beatles (above) in 1962 on the famous grounds that "guitar groups are on the way out" and that "the Beatles have no future in show business"?

9. Paul Pennyfeather is the main character

in which Evelyn Waugh novel?

10. What form of philosophical analysis was developed and named by Jacques Derrida?



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



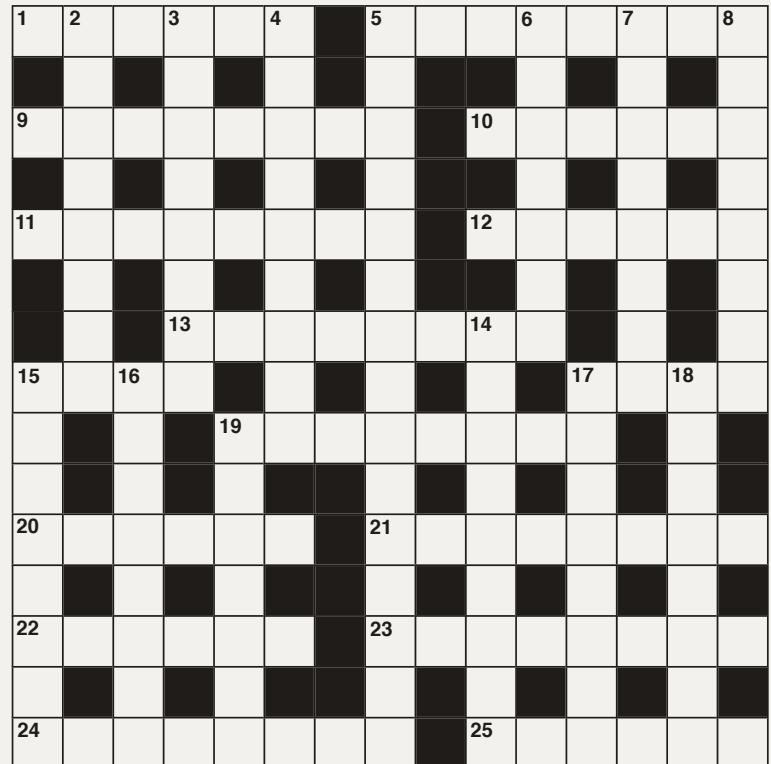
+



= ?

Answers page 10

The Crossword No 465. Set by Aldhelm



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

ACROSS

- Iran, formerly (6)
- Savage (8)
- Tell off (8)
- Ring (6)
- Australian parrot (8)
- Urban thoroughfare (6)
- Theoretical (8)
- Male deer (4)
- Gala, garden party (4)
- Thin skin (8)
- Wanderers (6)
- Sound of horses' hooves (4-4)
- Indian spirit drink (6)
- Stranger (8)
- Stalemate (8)
- Young swan (6)

DOWN

- Finishing place for pond I reconstructed in hospital department (8)
- Supplying items for Christmas present container (8)
- This philosopher's different to realist (9)
- Next to Hampshire town, Corby's rough-get castle in any way possible (2, 4, 2, 2, 5)
- Port with lobster I cooked without energy (7)
- Mixed treacle with a touch of tarragon for cheese dish (8)
- Animal puppet (8)
- One activist agitated to be like those who came earlier (9)

- It's normal to pay for a road (8)
- Avenue for musician starting song and prayer (3, 5)
- Going and getting what's attractive (8)
- When travelling around, goes to Liberia at first with east African (8)
- Check-up's claimed to be faulty (7)

Solution to Crossword No 464





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

Bloomberg spices up the digital war for voters

This week, Wall Street and Washington, DC, are buzzing about the power of money in politics. No wonder: Michael Bloomberg, the former New York mayor, has thrown his hat into the race for Democratic presidential nominee and plans to use his billionaire largesse to campaign.

Last Friday alone, Bloomberg reportedly spent about \$30m on a blitz of television ads. This sparked a wave of furious anti-billionaire complaints from his rivals in the Democratic race (never mind that his TV ads are not very compelling).

