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Bitten
Umami: why it’s good for you and me. Illustration by Alice Duke.

The Fifth taste isn’t just lip-smackingly lovely, scientists now believe it serves an evolutionary purpose too. Mother’s milk? It’s as savoury and umami as Marmite.

After salt, sweet, sour and bitter, umami (that moreish, glutamate-based savoury taste) is so important for humans our tongues come pre-fitted with taste receptors to lap it up. Why? Because the flavor triggers off chemicals that tell our brain we’re digesting protein (and its life-essential amino acids), and we should jolly well not be sick. As we’ve evolved, our brains have learned to shun bitter flavors: because, usually, they indicate the presence of harmful toxins.

Umami, mostly found in cooked, preserved or aged foods, indicates the food’s been pre-detoxified. And, so, our brain translates that into: ‘Mmmm, this is delicious, what have you done with the sauce?’

Part of our Homo sapien success story has been our ability to just eat bloody well. And, for the past 250,000 years, that means cooking and smoking and curing and all that stuff filling the cookbook section of Waterstones right now. Umami: it goes way back.

You’ll find umami in taste-bombs such as ramen broth, extra-aged parmesan, fried chestnut mushrooms, tomatoes, sizzling meat juices and Marmite (fermented food, such as yeast, offers an umami-motherload).

Six Ways to Get Your Umami Hit

1. Grilled halloumi, tahini paste and chilli sourdough sandwich: Baltic Bakehouse, Bridgewater Street, Liverpool.
2. Soya bean with tofu, Chinese leaves and sesame soup: Koreana, King Street West, Manchester.
3. Duck Gyoza with dark soy: Host, Hope Street, Liverpool.
4. Barbeque flavour crisps: Baked Popchips are our current favourites.
5. Rye bread with fried olives and anchovy paste: Make it at home.
**EDITOR'S LETTER**

WHEN THE person you're closest to in the whole world is dying, all of food's mysteries melt away. You get that it's a proxy for the things there are no words for. That it's all that's left when your world shrinks to the size of an overbred tray table.

When medicines faltered and failed, food fixed up long-dead neurons – reached parts, reignited eyes. For six weeks I witnessed the amazing alchemy that happens.

You get that it's a proxy for the stuff we consume in a curious, intelligent and celebratory way. It's about finding the stories, people and passions that truly nourish us. That we accept that restaurant reviews are either payola or mean-spirited web write ups (when you were either friend or family).

We disagree. Bitten isn't about food as fad; drink as fashion. It's about the constants: real people, driven by a passion to bring something amazing into the world.

Bitten is about reconnecting to the stuff we consume in a curious, intelligent and celebratory way. It's about finding the stories, people and passions that truly nourish us. Stories that weave through not just food and drink, but stuff that feeds the soul, whether it's travel or culture, style or, well anything that takes our fancy really.

Some say we're mad to launch a printed title in this day and age. I dunno. All I do know is that we're going to fill these pages with the things we love. And if you want to join us or if you've any stories you think we'd like to hear, drop us a line. Enjoy.

David Lloyd, Editor

Illustration: Samantha Baguley

**THIS IS FOOD**

**RETURN OF THE NATIVE**

**RIBBLE** Valley's much-lauded inn, the Highwayman in Nether Burrow near Kirby Lonsdale opened its doors last season in 2007 - sweeping amongst other things, the UK Pub Chef of the Year Award in 2009. Founded by Northcote’s Nigel Haworth and Craig Bancroft, the Highwayman’s enlivened local boys Head Chef Jason ‘Bruno’ Birkbeck, A Cumbrian lad, Bruno’s worked at the Michelin-starred Northcote, and the sublime Torridon Hotel in the Highlands. But it’s coming back to his roots that most excites him. “It’s been such an amazing journey so far, but my heart’s always been in this part of the world” he says. Taking advantage of the farm’s proximity to Nether Burrow, Bruno promises to utilise the best of Lancastrian, Cumbrian and Yorkshire produce. A triplet entendre we can’t wait to see in action. Expect farm-reared beef from Kirdring Farm in Old Town, Near Kirkby Lonsdale, smoked fish and meat from Lancaster Port Smeathouse in Lancaster and game from Cartmel Valley Game in Cartmel.

The refurbishment, totalling a cool £200K since Lennon and McCartney. Go for a drink, drink as fashion. It's about the constants: real people, driven by a passion to bring something amazing into the world.

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Illustration: Samantha Baguley

**THE GAMES UP**

LIKE most good ideas, the concept of Fair Game was founded in a pub. Friends Rob, Josh and Stephen had been discussing setting-up a ‘Street Food’ business and it had to be game.

“Despite being championed in high-end restaurants, game was being misrepresented on the streets. We then set out to make sure our dishes utilised game at an accessible level but still retained a certain amount of refinement.” Rob – head chef at Wirral’soby Mill – says.

“we always try to source our food as locally as possible. We use a game supplier based in Neston (Dunstan Fish & Game), who in turn sources as local as he can. Our Venison comes from ‘Yatty Park, where they are cued to control the population’ says Stephen. September is peak season – with most native game birds in season. “It’s the start of partridge shooting season, so we expect that will feature heavily on our menu for the following months,” says Stephen.

**DAILY BREAD**

WE’RE long known that Baltic Bakeshop is one of the best bakeries in the North West of England (if not the UK). Now it’s official, with them winning four stars in the Guild of Food Writer’s Great Taste Awards 2014 – two of those for their sublime Wild Dark. Yet another reason to pay one of Liverpool’s best independent food retailers a visit. Well, that and their peanut butter brittle doughnuts. Their takeover of the recently renovated ‘Yabby’ in the Loaf (Hardman Street) has to be one of the most recent Food ‘Scous’ partnerships since Lennon and McCartney. So for a perfectly poured pint, stay for one of their...
truly sublime sandwiches (our favourite is the Charcoal Chicken – a same-as-soap, it should have a sonnet written about it) and then treat yourself to a slice of their Cackle Pie. The deep fried combination of salty-sweetness is quite simply, one of the best baked products currently doing the rounds in Manchester.

- Baltic Bakehouse
  Bridgewater Street, Liverpool
  www.balticbakehouse.co.uk

Open Tuesdays to Saturdays, 7pm – 9:30pm, 242x4 offer – deceptively simple dishes from slow cooked Cumbrian beef to signature favourites grapefruit posset and sautéed mushrooms and snails - will show McTague’s meticulous and passionate side at its best. Fine dining in the heart of the city. Opens late September.

