



FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Siobhán Breatnach serves up a foodie's delight

GET IN TOUCH
t: 020 8735 9423 | f: 020 8741 3382
e: siobhanbreatnach@irishpost.co.uk

FOOD&DRINK



PATARA
15 Greek Street
London W1D 4DP
Tel: 020 7437 1071

Over the years the Irish have certainly taken Thailand into their hearts, travelling there on holidays, gap years and sabbaticals. And the southeast Asian coastal nation has reciprocated to a degree – you'll find the Shamrock Irish pub in Koh Samui and The Dubliner Irish pub in Bangkok to name but a few. But when you return from your travels, having indulged in the best Thai cuisine on offer, it's no easy task to find a place that will recreate those same delicious dishes to a level equal in detail and variety. So, it was with some delight that I happened across Patara in London's Soho. Tucked away not far from the Palace Theatre – which West End fans will know as home to the musical Pricilla Queen of the Desert – Patara Greek Street is one of four branches of an international



chain. Inside, there are two floors full of authentic furnishings and enchanting corners to dine a deux, which glow beneath the flicker of candle light. Thai food is as much about the balance of flavours as the detail that goes into each dish. I had a hot and sour soup – the tom yum goong prawn bisque scented with lemongrass and kaffir lime leaf – to start and with each bite of succulent prawn this signature dish whisked me back to those long gone

weeks spent in Krabi. The fella had the phed nam peung – a honey marinated Gressingham duck breast golden fried in fresh pandan leaf. An empty plate and satisfied grin followed. For mains we were seduced by plump king scallops sautéed in chilli paste and sweet basil, with a side of pak choi and gang kari – a yellow coconut curry with New Zealand lamb, new potatoes and baby onions. Dessert became another course of divine indulgence, this time incorporating more subtle and fragrant flavours. The lemongrass tart with coconut ice cream left a lingering smile, while the fella enjoyed his baked banana! Patara is that rare mix of modern yet authentic, making it the perfect stop for some genuine Thai food...particularly for those longing to recreate the memories of a perfect holiday. Three course dinner for two plus wine, excluding service, cost £91.20

■ **Next Week:** We visit The Modern Pantry in Clerkenwell to sample their Cashel Blue Cheese soufflé.

That old chestnut

A recent trip home to Ireland reminded me of all those autumnal childhood days spent picking horse chestnuts underneath the rows of trees that lined the country lanes where I grew up. These were used to battle younger siblings in endless games of conkers but with those games relegated to the past, there is still a way to enjoy the delights of chestnuts in October. Edible sweet chestnuts, not to be confused with inedible horse chestnuts, can be used to cook delicious soups, stuffings and stews. And so while skimming through my recipe books I came across this easy to make chestnut soup, which will warm up any cold or hungry tummy. Why not give it a try this week...

Why not try
Valentine
Warner's
recipe for...

Chestnut soup

Serves 6

Ingredients

1kg Fresh chestnuts (or 600g pre-prepared vacuum-packed)
25 g butter
1 Medium onion, peeled and finely diced
1ltr Pheasant, chicken, ham or beef stock
Soft brown sugar (optional if using fresh chestnuts)
2 tbsp Armagnac or other brandy
Large-flaked sea salt and black pepper

Good olive oil
A few cep or penny bun mushrooms (optional)

COOKING CHESTNUTS

If you are using fresh chestnuts, use about a kilo, as after accounting for peeling, rotters and the odd exploder, you will probably be left with the desired amounts of meats. Those cooked in the fire, will require a little more attention than those roasted in the oven. They need to be turned and cooked as evenly as possible, avoiding any black burnt scabbing. The fire, however, imparts a pleasant smokiness to the soup.

The nuts must be cooked through and not have any bitey texture, the oven is effective for this. Put them in on full heat and cook them for about 20 minutes. Be wary on opening the oven door as this can uncannily seem to prompt an explosion from within. The chance of this can be lessened by a jab through the skin from the end of a sharp knife before roasting.