But as political hacks pontificate about TV spots, there is another detail about the contest that has not received as much attention as it should: the ad money being thrown at digital platforms such as Facebook and Google.

Until three years ago, this was a topic most Democrats tended to ignore, partly because it was widely presumed that political advertising on platforms such as Facebook was less important than TV spots. But it was also because the Democrats blithely assumed that they held a strong advantage over Republicans in cyberspace after Barack Obama's successful digital campaigns in 2008 and 2012.

The 2016 race showed that these assumptions were wrong. Digital advertising can pack a more powerful punch than TV. While the Democrats used to be ahead of the Republicans in this sphere, the online campaign unleashed for Donald Trump during his 2016 presidential run (using the now discredited research group Cambridge Analytica) was more adept than anything produced by the Democrats, partly because it introduced a level of personalised messaging and manipulated "facts" that left civic-minded observers howling with outrage.

Three years later, the shock of that defeat for the Democrats - and the Cambridge Analytica scandal - is sparking a fightback. Some start-ups, supported by Democrats, are trying to harness digital tools to combat Trump online. Others are seeking to track political advertising online to create some transparency, for the first time. However, this has received relatively little attention among voters or Democrats. That is a pity.

Consider the findings of the start-up Acronym, which was launched in the aftermath of the 2016 election by Tara McGowan, a charismatic young Washington techie who was a key part of Obama's digital team in 2012. Its weekly newsletter on digital spending suggests that, in the week from November 10 to November 16 (the last data available as this column went to press), the Democratic presidential candidate that spent most heavily on Google and Facebook advertising was Tom Steyer, the billionaire environmental activist, who shelled out \$1.4m.

This might surprise many observers, since Steyer is polling so low in the primary race that

he has been largely invisible in mainstream news. However, his team has used targeted social media to attract grassroots donations (needed to keep him in the debates) and to spread environmental messages. Despite Steyer's poor polling numbers, this seems to be helping to shift the wider debate about green issues among Democrats.

Another candidate, Pete Buttigieg, has been in second place to Steyer in recent weeks but his overall digital spending for the year (at \$9m) is bigger than any other leading Democratic candidate: Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders lag slightly behind, while Kamala Harris and Joe Biden are considerably lower.

This is striking. But what is doubly notable is that Acronym calculates that Trump's team has spent about \$28m on Google and Facebook advertising since last year's midterm elections - far more than any Democrat. This is set to accelerate, the Acronym newsletter says, noting: "His team continues to run Facebook ads calling impeachment a hoax."

But Trump may finally be about to face a proper foe in cyberspace. According to Acronym, Bloomberg plans to spend \$100m on swing-state, anti-Trump digital advertising on top of his

'What matters more than ever are the targeted online ads, precisely because they are so personalised'

anticipated presidential campaign. Is this a good thing? Some observers think not. Tim Berners-Lee, the man who invented the world wide web, wrote an impassioned column in The New York Times this week calling for a ban on all digital political campaigns. Twitter has already taken action on this, while Facebook and Google claim they are also tightening controls.

However, the harsh truth is that even as groups such as Twitter step back, new digital channels are emerging. Acronym points out that rightwing, pro-Trump groups have recently started to use the Chinese-owned video platform TikTok, which is popular with millennials, to spread their message.

This leaves figures such as McGowan concluding that Democrats must join the fight. "The Democrats fell behind the Republicans in 2016 because the Republicans had more incentive to innovate... they leapfrogged us," she says. "But I feel very confident that the Democrats are now going to use every [digital] tool and channel available to them... 2016 was a wake-up call and we know we need to be humble and embrace new strategies." The 2020 race, in other words, might yet make Trump's digital onslaught seem almost tame. Think of that when you see the next Bloomberg TV ad. **FT**

.....
gillian.tett@ft.com; [@gilliantett](#)