- 42 Edge Street, Manchester
  www.4244.co.uk

The stroll from Paul Askew’s old London Carriage Works stomping ground to his new Art School Restaurant isn’t a long one – but boy, has the city been on a journey since Aske threw on his apron. I remember when LCW opened and I was in Liverpool’s fruit and veg market, they called aubergines ‘queer gear’ back then,” he tells Bitten.

The smartest new space in the city, the Art School features a purpose-built skybox above a rich, clubby interior of muted walls, Cumbrian granites and rugged armchairs. But this cooking is the thing.

“I want to offer cooking in its purest form,” he says, “testing menus for days a week, a place to come with good friends who enjoy great food.”

If the weight of expectation is, squarely, on Aske’s ample shoulders, all looks well in the galaxy kitchen on its main opening night.

“I’ve yet to get a fantasy view. Aske line-caught in Liverpool Bay this morning, I really don’t have to do much with it…” he says, modestly.

But what he does do, well, that’s something very special.

The Art School
1 Signal Street, Liverpool
www.theartschoolrestaurant.co.uk

- The Chocolate Café, Ramsbottom
  www.chocolate-cafe.co.uk

The Chocolate Café, Ramsbottom
Luxury Hot Chocolate, Hotel Chocolat Liverpool ONE

The last word in comfort drinking? Hotel Chocolat’s classic dark hot choc is dark, rich and very grown up.

Venison, chilli and chocolate burrito, Fair Game

Dark, spicy and surprisingly savoury wrap – look out for it at Camp and Furnace’s Food Slam Fridays.

Steak and vegetables in chocolate beer, The Chocolate Café, Ramsbottom

Shine to all things cocoa, the Chocolate Café bake delicious pants-ou-charlotines, make a mean chocolate pizza and get all creative with this hearty stew.

Chocolate Tom, Robinsons

With a velvety ‘natural’ milky sweet chocolate palate balanced with hoppy, roasted malt. Robinsons’ Old Tom Chocolate is just the ticket for smoky autumn evenings.

FARM, FRESH

“The Pimbleys’ six farmers, we’ve grown and sold our own fruit and vegetables since 1906,” Andrew Pimbley says. “But we get carried away into thinking we’re the generation that invented the farm shop.

Still, things have moved on a bit in a hundred or so years. This summer saw the opening of Finsbury’s new, super-stylish Claremont Farm shop.

Shop, butchers and cafe, the structure is a hall for the farm’s industrious, year-round programme of festivals, demos, Welly Walks and cook schools.

‘It’s the culmination of ten years’ planning,’ Pimbley explains. ‘We want it to become an alternative shopping and eating destination, a melting pot for local produce, seasonal foods and for those who seek it.’ Business as usual then.

Claremont Farm
Old Cletterbridge Road, Wirral
www.claremontfarm.co.uk

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SWEET ROSYLEE

ROB Owen Brown has taken the reins at Rosylee as part of a further £100,000 investment in the restaurant – in the former Rosylee Tearooms in the Northern Quarter. And he’s made an ambitious new Art School isn’t a long one – but boy, has the city been on a journey since Aske threw on his apron. I remember when LCW opened and I was in Liverpool’s fruit and veg market, they called aubergines ‘queer gear’ back then,” he tells Bitten.

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trinity, you could say. and swordfish too. Chips are disappoint, but there's halibut of cod and haddock won't is always in the play offs. For town, but this seaside chippy creamy texture 'unlike any ice cream parlour's had the way – and, for the past 85 years, it's vanilla. That's the Notarianni Shore.

Suffice to say it's made fresh. For Blackpool, it may be many a thing, besides things. Donkeys and trams, flashing lights and amusement arcades. But it's not just the roller coasters that are stomach churning. The food's pretty rote too, right? Well, no actually – these days it's surprisingly illuminating.

Notarrianni’s 9/11 Waterloo Road, South Shore

Any flavour you like, as long as it’s vanilla. That’s the Notarrianni way – and, for the past 85 years, that’s the way this family-run ice cream parlour’s had the competition licked. The recipe? It’s a closely guarded secret. Suffice to say it’s made fresh each morning using local milk, eggs and butter to create a creamy texture ‘unlike any other’.

Yorkshire Fisheries 14-16 Topping Street

It’s probably unwise to claim this shrine to all things cod/potato is the undisputed best in town, but this seaside chippy is always in the play offs. For traditionalists, generous fillets of cod and haddock won’t disappoint, but there’s halibut (the king of whitefish, in our humble opinion) tuna steaks and swordfish too. Chips are fat, crunchy and fluffy the holy trinity, you could say.

Carfords Inn (Main image)
Carfords Lane, Little Eccleston
Gorgeous riverside gastropub, a few miles inland from Blackpool serving maginative takes on local staples such as Gosnash duck breast served with wildflower honey glaze, a ‘Bouillabaisse-style’ shellfish broth and a fabulous Lancashire cheeseboard. Rooms, too, should you be too stuffed to get back in the Skoda.

Mandarin Restaurant
27 Clifton Street
Surefooted Asian restaurant with a legion of loyal fans. Mandarin doesn’t exactly mess with the formula too much – so expect authentic plates of tea-cooked pork, fried white noodles soup and seriously great Con Sui – steak strips coated with egg and potato flour and stir fried with sweet chili.

Pump and Trunchon
13 Bonny Street
One of the oldest pubs along the Golden Mile, the Pump & Trunchon is a great place to stop for a drink or a bite to eat. The pub is known for its wide selection of beers and hearty pub grub. The atmosphere is warm and inviting, with wooden beams and cozy seating. It’s a great spot to relax and enjoy a pint after a day of sightseeing.

The Stanley Park Cafe
West Park Drive
Within its gorgeous Art Deco building, Stanley Park’s café offers hearty breakfasts, a seriously great steak and ale pie and some nights, a touch of trad jazz with your traditional fish and chips. Nice.

Salt of the Earth
Poulton Road, Poulton Le Fylde
This family-run delicatessen in Carleton is your best bet for stocking up on picnic provisions. Their hot sandwiches are a meal in themselves. Try their hot beef and onion Frenost of Broadland beef, caramelized onions and secret sauce. Or go all continental with a mozzarella, pesto and sunblushed crispy. Tidy little tapsa menu too.

Oyster Bar
Blackpool Pleasure Beach
It’s not all garishly-coloured rock and all-you-can-eat buffets along the Golden Mile: y’know. Within the screening precent of the Pleasure Beach, you can enjoy the Hyde Cove’s fresh shellfish – a tray of prawns or cookies, or even a hexagonal native oysters with Tabasco and lemon juice, washed down with a glass of champagne. Which, really, is the life, isn’t it? See also: Robert’s Oyster Bar, 90 The Promenade.

