

BLUSH
IS SO LUSH
FASHION
GOES PRETTY
AND VERY
PINK



Lionel Shriver, a skiver?
How the bestselling author
just occasionally unwinds

Conspicuous consumption
The weird food some
women put away in one day

We want to be in
Wang's gang
Meet the man everyone
wants as a friend
and designer

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FOOD
Junipers: not just for gin!

Could it be magic?

Even when playing it safe the great sorcerer Heston Blumenthal still manages to spellbind, says ZOE WILLIAMS

Heston Blumenthal may be hyped beyond the physical possibilities of one human talent, and he may have been put through the sausage-feeder of posh-hotel décor, yet his quiddity has survived. He doesn't simply cook; he has a high concept, a rich historical sweep through 500 years of English cookery. There will be pedants who think 1390 was as different from 1820 as our cuisine is from Seoul's, so it's not so much a theme as a wheeze, but I am not among them.

I started, as any enquiring mind must, with the meat fruit (£12.50, circa 1500). It arrived in the shape of a mandarin, beside two (impossibly delicious) bits of sourdough toast. Well, of

course I knew something had to be in the mandarin, and I guessed it was probably made of meat. Imagine my delight, though, to find that what I'd thought was peel was actually a mind-bogglingly artful mandarin jelly, shaped to look like peel right down to its pores, covering a chicken-liver parfait. I wanted to stand up and cheer. The pâté was great: rich, dense, mature and so smooth you weren't so much eating it as merging with it. But I felt the inventiveness here was all in the research and the trompe

l'oeil, rather than the dish itself, which would not have been out of place at a smart wedding. C had the rice and flesh (£15, circa 1390), and this looked much more like food: saffron-soaked risotto, with four pools of calf's tail braised in red wine. Again, it sounded more inventive/scary than it was. If I can be so vulgar as to talk about plain taste, this was an excellent risotto, spiked with a deeply flavoured, perfectly cooked, much-overlooked bovine delicacy.

Hey nonny noo (this is Early English for 'Not to

worry, I haven't even had my main course yet'), perhaps we were choosing too safe? As unsafely as I could, I went with the powdered duck (£24). Its year was 1670. Perhaps it was so called because it was marinated in gunpowder, to celebrate the Restoration? Nope. 'Powdered' is just olde worlde for 'brined', and the brine was the classic mix of water, salt, cloves, bay leaves and sundry other nobby spices. It featured two criss-crossed duck legs of exquisite plumpness, shiny with glaze, burnished with care. If Walt Disney himself had made a cartoon advertising meat, this is what it would have looked like. The brine was detectable but didn't ruffle the ducky

Dinner by Heston Blumenthal

Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, 66 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020 7201 3833)

Three courses: £51.25 Stella rating: 9/10



Sauce

Q: What to drink with our juniper recipes?
A: not gin, says SUSY ATKINS

nature, and some underlying fennel was braised – subtle but distinct. Excellent, but only a surprise in so far as I had assumed it would be more surprising. C had the beef royal (£28, circa 1720), a short rib of Angus, slow-cooked for 72 hours, and this was awe-inspiring. Imagine the depth and dimension of a stew, with the glamour, the pinkness, the satisfying chew of a rare-ish fillet steak – it's Mephistophelean, isn't it? An amazing dish, whose oxtail, anchovy and onion accessories only underlined how perfect it was.

The tipsy pudding is another headline dish, a yeasty, syrupy, gorgeous feast of dough on one side, a spit-roasted shard of pineapple

next to it (£10, circa 1820). You have to order it with your main because it takes so long, and this I strongly urge. C had the chocolate bar (£8.50, circa 1730), which was a dense, well, bar of chocolate truffle, with a ginger ice cream on the side. He said it was the best bar of chocolate he'd ever had, but reader, I have no idea what he was comparing it to (a Snickers?).

You couldn't feel let down here because it is simply too good, but you might feel – as I did – the lack of a wow moment (crikey! Did he really put snails in an ice cream? Jeepers creepers! Could that be bacon in my cappuccino?). Heston's been hotelled as surely as the hotel has been Blumenthalled. ●

Gin lovers might fancy a spot of food matching with their favourite drink after scanning Diana's juniper recipes on page 58. Juniper is, after all, the key 'botanical' used to flavour the spirit. If so, be cautious. I've never found gin to go particularly well with any full-blown dish. Not even an ice-cold shot with salted fish, caviar or gravlax (chilled plain vodka is better), and certainly not bubbly, quinine-tinged gin and tonic

with anything other than briny green olives and little salty snacks. Sip gin as your aperitif, then move on to wine, I say.

For the maple-brined pork chops it's tempting to go for a white – rounded white burgundy, say. But reds are better here, and preferably juicy, ripe reds to marry with the note of sweetness in the dish. Try southern French or inexpensive, simple Rhône

TIPPLE TIP

A LITTLE FISHY

'Don't put wine glasses in the dishwasher after a meal of oily fish. Traces of sardine, mackerel and especially salmon in the wash can leave a faint fishy scent on otherwise clean glass, which sensitive sniffers may well detect. Wash the glasses by hand instead'

wines for sun-baked ripeness, supple texture, a twist of spice.

Diana's juniper-cured mackerel definitely calls for a white, and an unoaked, whistle-clean one at that. A medium chenin blanc, with its light drizzle of honey on fresh apple peel and citrus, hits exactly the right note with the fish, and the apple and celeriac salad. Choose from two key chenin regions – the Loire in France, or the Western Cape of South Africa.

With sloe-gin jellies and sour-cream ice cream, I'm going to turn down the gin again in favour of a lighter sweet wine, which won't overwhelm gentle flavours. Sloe-gin shots could be enjoyed afterwards, of course, with toasted nuts, prunes, dried figs and dark chocolate.

TRY THESE...

Sainsbury's Anjou Blanc, Loire, France (£4.79) Good-value Loire chenin blanc, off-dry and with a juicy flavour of apples and quinces. I only wish it came with a screw cap to ensure youthful freshness in every bottle

La Croisade Réserve Grenache 2009, Pays d'Oc, France (Majestic, £5.99 or two for £9.98) Supremely fruity red, packed with sweetly ripe red plums and perfumed with the scent of cloves. A good partner for pork chops, and not too heavy for the maple-brined version

Concha y Toro Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc 2007, Maule, Chile (Tesco, £6.29 for 37.5cl)

Subtle, sweet stuff, crisp with lemon and grapefruit zest, yet sugared sherbet and lime marmalade on the finish. A clever choice for lighter and frozen desserts

NAMES AND PLACES

ADAM SIMMONDS AT DANESFIELD HOUSE *Marlow-on-Thames, Buckinghamshire (01628 891010)* The dining-room at this Italianate country pile, designed by Anoushka Hempel, is a pearly-white backdrop to Adam Simmonds' vibrant dishes. Roast loin of venison is scattered with sprout leaves and caraway croquettes (£59 for three courses)

ROBERT THOMPSON AT THE HAMBROUGH *Ventnor, Isle of Wight (01983 856333)* The island's only Michelin star belongs to this exciting young chef at his cliff-top restaurant. His artistic dishes include steamed sea bream with an oyster nage and cucumber seaweed gnocchi (£55 for three courses)

THE PARK *Lucknam Park, Colerne, Wiltshire (01225 742777)* With the hotel's mile-long approach to anticipate Hywel Jones's exquisite cooking, you'll want to devour his favourite dish immediately: lamb loin and shoulder with a sweetbread dumpling, potato terrine and a zingy olive and celery purée (£70 for three courses)



Mark Whitfield, Peartree

