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Opening Extract from...

Mark Hix: The Collection

Written by Mark Hix

Photography by Jason Lowe

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Notes

All spoon measures are level unless otherwise stated:

1 tsp = 5ml spoon; 1 tbsp = 15ml spoon.

Egg sizes are given where they are critical, otherwise use medium eggs, preferably organic or free-range. Anyone who is pregnant or in a vulnerable health group should avoid sauces that use raw egg whites or lightly cooked eggs.

Use fresh herbs, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper unless otherwise suggested.

Timings are for conventional ovens. If using a fan-assisted oven, decrease the temperature by 15°C (1 Gas mark). Use an oven thermometer to check the temperature.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years I've often been asked when I'm going to get around to putting together a collection of my best recipes. Well, here it is!

I've really enjoyed putting this book together – the process of trawling back through my recipe archive and picking out my favourites has been a lot of fun. But it's also been great to have had the chance to mull over how much things have changed in the food world over the years, and it's given me the chance to tweak and revise certain recipes where necessary to show this. For example, things have changed so much in our oceans in terms of fish stocks that I've tweaked a number of the fish recipes here to use what are now more sustainable options (though who knows what will happen to even these stocks over the coming years if our fishing policies don't change!).

Since I started cooking so much to do with our food has changed for the better. People now are genuinely interested in the provenance of the food they are buying, sometimes to the point that they are getting out there and foraging some of it for free (something which always makes cooking at home a little more interesting and certainly prompts dinner party conversation!). British farming has certainly moved on in the last few decades and there's now little excuse for putting anything into your shopping basket that isn't British, while food and farmers markets are cropping up all over the country – offering great support for local producers by providing an opportunity to educate the general public about the great food that is available on their doorsteps.

Similarly the many food festivals that have started across the country, including my own down in Lyme Regis, give the public a great chance to meet to chat about food and watch the chefs perform. This is something I love, as I truly believe that food should be about fun. It's a huge part of our lives and a gathering around the table, whether it be at a festival, in a restaurant or at home, should be a lively occasion with ingredients that celebrate their season, obviously with good wines or beer or cider to match. Hopefully the food you'll see in this book reflects this, and will give you a bit of inspiration to get in the kitchen and get cooking.

MARK HIX

RED MULLET ON TOAST WITH CRUSHED BROAD BEANS AND PEAS

250g podded young broad beans
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
a couple of generous knobs of butter
60g podded peas
4 small red mullet fillets, each about 80g, or 2 halved fillets from a larger fish
4 slices of brown or white bloomer-type bread
½ tbsp cider vinegar
1½ tbsp cold-pressed rapeseed oil
a handful of pea shoots (optional)

SERVES 4

Cook the broad beans in boiling salted water for 3–4 minutes (or a little longer if they are large) until tender. Drain them and blend to a coarse purée in a food processor, adding a knob of the butter and seasoning to taste; keep warm.

Cook the peas in boiling salted water for a couple of minutes until tender. Drain and set aside.

Melt the rest of the butter in a heavy or non-stick frying pan. Season the red mullet fillets and fry them, skin side down first, over a medium heat for a couple of minutes on each side.

Toast the bread on both sides. Meanwhile, whisk the vinegar and oil together to make a dressing and season with salt and pepper.

Spread the broad bean purée generously on the toasts and top with the red mullet. Arrange the peas and pea shoots, if using, around the toasts and spoon the dressing over them to serve.

“This is a popular dish at the Hix Oyster & Fish House in Lyme Regis. It really says summer when it arrives at the table, especially when you have a great sea view. You could use red gurnard or even mackerel fillets instead of red mullet.”



SPICED PARSNIP AND APPLE SOUP

2–3 large Russet or Cox's apples, about 400–500g in total
500g parsnips
60g butter
1 tsp chopped fresh root ginger
1 tsp ground cumin
½ tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
½ tsp ground turmeric
100ml cider
about 1.5 litres vegetable stock (see page 292)
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
90ml double cream
2 tsp toasted cumin seeds

SERVES 4–6

Peel, core and roughly dice the apples and parsnips. Melt the butter in a large saucepan, tip in the diced parsnips and apples, then add the fresh ginger and spices. Cover and cook gently for about 5 minutes, giving it an occasional stir; don't let it colour.

Remove the lid, add the cider and vegetable stock and bring to the boil. Season with salt and pepper and simmer gently for about 15 minutes until the parsnip is soft.