FOR FIDDLY little blighters, they sure create a big rumpus. Polten Street Social’s James Allen is firmly in the ‘not in the camp when it comes to micro herbs and salads’ camp. ‘We don’t want to see a seaweed chef with a pair of tweezers, arranging tiny shoots over a dish. We’re cooks, not gardeners,’ he says.

Wiral watercress watercress, Peter Jones says. Peter Jones doesn’t sweat the small stuff. He’s big in the microcosm, growing baby leaves, such as pea shoots, mustard and sorrel. ‘We’re packed with all the health benefits needed for the seedling to grow into a healthy plant,’ Jones says. Think cress, but posher.

Small in stature, big in flavour. Try it for yourself – and make your own mind up. Wiral watercress deliver to farm shops in Wirral and Chester. Or grow your own – try Sprout People’s hardly GMO free seeds.

Sow into fresh compost under a cloche, or on your windowsill, light like any normal seedling and in a week or two they’re ready to harvest.

The plants that work best include coriander, basil, fennel, radish and oriental leaves. At micro stage they’re flavour bombshells – a concentrated version of their future selves. Great to add inside tapas to salads, stews and sandwiches. It’s gardening on speed, really.

www.wirralwatercress.co.uk
www.sproutpeople.org

GROW IT

EXTERMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE

The art and science of restaurant acoustics.

THINK about your favourite restaurant and chances are, subconsciously, you’ll be playing back the soundtrack. Because here a place sounds directly affects how it snaps into our soul.

Or note:
Take, as exhibit A, a Liverpool Asian waterfront restaurant. A festival of steely surfaces, it’s all mosaic pillars, onyx bars, crude concrete and harsh tile. It’s just about the shrillest, noisiest and most painful acoustic experience this side of a Slipknot gig in Topps Tiles. All those hard surfaces just let the sound ricochet around like charged particles in the Large Hadron Collider. In short, it’s painful as is the food. But that’s another story altogether.

The sound in restaurants has changed. As the recession hit, their ‘party atmosphere’ has been turned to drabness. As the recession hit, their clientele changed. As the recession hit, their clientele changed.

The interior with its ubiquitous concrete and timber conspired together so that after a while the sounds of clattering and chattering started to echo within the space. It snags into our soul. That’s where elements such as hard retail spaces are spectacular and need to be thought through.

The dining area is a place that doesn’t sweat the small stuff. He’s big in the microcosm, growing baby leaves, such as pea shoots, mustard and sorrel. ‘We’re packed with all the health benefits needed for the seedling to grow into a healthy plant,’ Jones says. Think cress, but posher.

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Brace yourselves. Liverpool's curry evangelist Nisha Katona is about to blow the lid off everything we thought we knew about our favourite dish. Photos by Pete Carr.

"MY PARENTS". Indian Hindu doctors, came over to Britain – to Ormskirk, where I was born – in 1968 and moved into an incredibly deprived area. They told me how they had to travel to Manchester to buy ginger, onions were sold by the half in a bag of barley (for soup) and turmeric was peddled in pharmacies like some filthy yellow narcotic.

Some of my earliest memories are of being firebombed, bricks landing through nursery windows and dodging the stones on the way to school. Food became our strongest force for race relations. Korma became the Kofi Annan of Skem. It is in the nature of Indians to feed, to show hospitality. We want you to like us. We want you to like our food. We love that you might love our food. There it is – raw neediness manifested in the form of a meaty Madras.

My need to feed is no different to my parents; it runs deep. I recall a defining incident, as a child, I was invited to play at a friend's house. I was asked to collect me just before lunch was served. This cut my mother deeply. Deep down I must feel that I may not have enough personality to sustain a friendship, but damn it, I do have enough garam masala.

It is a fact little known that, most of the Indians who could afford a ticket to come to live in the west, could afford chefs at home. Many first generation immigrants could not afford chefs. Those that could were more interested in turning their children to the professions, those few that could were more interested in turning their children to the professions, those few that could were more interested in turning their children to the professions, those few that could were more interested in turning their children to the professions. Hence, in India, kids start cooking before they die with the first generation. This is how we Indians show love. Deep down I must feel that I may not have enough personality to sustain a friendship, but damn it, I do have enough garam masala.

The food scene in the Bold Street area excites me. Yes, it's 20 years late but it is following the Soho model. Independents are the organic foundations of our increasingly concrete, homogenised cities. I'm utterly crestfallen that this homogenisation of Liverpool is not fully grasped and overturned by the top end of the city.

Commercial pressures made the journey towards Mowgli Street Food almost unattainable. It is impossible for a small independent like me, to go head to head in rent competition with the big, deep frying, sugar coating, transfat loving chains. But I really feel that it's time that Britain owned the curry it so loves. This is the stuff of Indian homes and the streets of Calcutta. Brace yourselves, come, chat, chill, chat...

FOOD BECAME OUR STRONGEST FORCE FOR RACE RELATIONS. KORMA BECAME THE KOFI ANNAN OF SKEM.

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"I honestly feel that many Indian chefs and writers, through design or sloth, complicate curry making. It's almost as if they want to maintain it as some mystical dark art. This winds me up no end. I'm sick of them describing long lists of ingredients, a bewildering timberyard of spices, days of prep, a day to shop, the weight you can actually lose in stress before you even start to cook the damn thing. Look, in India, kids start cooking before they die with the first generation. This is why I became a curry evangelist."

NISHA'S GIN AND TONIC SALMON

Make a tin foil tent. Pour in a generous G&T (drink some first, obviously) and sprinkle with coriander powder, some sprigs of fresh coriander and a twist of lime. Place salmon flesh down in the liquid. Close tent, and leave for an hour. Then bake it in hot oven for 10 minutes. Delicious.

Mowgli, 69 Bold Street, Liverpool

www.mowglistreetfood.com

FOOD + LIFE
What new Nordic cooking can teach us all.

What have the Danes ever given us? Apart from Jan Molby, Peter Schmeichel and Aqua, we mean? Well, if you’re of a Liverpool persuasion, they gave the name of their favourite meat stew – labékaus – to you. Which, as gifts go, is way better than Barbie Girl, we think you’ll agree.

If you’re passionate about food – where it’s come from, where it’s going, and how to make the most of what grows around you – you’ll know the trim Nordic nation’s also given us Noma, regularly bouncing around the upper reaches of the ‘Best Restaurant’ lists. Mostly at the very top.

Head chef René Redzepi’s insatiable experimentation reaches its apotheosis in Copenhagen’s two-Michelin-star warehouse restaurant. But, for Redzepi and his intrepid band of gastronauts, it’s all about the journey. The quest to break down, reassemble, juxtapose and redefine the parameters of the dinner plate in front of you.