MAKING SOUP

Take the cooked nuts out of the oven and let them cool a little before peeling them, taking great care to remove the inner skin.



This may involve breaking the chestnut to get into any creases. Melt the butter in a saucepan and gently fry the onion until it is soft and dark golden. Remove from the pan and put to one side. Roughly chop the chestnuts and add them to the pan before pouring over the stock. Bring the pan's contents to a gentle simmer. With a stick blender or food processor, blend the soup until it is as smooth as possible. Pass the soup through

a sieve if you have roasted the chestnuts from fresh, as this will remove any stray bits of furry skin or burnt flesh. Return the onions to the pan and pulse again.

Return the soup to the faintest simmer and cook for 10 minutes. Add a little more stock if you think it is too thick – it should be the consistency of floured gravy. Check the seasoning, and if you used fresh chestnuts you may want to sweeten them with a little sugar. Pour and stir in the brandy and cook for a further minute.

Serve the soup grating over slices of raw penny or bun if you have them. Go over with a grind of black pepper. Finish with a good splash of quality olive oil.

■ For more seasonal recipes check out Valentine Warner's What To Eat Now, Autumn and Winter, published by Octopus Books.

On the grapevine...

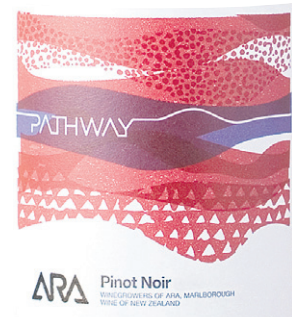
Try this award-winning Sauvignon Blanc

New Zealand winemakers Ara have won gold for their 2009 Sauvignon Blanc at one of Europe's biggest wine competitions – the Great MUNDUSvini International Wine Awards 2010 in Germany. Ara means 'pathway' in Maori and its single vineyard site in Marlborough is blazing its own trail producing wines with an elegant, mineral style. Described as a fusion of New and Old World practice these wines are available to buy at Morrisons.

2009 Pathway Sauvignon Blanc

Ara - Marlborough
£7.99

100 per cent Sauvignon Blanc from different parcels across the Ara vineyard. Each parcel was vinified separately and spent six months on its yeast lees before blending. For the Pathway wines some of the vines are allowed to grow more vigorously than is usual for Ara, so that some more classic Marlborough fruit can be included.



2008 Pathway Pinot Noir

Ara - Marlborough
£9.99

100 per cent Pinot Noir from Ara's typically close planted and low yielding vines but again with some of the younger and more vigorous parcels in the vineyard as well. This adds some typical Marlborough exuberance and intense strawberry character to the wine. Pathway Pinot Noir spends six months in 10 per cent new and 90 per cent older, fine-grained French oak.

KNOW YOUR NUTS

The chestnut season runs from late September until December and those on offer in the supermarkets tend to be imported from Europe rather than home-grown. If you buy chestnuts fresh, choose plump smooth, shiny nuts. The best quality vacuum-packed chestnuts are usually sold whole and unbroken, also in cans. Wild British sweet chestnuts are not fully ripe until they fall in large numbers in late October.



Organic nibbles

OCTOBER 21 is Apple Day and to celebrate Galway's Michelle McKenna – founder of Clippy's Apples – is hosting an apple preserving masterclass in London where she will also be teaching the secrets of making toffee apple jam.

The masterclass at Fortnum & Mason from 2pm on Thursday is part of a nationwide tour which sees Michelle appearing in some of the nation's most prestigious cookery schools.



Michelle McKenna

Founded two years ago in Cheshire, Clippy's Apples is home to British-apple based jams, jellies, chutneys and relishes. Michelle's passion for home-grown apples began when she found out that two-thirds of British orchards have been lost since 1970 and, together with fiancé Paul Gorman, wants to reverse this trend. To see Michelle in action look for tour dates near you at www.preservingthenation.org and www.clippys.com