Purée the soup in a blender until smooth, then strain through a fine sieve back into the cleaned pan. Bring back to a low simmer, then stir in the cream. If the soup is too thick, adjust the consistency with a little water or additional stock.

Divide between warm soup bowls, sprinkle with a pinch of cumin seeds and serve.

"Parsnips make a hearty, sweet soup – ideal when the weather begins to get a bit chilly. Teamed with apples like Russets or Cox's and mild background spices, they are amazingly good. This is a mildly curried soup; increase the quantities of spices if you want it to be more fiery."

ROAST AUTUMN SQUASH AND WALNUT SOUP

1kg butternut or onion squash
a large knob of butter
1 small leek, trimmed, chopped and washed
1 small onion, peeled and roughly chopped
1.2 litres vegetable stock (see page 292)
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp pumpkin seeds, lightly toasted
12–15 fresh walnuts, shelled and roughly broken

SERVES 4

Peel the squash, halve and remove the seeds and fibrous bits, then chop the flesh into small cubes. Heat the butter in a large saucepan and gently cook the leek and onion for 4–5 minutes until softened.

Add the squash and stock, bring to the boil and season with salt and pepper. Leave to simmer for 20 minutes. Scoop out a spoonful of the cubed squash, using a slotted spoon, and reserve for serving.

Whiz the soup in a blender until smooth, then – if necessary – strain through a fine sieve back into the pan. Reheat gently, stirring in a little more vegetable stock or water if the soup is too thick. Taste and adjust the seasoning.

Pour the soup into warm soup plates and add the reserved squash cubes. Top with a light sprinkling of toasted pumpkin seeds and walnut pieces and serve straight away.



"Closer-textured orange-fleshed squash – like butternut and onion – are particularly good for using in soups. These varieties tend to have a better ratio of usable flesh to skin than some of the larger squashes and pumpkins that you find. Fresh walnuts make a natural crunchy accompaniment."

BEEF AND OYSTER PIE

1kg trimmed flank or shin of beef
3 tbsp plain flour, plus extra for dusting
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
vegetable oil, for frying
30g butter
1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 garlic clove, peeled and crushed
1 tsp tomato purée
200ml dark ale, such as Hix Oyster Ale or Guinness
1.5 litres dark meat stock (see page 292)
1 tsp chopped thyme leaves
1 small bay leaf
1–2 tsp cornflour (optional)
12 large oysters, 8 shucked, 4 left in the half-shell

FOR THE PASTRY
225g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting
1 tsp salt
85g shredded beef suet
60g butter, chilled and coarsely grated
1 medium egg, beaten

FOR THE PARSLEY CRUST
a generous knob of butter
2 tbsp fresh white breadcrumbs
1 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley

SERVES 4

> “Pies are a great way to use the less expensive, yet full-flavoured meat cuts, such as flank and shin of beef, mutton shoulder and neck, and ox cheeks. Tucking in a few oysters adds a touch of luxury.”

Cut the meat roughly into 3cm cubes. Season half of the flour with salt and pepper and use to lightly flour the meat. Heat a little oil in a large, heavy-based frying pan and fry the meat in 2 or 3 batches over a high heat until nicely browned. Set aside on a plate.

Melt the butter in a large, heavy-based pan or flameproof casserole and fry the onion and garlic for a few minutes until lightly coloured. Add the remaining flour and tomato purée. Stir over a low heat for a minute or so, then slowly add the ale and stock, stirring to avoid lumps from forming.

Add the beef with the thyme and bay leaf. Bring back to a simmer, cover and simmer very gently (ideally using a heat-diffuser mat or a simmer plate) for about 2 hours until the meat is tender. When the meat is cooked, the sauce should have thickened to a gravy-like consistency. If not, mix the cornflour to a paste with 1 tbsp water, stir into the sauce and simmer, stirring, for a few minutes. Leave to cool.

To make the pastry, mix the flour, salt, suet and butter together in a large bowl and make a well in the centre. Mix in enough water (about 150ml) to form a smooth dough and knead for a minute.

Spoon the cooled filling into 4 individual pie dishes (or 1 large dish) to about 1cm from the rim. Roll the pastry out on a floured surface to a 7–8mm thickness. Cut out 4 discs to make pie lids (or one large lid for a big pie), about 2cm larger all the way around the pie dish(es). Brush the edges of the pastry with a little of the beaten egg.