What happens if you need something acidic, but lemons aren’t – naturally – in abundance in a Danish winter? Choice A: fly one in from southern California. Choice B: find something, locally, that works as a substitute.

And the journey starts at the Nordic Food Lab – a non-profit, open-source Noma spin-off, the lab’s methods might look more Minority Report than Saturday Kitchen, but its mission is simple: making more tasty food available to more people, and – by a relentless process of trial and error – diversifying agriculture and expanding the parameters of what we think of as food.

Like insects.

“The most delicious things often happen when you start with something that already exists, but maybe has been overlooked or ignored,” says Nordic Food Lab’s Lead Researcher, Josh Evans. “Insects are the obvious example in this case – a real delicacy in many ancient and established cuisines around the world. Our work with insects is to learn techniques from these cultures and try to use them in our region to bring an understated edible resource into our culinary vocabulary in an appropriate way.”

Ecologically, the eat-insects argument is hard to push against. The critters are found everywhere. They have nutritional content comparable to that of larger animals, and lower demands on resources like feed, water, and land.

But, as Evans says, there is a better reason that all this: they taste phenomenal.

“They produce a range of flavour compounds and are rich in gastronomic potential. The main problem is that we in the West don’t consider them as edible. Our strategy is to transform them to highlight their latent deliciousness.”

So far, some of the Lab’s creations include a rich sauce fermented from grasshoppers, barley koji and salt, a mousseline of wax moth larvae, and a granola that replaces the oil and sugar with bee larvae and honey (they also have recipes for all of these on their website, should you fancy your chances).

“But the live ants are possibly the most remarkable,” Evans grins, getting into his stride. “They produce formic acid as a defense mechanism, and when you eat them live they spray it into your mouth.”

As an added sting in the tail, Evans tells us they’ve since learned that some
wild ants can harbour a nasty parasite called the Lancet Liver Fluke, which can be killed simply by freezing. “So while I sometimes eat the ants live because I understand and accept the risk, I can’t in good conscience do it.” Evans says. “We investigate culinary techniques from around the world to explore the edible potential of the Nordic region. We’re intent on broadening our taste, generating new methods for those who make food and those who enjoy eating.”

“That’s us, then. With his team, Evans’ work is a mash-up of new flavour-discovery and old flavour-reinvention: “But our primary driving force is ultimately the pursuit of deliciousness,” he smiles. “It all comes back to acknowledging where your food comes from – not just the ingredients, but the techniques used to make it tastier. Fish sauce has been around for thousands of years, rotten fish is fucking fantastic.”

Evans says. “As an example, Evans points to the magical art of fermentation. Its bubbling alchemy finds home on most of the world’s top tables, but it’s a technique – borne out of a necessity to store foods over the harsh winter – that’s actually thousands of years old. ‘It all comes back to acknowledging where your food comes from – not just the ingredients, but the techniques used to make it tastier. Fish sauce has been around for thousands of years, rotten fish is fucking fantastic.’

This knowledge, Evans evangelises, is there if we want it. “If we go looking for it. ‘That’s why we exist,’ he says. “Fusing ecology, tradition, science and a sense of place – the Nordic Food Lab might look like a CSI lab with broccoli, but, really, it’s an open love letter to the Nordic edible landscape.”
How did a farming family at the very end of England reinvent the motorway service station and, in doing so, revive a community on the edge? David Lloyd meets the team behind Cumbria’s Tebay Services. Photos by Pete Carr.

Away from the second homes and the gashospitals of the Lake District, eastern Cumbria broods under thick skies, its stony villages hunkered in the hollows of the Howgills, shivering beneath the kamestone slopes of Great Asby Scar.

Somewhere here (although no-one can quite agree where) lies the dead centre of mainland Britain. It’s a lonely, wind-scoured spot.

All over a kilometre above the leashed Irish Sea, Shap Fell curves like a pudding basin over villages left for dead when Beeching took the fells in the middle distance, picking the shadows of summer clouds mottle the Howgills’ upper slopes – that knuckle-shaped ridge that stubbornly blocks out Ken Bruce’s popmaster when you’re heading up to Scotland. That link in the motorway network that says you’ve moved beyond the wall of Westeros. Here be moorland, mists, steak and scree.

“We knew nothing about the food industry, the Dunnings started small: a scatter of picnic tables, shower startles the Tebay ducks scuttle around the contours of the malls in the middle distance, picking up catering staff working Tebay’s school mum nine-to-three shift. Mums come to bake, while dads come to bake, while dads farm the land. A closed system of farming is a really tough job here.

But, with the buy-out cash came an outlandish offer: would they like to tender for a motorway service station? Here, in the middle of Britain?

“The CPO knocked him, but my father’s the type to take a punch and come back harder,” says Sarah Dunning, who now runs her father’s business after a spell in stocks and shares in London, “so he bid. And he won.”

The big operators thought that the plot just wasn’t viable. Who’d be crazy enough to sell coffees here, they bargained? Now Tebay sells single estate Guatemalan rain forest beans. But, mostly, it sells Cumbria.

The Tebay difference? From our perch at Tebay services’ northbound restaurant, we watch the shadows of summer clouds mottle the Howgills’ upper slopes – that knuckle-shaped ridge that stubbornly blocks out Ken Bruce’s popmaster when you’re heading up to Scotland. That link in the motorway network that says you’ve moved beyond the wall of Westeros. Here be moorland, mists, steak and scree.

“We’re a tiddler in our industry,” says Sarah. “Everyone else is massive. They’ll have fifty or a hundred services. But they don’t produce the offer themselves. They’re financial institutions, property landlords. They bring in franchises, they don’t deal with food at all.”

But there was something here. Something different. This was a service station that grew out of the ground, rather than being parachuted in. It was a partnership part of the community, the people, the land. The ancient county might have been wiped off the map to be merged with Cumberland into administrative behemoth of Cumbria in 1974’s big shake up but the Dunnings were determined to keep a little corner of their fields forever Westmorland.

“There is a depth that comes out after being here all these years,” says Sarah, as the breakfast rush broils around us, and a sudden shower startles the Tebay ducks scuttle around the contours of the malls in the middle distance, picking up catering staff working Tebay’s school mum nine-to-three shift. Mums come to bake, while dads farm the land. A closed system of sublime sustainability.

“Businesses integrate into their communities in lots of different ways, this one works for us.”

But it is a business first and foremost, isn’t it?

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Buying in expertise. It’s a lighter way of doing business, and it’s a model that works from Gordano to Gretna. Need sandwiches? Get Marks and Spencer on the phone. Coffee? That’s spelled C-o-s-t-a?

