



The Relaxed Roast

Despite the name, Roast restaurant, in London's iconic Borough Market is not only about the traditional roast. We speak to Chef Marcus Verberne to discover his secrets in the kitchen.

Roast uses the finest seasonal ingredients to create classical British cooking that both supports and celebrates Britain's farmers and producers, many of whom are stallholders in the market. The cuisine is then dished up in a surprisingly informal atmosphere, in the minimalist open plan restaurant that sits a short way from the Shard Building. This is no stuffy affair. It is simply good food in a relaxed space, served well.

Chef Marcus Verberne has been around the block, starting out in New Zealand then moving on to Australia before seeking experience in London, where he has now been for twelve years. He joined Roast in January and has been stamping his mark on the cuisine ever since.

Marcus had no idea as a young lad that cooking was in his future. It was not until he was given his first job as a kitchen porter in

Wellington, New Zealand that he found his niche, but from night one he was hooked. 'It was the tempo and the adrenaline that goes with it', explains Marcus, '...and tasting the sauces on the pans that the Chef was throwing at me to wash was like an epiphany. I knew straight away that was for me.' He spoke to the Chef who was willing to mentor him as long as he completed his duties first. The rest, as they say, is history.

Marcus absorbed knowledge about flavours and learned techniques ranging from fine dining to wood-fired oven applications, not limited to the standard pizza, but rather, branching out into steaming and smoking with speciality woods infusing flavour. He worked hard in every kitchen he found himself in and learned everything he knows on the job.

'Nature has a way of letting you know what works well together', says Marcus. 'Seasonal produce provides complementary flavours.' This is what directs the Roast menu, which changes monthly. Marcus rings around suppliers to see what will be available before creating the dishes for the next month, as changing world temperatures have meant changes in seasonal supply. 'It used to be so precise as to things that would be in season, but now things can be up to a month late,' he says. He modestly attributes part of the success of his dishes to the knowledge of the suppliers he works with, many of whom are in the market at the base of the restaurant.

New dishes are a constant work in progress as they require trial and a period of refining before they

feature on the main menu. This is catered for in daily specials on the menu which change constantly as Marcus seeks feedback. The focus, however, remains the same. 'People at Roast like simple food...The philosophy is that well sourced produce shouldn't need to be messed around with too much', declares Marcus.

Marcus never gets tired of the kitchen, also sharing cooking duties at home. His back up meal in summer sounds like something from the Roast lunch menu. He professes to have a constant supply of fresh vegetables at home, so throws together a quick, fresh raw vegetable salad when in a hurry. This changes to roast chicken in winter, which he will toss in the oven with some potatoes, keeping the bones for soup stock. His wife also cooks and Marcus claims that while she is an inexperienced cook, she has a perfect palate, knowing instinctively which flavours go together.

Back at the restaurant, Marcus manages 30 staff, equating to a busy kitchen. He sees this as one of the hardest aspects to control as there are times where the rota just doesn't work and he ends up short





staffed. His reply to what he does in this case is '...work more hours', although he admits that individual staff will usually step in to fill the gap. This loyalty is a tribute to his manner with staff. He is strict when he needs to be but also recognises that different people respond to different approaches. Marcus is also keen to keep his kitchen balanced, aiming to hire female and male staff equally. 'I think it is important to have both', he says, 'This is a gross generalisation, but women tend to make better cooks. They tend to have a bit more finesse, are more careful and manage time better.' This may be so, but ironically there are more male Chefs in the industry.

With Christmas approaching, Marcus cannot resist the lure of turkey and honey roast ham. He has also put down around 800 Christmas puddings, a major feat. 'It was hilarious. When I got all the ingredients, it all came in and I had 120 kilos of dried fruit and I just thought "What am I going to do with this?" I ended up having to buy massive stainless steel tubs to be able to steep the fruit', he laughs. Either way, we know they will be delicious. Plain, well-sourced food in a casual environment. Now there's a Christmas treat.



Roast, The Floral Hall, Stoney Street, London, SE1 | TL
www.roast-restaurant.com

The View at the top of The Shard opens to the public on 1st February 2013. As a curtain raiser to the launch Roast Restaurant has introduced celebratory tippie Shard Sour, a delicious combination of premium Hakushu whisky, fresh lemon juice, egg white and cherry juice. Bar goers are invited to leave their business card for a chance to be among the first to experience The Shard's astonishing 360 degree, 40 mile views over the city and beyond.

Roast is also offering whisky aficionados the chance to sample five of the most celebrated Japanese brands at a series of tasting sessions. Japanese whisky making has its origins in Britain, using knowledge and techniques brought back from Scotland. The monthly tastings run from November to January, costing £60 per person.



Marcus Verberne's Anchovy-rubbed, Hay-baked Leg of Mutton with Parsley and Caper Sauce (Serves 8-10)

Ingredients

1 leg of mutton, femur removed and butterflied
 Enough hay to wrap the leg thoroughly
 16 salted anchovy fillets
 2 cloves of garlic
 Leaves from 3 sprigs of rosemary
 2 tablespoons of rapeseed oil
 Freshly milled black pepper
 Sea salt

Sauce

50g butter
 1 large onion (sliced)
 1 bay leaf
 2 tablespoons of flour
 500ml lamb or beef stock (hot)
 150ml double cream
 80g capers
 1 small bunch of parsley (chopped)

A wise woman once said: 'Mutton is not considered by experienced judges to be in perfection until it is nearly or quite five years old; but to avoid the additional expense of feeding the animal so long, it is commonly brought into the market at three years old.' (Eliza Acton 1858) Given the varying standards of mutton on the market, make sure you ask your butcher for mutton that meets the exacting standard drawn up by The Mutton Renaissance. These guidelines ensure a consistent quality. The sheep must be over two years old, have had a forage-based diet, have sufficient fat cover, and be matured (hung for at least two weeks). There are certain breeds known for producing delicious mutton such as, Herdwick, Romney, Blackface, and Southdown. Roast use the latter. Ask your butcher to bone-out the leg, removing the femur but leaving the shank bone in for presentation. It also gives you something to hold on to when carving. The butcher should butterfly the individual muscles, opening them out sufficiently for the anchovy rub. If you're worried about where you will find hay, try a pet shop.

Method

Soak the hay in cold water and start with the anchovy rub. Place the anchovies, garlic, rosemary and rapeseed oil into a pestle and mortar and grind into a smooth paste. Open out the butterflied mutton leg with the inside facing upwards. Massage the anchovy paste into the meat evenly and season with a few twists of black pepper. Roll the leg back up and tie tightly with butchery string at 2 inch intervals. Season the outside with sea salt and pepper.

In a large heavy based pan on a moderate heat, seal the meat, rendering out any excess fat from the outside of the leg. Continue this process until the meat is caramelised on all sides. Lay a large length of tin foil on your work surface and place the wet hay generously inside the foil saving some for the top. Lay the sealed leg gently onto the hay and cover with the hay you have saved. Wrap the leg up tightly in the foil covering with several layers so no moisture is released during cooking.

At Roast the leg is baked slowly for 5 hours on 80C which results in the leg being pink all the way through and means minimal moisture loss or shrinkage. If time isn't on your side, bake for 3 hours on 120C. Once cooked, rest the meat for at least 20 minutes before unwrapping to carve.

In a saucepan, cook the onions and bay leaf gently in butter until the onions are soft. Add flour and cook for a further 2 minutes, stirring often. Add the hot stock a little at a time and stir constantly to avoid lumps. Reduce until reaching a gravy consistency then add cream and seasoning. Add capers and chopped parsley just before serving. Serve with bubble 'n' squeak, mashed potato or champ.