Lay the pastry over the filling, pressing the egg-washed sides onto the rim of the dish(es). Cut a 2cm circle in the centre but leave in position on top of the pie(s). Let rest in a cool place for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas mark 6. Brush the pie(s) with beaten egg and bake for 30–35 minutes (or 40–50 minutes for a large one) until the pastry is golden. Meanwhile, for the parsley crust, melt the butter in a pan, mix in the breadcrumbs and parsley, and season with salt and pepper.

Once the pie(s) are ready, remove the pastry circle(s) in the centre and pop in the shucked oysters. Return to the oven for 10 minutes. In the meantime, heat the grill. Scatter the parsley crust over the oysters in their half-shell and grill until golden. Place over the hole in the pie and serve.



BLUEBERRY CHEESECAKE

450g blueberries, hulled
200g caster sugar
20g cornflour

FOR THE BASE

250g digestive biscuits or Hobnobs
80g butter, melted

FOR THE FILLING

300ml double cream
100g caster sugar
500g cream cheese
finely grated zest of 1 lemon
1 tsp vanilla extract

SERVES 4

“A truly comforting dessert. I’ve used blueberries here, but you could substitute raspberries, blackcurrants or strawberries, making sure to adjust the sweetness accordingly.”

Put 200g of the (softer) blueberries into a pan with the sugar and 175ml of water. Heat slowly to dissolve the sugar, then simmer for 7–8 minutes. Mix the cornflour with 25ml of water and stir into the mixture. Simmer, stirring, for 2–3 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve into a bowl, pressing the berries in the sieve to extract as much juice as possible. Leave to cool.

Line a 17–18cm springform cake tin with greaseproof paper. Crush the biscuits in a food processor to coarse crumbs. (Or put in a plastic bag and smash with a rolling pin.) Mix with the butter and pack into the cake tin to make a firm base using the back of a spoon.

Whip the cream and sugar together until fairly stiff. In another bowl, beat the cream cheese to soften, then fold in the cream with the lemon zest and vanilla extract. Lightly fold through half of the blueberry syrup to create a rippled effect. Spoon the mix onto the biscuit base and place in the fridge for 2–3 hours until firm.

Mix the rest of the fruit with the remaining blueberry syrup. To unmould the cheesecake, run a hot knife around the edge, then release the side of the tin and slide the cheesecake onto a board. Cut into slices and serve each one topped with a generous spoonful of blueberry sauce.



CHRISTMAS MESS

40–50 fresh or vacuum-packed chestnuts
2 tbsp icing sugar
500ml double cream
80g caster sugar
150–200g meringue

FOR THE CRANBERRY SAUCE

200g fresh cranberries
90g sugar
1 small cinnamon stick
juice of 1 orange

SERVES 8

“Cranberries, in the form of a sauce or jelly, are synonymous with Christmas dinner, though these tart red berries are worthy of more than being just an adjunct to the turkey. Like chestnuts, they lend themselves to a host of savoury dishes and interesting desserts, such as this lovely meringue concoction, which is loosely based on an Italian *monte bianco*. You don’t need to go to the trouble of making fresh meringues, there are plenty of good ready-made meringues on the market that are suitable for this dish.”

Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas mark 6. If using fresh chestnuts, make an incision in the top of each with a small sharp knife and place them on a baking tray. Bake in the oven for about 20 minutes, then remove and leave to cool.

Meanwhile for the sauce, put the cranberries, sugar, cinnamon and orange juice into a heavy-based saucepan. Stir over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved, then simmer gently for about 20–25 minutes until the cranberries have softened. Discard the cinnamon. Taste the sauce and add a little more sugar if necessary. Leave to cool.

Peel the chestnuts, removing as much of the brown skin as you possibly can. Place the cooked or vacuum-packed nuts on a foil-lined baking tray and dust with icing sugar. Bake in the oven for 20 minutes, turning them every so often. Remove and set aside to cool.

Whip the cream and caster sugar together in a bowl until very thick, using an electric whisk if you wish.

To assemble, break the meringue into pieces and fold into the cream with about two-thirds of the cold cranberry sauce and two-thirds of the chestnuts. Pile onto the centre of individual serving plates. Scatter the remaining chestnuts on top and spoon the rest of the cranberry sauce over. Serve at once.