“Their teams have no food people in the business, whereas we have our own kitchens where we make...
all our cakes and sandwiches. The beauty is that we cut out the middle man. We provide ingredients. There’s absolutely no-one between us and the customer.”

Which also means there’s no middle man. No profit margin pyramid scheme. It means better value, better products, happier customers. For Tebay, it meant they were in business.

The recipe worked and a hotel followed in 1976 – but, with its ski chalet chic, its sunken lounge and floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace, this was no soulless business stop-over. Like the service station it grew from, this was a hotel with Westmorland indelibly etched on every timber beam, every slate, every view from its super-sized windows. Oh, and in every meal served at the hotel’s award-winning restaurant.

“It’s not the easy way to do business. We didn’t need to make the hotel as good as it was. But that’s not how we do things around here,” Sarah says.

But one thing Tebay does share with its distant cousins is the peculiarity of the service station’s modus operandi. Islands of round-the-clock hospitality, their ‘always welcome’ guarantee comes at a price. And it’s usually on that cuppa and slice of cake.

“There’s a reason the high street doesn’t offer a 24/7 service,” Sarah laughs, “it’s really inefficient. Everyone who comes here uses the loo, but not everyone spends money in here.”

High street shops don’t have to build a road to their door, for that matter. Tebay does – its new Gloucester operation is a £40 million investment, a huge chunk of which will be spent on building the motorway slip road.

Yet, despite the obvious Tebay touch, Sarah will bring to their new M5 site (including retail space for 130 suppliers from within 30 miles of the services) arcane legislation prevents them from making too much of a song and dance about it. The reason? The Government is adamant that service stations shouldn’t become destinations in their own right. Turn Tebay into an attraction and, it believes, the roads will become more congested and businesses located near the motorway will suffer.

It’s why Tebay can’t promote its picnic tables, its award-winning restaurant, the fact that it’s the best farmers’ shop for miles in any direction. The message? Don’t get too good. We’d hate for people to actively seek you out over the mundanity of Lancaster services. It’s why there’s restrictions on what they can and can’t sell (Tebay’s only allowed to sell its eye-popping range of Cumbrian beers and small batch gins because it doesn’t rent the site from the Highways Agency).

But there’s an inbuilt tension there, surely, we ask?

“It’s interesting,” Sarah says, pragmatically. “We can bring the national public to local foods in a way a farm shop can’t – we get all sorts of commuters and businesses who’ve built contacts they’d never make elsewhere. But we just have to rely on our customers to get the word out.”

And, of course, they do – even more so since the farm shops opened, north and southbound a decade ago – bringing more cheese than you could wave a Blacksticks blue at, jaunty ceramics, Tebay farm topside and trucker-sating steak and ale pies.

“I couldn’t be good at running a business I didn’t love, and I love food,” Sarah says. “What drives me is feeling enthused by what we sell. That there’s a point to it.”
The Beautiful South

Why Southern 11 is the real deal.

FOR SOUTHERN 11, James Hutchins, the vision was simple: to travel to the 11 states that make up the southern swathes of the USA, to immerse himself in the best region pit and barbecue cooking – and to come home with the bacon. Well, the baby back ribs. And the brisket. And the pulled pork. And the baby back ribs. And the brisket.

And he’s pulled it off. Fortunately for us – thanks to James – now the rest of us can travel to the deep south without ever leaving Spinningfields. Which is handy when your babysitter gets double time after 11.

Working side by side with Pit Bosses (the men who control the all-important fire/smoke) from Tennessee to Mississippi, James learned the ancient art of marinating, smoking and char-grilling from the very best. He’s shared that knowledge with his small band of smoking hot chefs, invested in a pair of gleaming Oklahoma wood burning ovens, and perfected a top-secret selection of homemade sauces and rubs, to create a menu every bit as authentic as a drive-by Tallassee smokehouse.

“We’ll use hickory, or fruit tree-woods, and smoke, say, brisket for up to 18 hours, after four or five hours of marinating,” says chef Lee Fannon. “After which, the most emerging – tender, moist, melt-in-the-mouth and with that reassuring crisp coating of caramelised marinade.”

“It’s a very simple, ancient technique,” Lee says, “but the flavours, and the texture, are second to none.” And those flavours, whether hand rubbed with herbs and spices, braised, drenched with apple juice or slathered with sauce, form the heart of Southern 11’s sunrooted exploration of the very best of southern-inspired cooking from chunky short ribs to succulent plates of baby back ribs, pulled pork to Cowboy Pie (slow-cooked brisket covered in a creamy potato and cheese topping).

“It’s the ultimate comfort food. Nothing tastes as good as good quality meat cooked using well honed techniques,” James says, “and we do it better than anyone.”

Well, he did learn from the experts.

Southern 11, 3 Hardman Street, Spinningfields M3 3EB.

www.southern11.co.uk

Photos: Bacononthebeech.com

SPONSORED

Photos: Bacononthebeech.com

IT ENHANCES. It preserves, it cures and transforms. The alchemy of wood, fire and food is one of man’s oldest cooking techniques – and yet, despite its latter day resurgence, we’re still in the dark when it comes to the magic that happens when smoke meets meat.

By increasing heat, yet lowering humidity, smoking has been used for millennia to dry out food and keep it edible through the winter. But, over the centuries, we’ve experimented with thousands of different plants, herbs, woods and coals, to create an arsenal of smoke-induced flavours and textures for no other reason than they make food taste great.

WHAT IS SMOKE?

Smoke is no ordinary substance. It’s a magical mix of three states of matter – a suspension of airborne solid and liquid particles and gases released after combustion.

The chemical compounds (known as pyrolysis. Cellulose and hemicellulose, when burnt, caramelise to produce sweet, flowerly, and fruity aromas. By breaking down lignin, smaller volatile molecules are produced the aromatics, with nutty clove, peat, vanilla, and spice flavours being imparted.

Other compounds act as preservatives, while phenol slows bacterial growth and stops fat from going rancid.

Capturing these new flavours and preserving is a complex balancing act – and the key to success is smoking.

To find the sweet spot, you’ll need to master airflow to control combustion. Flames indicate the temperature is too high. Lower your airflow and you’ll decrease the flame. If your fire’s not glowing, increase the airflow. It’s that simple. Sort of!

GET WOOD

Wood is the go-to plant for most smoking; it preserves, it cures and transforms. The alchemy of wood, fire and food is one of man’s oldest cooking techniques – and yet, despite its latter day resurgence, we’re still in the dark when it comes to the magic that happens when smoke meets meat.

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GET WOOD

Wood is the go-to plant for most of your fire-starting needs. And there’s no smoke without fire.

