



Cotswold Comfort

Sebastian Snow at The Five Alls favours big flavours

My earliest food memory is of summers in Umbria, with my grandparents. They lived in a converted monastery near Todi and I remember spending hours and hours in their huge kitchen – the coolest place to be during those hot summers – making gnocchi on vast marble slabs. Italian food has been a huge influence ever since.

The best meal I've ever eaten was at Lake Annecy on the way home from a student trip. The rest of the group went off to get drunk, while I went off in search of a restaurant and found heaven on a plate – a saddle of sweet, melting lamb, flavoured with mountain herbs and stuffed with kidneys. The sad thing is that I don't remember the name of the restaurant and although I've been back, I've never been able to find it again.

The biggest influence on my cooking has been Antony Worrall Thompson – as a chef, he has the touch of an angel, and a spontaneous way of using ingredients. From him, I learnt not to mess around with them too much – let them do the talking. It was under his guidance that I changed the way I look at food.

My style of cooking is much the same as it was 20 years ago – although the odd pan-Asian spice creeps in nowadays. Its essence is flavour and letting the ingredients shine through. What's



interesting is seeing dishes come into fashion, go out, come back in again... a perpetual cycle. At the moment my menu is big on cassoulets and pot-au-feu – real comfort food.

My top ingredient is saffron – it embellishes with its colour, aroma and flavour. I use Persian as it's meant to be the best, and buy best grade loose strands. I then soak it in a liquid – usually olive oil – to maximise the yield and end up with flavoured oil and softened strands for cooking.

My weapon of choice is a Thermomix – I've only just bought one and it does almost everything. I'm rather old school and not usually big on gadgets – so you won't find any water baths here.

WARM SALAD OF ASPARAGUS, SAMPHIRE, CRAB, AVOCADO, CHERRY TOMATOES AND BABY SPINACH

Trim off the woody ends of the asparagus spears and cook in boiling water for three to five minutes until tender. Refresh the spears in iced water, drain and cut

diagonally into long pieces. Just before assembling the salad, blanch the samphire in boiling water for one minute, drain, and put into a mixing bowl with

INGREDIENTS

MAKES FOUR

- » 1 bunch asparagus
- » 200g samphire
- » 150g handpicked white crab meat
- » 1 avocado
- » 1 small punnet of cherry tomatoes
- » 1 bag baby spinach
- » 1 lemon
- » 1 espresso cup good olive oil

the asparagus, cut cherry tomatoes, slivers of avocado, crab meat and baby spinach leaves. Add enough olive oil to dress, before grating and squeezing the lemon into the bowl. Give it a quick toss and divide between four plates. Note that the salad should not need any salt as samphire is already quite salty.