The substance is made of three core components: fibrous strands of cellulose (40 to 50%), the sugary-hemicellulose structures found in cell walls (15 to 25%) and the rigid woody polymer lignin (15 to 30%).

Fire releases the aromatic chemicals stored in these three substances by a process known as pyrolysis. Cellulose and hemicellulose, when burnt, caramelise to produce sweet, flowerly, and fruity aromas. By breaking down lignin, smaller volatile molecules are produced the aromatics, with nutty clove, peat, vanilla, and spice flavours being imparted.

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BARK

Outer bark, containing less of the sugary cellulose, results in a more metallic, bitter smoke the acids that protect the tree from the elements leave an acrid taste. Softer, inner barks burn to impart a mellow, balanced and peaty smoke flavour.

HARD OR SOFT?

Softwoods (conifers and evergreens, and elm and eucalyptus) have higher resin and volatiles. By preserving without cooking, cold smoking has traditionally resulted in that harsh, resinous smoke that will give your meat a nasty turpentine taste. So, for best results, plump for hard and fruit woods.

HOT SMOKING

By preserving without cooking, cold smoking has traditionally kept our larders stocked throughout winter, and helped ship smoked salmon across the globe. But it’s hot smoking, and its ability to produce deeper, stronger, more intense flavours that really sets our taste buds on fire.

But, for real smoke fans, it stops the surface of your food forming a crust, and helps absorption, for a stronger flavour. Consistency is key, too: the source material should be burned at around 120°C. Water evaporating from burning wood also heats up the smoking chamber to obtain a balanced smoke taste. Remember that with smoking, it’s all about low and slow.

As with any cooking technique, smoking needs to be precise – certain compounds produced in smoking can have negative health impacts, particularly polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), among which is the highly carcinogenic benzo(a)pyrene, otherwise known as B(a)P.

Recent analysis on smoked foods show high levels of PAHs in products from traditional kilns, where the combustion temperature is difficult to control. Modern, temperature-controlled kilns, indirect smoking, no open fires, and a reduced smoking time all combine to lessen the danger.

Fortunately, most of these recommendations produce a better-tasting smoke too.

WEEKENDER

Hot Chips

Take a day out to make the best slow-food ever. Bitten’s all-you-need-to-know guide to smoking with confidence. Illustrations by Sam Jones.

Photos: Bacononthebeech.com

Harvest your own firewood. How to Source Wood

To understand the magic that happens when smoke meets meat, it’s worth understanding the magic that happens when smoke meets wood.

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**WHEN TO SMOKING**

Traditionally, cheaper cuts of meat respond well to the slow, low, controlled method of indirect smoking (pulled pork being your classic). Cheaper, collagen-rich cuts are softened and tamed by the process, to something approaching melt-in-the-mouth adorable. Ribs, shoulder, hock, brisket, pork loin – these all make great smoking candidates. But do not underestimate smoking a prime cut indirectly first, then whacking it on the grill for a couple of minutes finishing over direct heat. Oh, and veggies too – peppers, sweetcorn and asparagus especially. Lip smackingly good results await.

**FIVE WOODS TO TRY**

**HECKORY** Sweet, bacon-y flavour, good with pork, ham and beef.

**OAK** Rich, deep vanilla, best for red meat, fish and heavy game.

**PECAN** Nutty, sweet, good with steaks, ribs, and cheese.

**MESQUITE** Strong, spicy, good with beef, fish, chicken, and game.

**MAPLE** Smoky, mellow, good with pork, poultry, cheese, and small game birds.

**MARY-ELLEN MCTAGUE’S COLD SMOOKED MACKEREL**

**METHOD**

1. Place the rack of mackerel. Lay the mackerel fillets skin side down on one of the wire racks and heat the oak chips in a pan until smoking hot, then set aside.
2. Prepare the smoking box. Place the pan of smoking chips in the bottom of the smoking box. Lay the mackerel fillets side down on one of the wire racks and heat the oak chips in a pan until smoking hot, then set aside.
3. Cover immediately and close the lid of the smoking box. Heat coals with a chimney starter and fill it with hot water. Heat coals with a chimney starter.
4. Place water pan in the bottom centre of the grill, on top of the charcoal grate, and fill with hot water. Heat coals with a chimney starter.
5. Leave the vent on the top of the grill wide open when there’s smoke escaping. Adjust the bottom vent to control airflow, which will impact the temperature.
6. Every thirty minutes for the next two hours, flip the ribs, and add more charcoal (iron burning) and wet wood chips to the baskets on both sides. After the fourth time you flip the ribs, which should be at the two hour mark, baste them with your favourite barbecue sauce.
7. After another 30 minutes, flip and baste them again. After the final 30 minutes, trim the skin off the ribs, if desired.
8. Leave the ribs to smoke for 45 minutes. Remove the mackerel and place in olive oil for a further 24hrs. Serve with rye bread, beetroot and a mustard cream sauce.

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**KETTLE BARBECUE SMOKER**

You can turn your KEGG BBQ into a smoker. Light your charcoal, and when it’s going, put some wood chips on it. They’ll generate the smoke. Place the thicker ends of your meat towards the charcoal. But never above it, always away to one side. Half fill metal trays (like the sort you get at take-aways) with water and place one alongside the coals beneath the meat, to help keep it moist, and one on the grill above the coals. You can water-soak the wood chips, but it’s not essential.

Keep the temperature to around 130°C. Lift the lid too much, and you’ll release all that lovely moisture. Invest in a remote probe, too.

A chimney starter, also called a charcoal chimney, is a handy device that is used to set either briquettes alight. Weber make great smoking devices that are used to set either briquettes alight. A chimney starter, also called a charcoal chimney, is a handy device that is used to set either briquettes alight. Weber make great smoking devices that are used to set either briquettes alight.

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bAckSTAGe, Harry Haralambous’ two city centre fried-food joints run like the boiler rooms of some mid-Atlantic steam packet: all glistening chrome, plumes of steam and brimming sumps of golden oil keep the good ship Lobster Pot on course for another voyage from Saturday night to Sunday morning.

The Haralambous family business was supplying fish to the fish and chip shops of Liverpool. “I suppose I picked up tips here and there as I did my rounds,” Harry explains, when Bitten asks why he swapped sides. “I suppose I thought I could do it better.” He started at the deep end – with a fish and chip stall at Liverpool’s Prescot Road fish market before heading into town, to open the first chippy on the block. “Some people have been coming for thirty years,” Harry says. “But we always know when the night shift’s nearly over, because Kenny will join the queue. You know it’s time for bed then.”

As the queue snakes out of the door of the original Lobbie, the banter and badinage of the best cabaret show in town hits its stride. Gaggles of hen parties refuel for the long walk home to the Travelodge, newly-acquainted best mates hug and wobble their way to the counter, a pair of skittish lads bump chests over the affections of a girl currently gnawing her way through a battered haggis, oblivious to their overtures.

“We were here before the first McDonald’s came to town,” Haralambous says, opening the 12th 56lb bag of spuds. With chips this good, they’ll be here long after Ronald throws in the towel.

A Night In
The Lobster Pot

Want to know where the hottest spot in Liverpool is, at 2am on a Sunday morning? Photographer Jane MacNeil spent a night in the best chippy in town. And a week trying to get rid of the smell.
Shooting from the hop

‘Fully loaded’ with 5 American hops

As featured in ‘1001 Beers You Must Try Before You Die’

Available - cask, 20ltr ‘one-way trip’ Petainer keg, 330ml can and bottle

IN CASE you haven’t noticed, it’s a very exciting time to be into beer. There are new breweries popping up everywhere producing great, traditional ales and some experimental brews which are pushing the boundaries of what we once thought of as lager, bitter, mild or stout – not to mention IPA, saison and wheat beer. As a beer lover I’ve worked in the bar and brewery trade for some years and have acquired a specialised knowledge of my preferred beverage. In these columns I’ll be introducing you to some of my favourites.

ALTHOUGH not Manchester’s newest brewery, Blackjack was set up in 2012 by Rob Hamilton, who was already well known within the Manchester beer scene having worked in and managed some of its finest pubs. Rob was part of the brew team at the Marisa brewery, producing some great talents within the brewing trade including Dominic Driscoll of Thornbridge and Colin Stronge at Buxton. When Marble decided to increase their brewing capacity and purchase a new brew kit, Rob saw his chance to become another one of those talents and put in an offer to buy the old kit and set up on his own.

Now just two years later his brewing great cask and keg ales which can be found regularly in pubs across the northwest and further afield. Rob produces a varied range of beers including the Fabulous Double Bluff which I recently enjoyed a few pints of in one of Manchester’s newest venues, The Botanist part of The New Fabulous Double Bluff which I recently enjoyed a few pints of in one of Manchester’s newest venues, The Botanist part of The New

THE BEER HEAD

A monthly celebration of our finest ales

Crafty Dan

Contact Sean Bate 07971 565461 or seanbate@thwaites.co.uk

IN ASSOCIATION WITH LIVING VENTURES

MY NAME is Warren McCoubrey and I’m Beer Guru at Living Ventures, choosing the beers for our different brands and passing on my passion to staff and customers. I’m in the lucky position to be trying new beers from breweries old and new on a regular basis and would like to share my findings with you in this page. I’ve worked in the bar trade for over 15 years – but the amber nectar business has never looked (or tasted) better.

MY FIRST choice is Cask on Liverpool Road in Manchester, and anyone who’s not visited this bar is missing out, it’s a real hidden gem. The vibrant blue façade with its lattice windows can easily be mistaken as a corner shop but take a step in and you’ll find a homely little pub with plethora of beers on offer. There are four cask ales available on hand pump which constantly change. On my last visit they were Junipa from Pittch Brewery Rochdale, Railway Porter from Five Points brewery Hackney, Abbey Ale from Abbeylea Sheffield and Union Ale from Summer Wine brewery Holmfirth. There is also a rotating guest keg which was Hop Island Red from Five Points Brewery on this occasion. alongside their regular keg offering which are not your everyday products, you can choose from a range including the Dutch pilsner Lindebosch, Bohemian lager, Budweiser Budvar and Budvar Dark, German Pilsner, Kronbacher and the superb Belgian, St Feuillian Saison. As if that wasn’t enough take a look in the fridges and you will find one of the most comprehensive bottle selections you can imagine. Although there’s not a menu as such just ask the bar staff for a recommendation as they are very friendly and show a good product knowledge.

Points Brewery on this occasion, alongside their regular keg offering which are not your everyday products, you can choose from a range including the Dutch pilsner Lindebosch, Bohemian lager, Budweiser Budvar and Budvar Dark, German Pilsner, Kronbacher and the superb Belgian, St Feuillian Saison. As if that wasn’t enough take a look in the fridges and you will find one of the most comprehensive bottle selections you can imagine. Although there’s not a menu as such just ask the bar staff for a recommendation as they are very friendly and show a good product knowledge.

I decided to pump for a bottle of Bavarian Lager in the form of Tegernseer Hell 4.9%, which is a perfect example of a Helles Lager with a doughy malt aroma and a full bodied mouth feel. The finish has a refreshing dry bitterness which is very satisfying, but you don’t have to take my word for it, just pop in and try it for yourself. Cask is open 7 days a week from 12:00pm – 11:00pm, and although no food is served, they will allow you to visit the Fish Hut next door on the condition you take your rubbish with you.

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Cask, 29 Liverpool Road, Manchester

facebook: blackjack brewery Manchester
www.blackjack-beers.com

THE BREWER OF THE MONTH

Bob producers a varied range of beers including...
cocks are back in fashion and finally being done with some style. We’re not talking about the disco fish bowl or the simple jug topped off with luridly coloured, and chemically flavoured alcopops.

Now with table service in bars and clubs becoming more popular, drinks made to share offer a sociable way to sip through your evening.

It all kicked off with the Tiki bars leading the way with the treasure chest served in Mahiki – a fruity mix of flavours topped off with a whole bottle of rum being chucked in, or at Liverpool’s Aloha – with its volcano-shaped (and aptly named) Zombie. We’ve seen this bubbling cauldron turn unsuspecting punters into the walking dead way too many times.

Dave Ray knows a thing or two about premium spirits, and the cocktails that make them sing. Working for one of North West England’s most successful restaurant and bar companies, Living Ventures, Dave always has to be at the top of his game – tasting and trailing the latest trends. It’s a tough job.

It’s becoming more common to see drinks coming out of copper kettles, vintage glass soda syphons and even boiled up in coffee makers (The Alchemist), shooter trees or towers (Elixir or Neighbourhood in Manchester), beautiful giant conch shells (Australasia), watering cans with plant pots as cups (Botanist) and teapots (Revolution de Cuba). Although all share dishes do tend to be slightly on the safe side flavour wise; let’s face it, they’ve got to keep lots of drinkers happy.

To catch up with demand in super-sized vessels, a fantastic company called bespoke barware (www.bespokebarware.com) are now making vessels to order and supplying a huge range of eye-popping designs.

An upcoming trend I’m noticing is bottled classic cocktails. If done well, pre-making a good classic such as a Negroni (Gin, Vermouth and Campari) or even a Manhattan (Whisky, Vermouth and Bitters) with the right dilution, bottling them and storing them chilled allows a speedy serve of a perfect drink.

This avoids the drink diluting with the ice melting if not consumed quick enough and saves you waiting on your next top up. The only restriction is they need to be straight up drinks so no fruit or citrus juice.

This can of course be done very effectively next time you’re entertaining friends, or even if you just have a favorite drink you make for yourself at home. I have a huge glass demijohn at home with around five litres of Negroni sitting in it. It even has a little tap on it to dispense. The only downside? It’s almost too convenient.

Sales Enquiries
signaturebrands@lwc-drinks.co.uk
0845 402 5125
www.oldjspicedrum.co.uk
www.facebook.com/oldjspicedrum
www.twitter.com/oldjspicedrum

“De-lish-us….really like it.”
Simon Rimmer – Resident Chef on Channel 4’s Sunday Brunch

“It’s Bloomin Lovely”
Dave Gorman – Stand up comedian

TOP BRAND LAUNCH 2012 as featured in the Morning Advertiser
Manchester and Liverpool have fallen for tequila in a big way. And, just as we’ve been educated in the small batch delights of gin, and the single cask wonders of whisky so Mexico’s finest is ready for its makeover.

Remember, sip – don’t shoot, says Charlie Hooson-Sykes.

Both Sides

Think of tequila and, chances are, you’re thinking of a ruthlessly efficient, salt-rimmed alcohol delivery system. Swift, wine-inducing and brutal. But not, especially enjoyable.

Now, a new breed of bar is encouraging us to savour tequila in the same way we would a single malt, and with good reason. Real tequila is as far removed from a grubby glass of Cuervo as Chihuahua is from Guadalajara.

Bitten caught up with two of the North West’s biggest tequila advocates – El Capo’s Peter Skelton (inset), and 81 Ltd’s Chris Edwards (main image).

Peter Skelton is the force behind El Capo, Manchester’s sole tequila bar. With over 70 tequilas in stock, El Capo’s the go-to place to start your journey of rediscovery. But first, a little homework.

Tequila, then. What is it?

Tequila is made from the agave plant which is indigenous to Mexico. There are lots of different types of agave, but the blue weber is the best.

Each plant can take up to eight years to grow. One of the most respected roles in Mexico belongs to the El Jimador who cultivates and cares for the plants, to get the maximum from them. They have to make sure that the centre of the pina doesn’t flower. If it flowers it’s game over, the plant will die. If they leave it too long or do it too early, there may not...
be enough carbohydrate for the optimum fermentation process.

How is the liquid extracted?

Once it’s grown, the spines are trimmed from the plant leaving the core or pina. This gets sent to an oven – traditionally a clay oven. The pinas are cooked slowly for a long period of time and when they come out the flesh has started to break down. They’re then shredded, and left for a few days to ferment, before the liquid is strained and distilled.

Most tequila is distilled twice. Some folk disagree on distilling it more than this as they feel you lose the characteristics of the agave. Once the second distillation has occurred this is effectively your blancos or silver tequila, which will often be rested for a small period of time (three months) before bottling. Or alternatively, it’s placed in barrels to age it longer.

Like a whisky?

Yes – a Reposado is aged for up a year, an Añejo is aged for the minimum of one year, but less than three years and Extra Añejo is aged for a minimum three years.

American white oak is the classic barrel used, but now producers are branching out into Canadian barrels, French cask people are mixing and even charring their own barrels. And then we drink it!

So, what is mezcal? And misto?

Misto, although the term isn’t used too much any more, is 51% agave, 49% whatever other sugar cane. So it’s effectively a bastardised tequila.

Tequilas can only be called tequila if it’s from Tequila, in the highlands of northwest Mexico. Mezcal is Mezcal can be from anywhere in Mexico, is produced on a smaller scale and to traditional methods. It tends to be produced for the love of the spirit – and the rules aren’t nearly as strict on production. Tequila is generally more mainstream, and produced on a larger scale. The history, the stories behind it, the slight difference in production and ageing is all part of the appeal of mezcal.

So why so many different kinds of tequila?

Each area brings its own flavour and characteristics, just like wine, cognac, whisky. For example Los Altos (the highlands) is a sweeter tequila, whereas the lowlands is more herbaceous and aromatic.

TOP 5 TEQUILAS

1. For a clean spirit that I can mix,
Herradura Blanco
Anette Reposado: It’s the only one from Tequila Exell
Hernesa Blanco: It’s clean, herbaceous, smooth. I absolutely adore it.
Don Julio 1942: Smooth, caramel, sweet, beautiful nectar.
Tapatio: A nice shooting tequila.

FAVOURITE COCKTAIL

Try a Paloma - more popular than a margarita over in Mexico.

50ml blanco tequila
25ml grapefruit juice
25ml fresh lime juice
17.5ml sugar syrup
25ml soda water
1 wedge lime

Method
Fill a tall glass with ice cubes. Pour tequila, grapefruit juice, lime juice and simple syrup into the glass. Using a jigger, measure 50ml Don Julio Blanco, Tequila 25ml grapefruit juice, 25ml fresh lime juice and 17.5ml simple syrup into the glass. Top with 25ml soda water. Garnish with a wedge of lime.

TOP 5 TEQUILAS YOU CAN BUY FOR YOURSELF

1. El Jimador – good cocktails, great margaritas.
2. Patron – a clean and upmarket tequila.
3. Herradura – any of them, beautiful, balanced flavours.
4. Jose Cuervo – but nothing lower than a traditionale, which is £7 a bottle.
5. Tapatio - nice, affordable, fresh. And the reposado is one of my drinks of choice.

TOP 5 TEQUILAS BARS IN THE NORTH

1. El Capo (Manchester)
2. El Bandito (Liverpool)
3. Lucha Libre (Manchester)
4. Patrón (Liverpool)
5. Lucha Libre (Liverpool)

TOP 5 TEQUILA COCKTAILS

1. Tommy’s Margarita
2. T.Y.T, (Tequila and Ting)
3. Smoky Sanchez - Mezcal Margarita
4. Tequila Old Fashioned
5. Shooting tequila with sanguita

GET THE basics right and the rest will follow. That’s the way of things for the team at Individual Restaurants – the good people who bring you The Restaurant Bar & Grill, Piccolino and Bar Restaurant & Bar. And the basics start at the source. IR’s Dinmore Manor Estate in North Herefordshire. Here, and 1800 acres of rich pastures and rolling farmland...

And the journey continues... when the cattle leave Dinmore, they leave with a passport and identification papers so the cattle can be traced back 100%. The meat is then hung for up to 35 days in IR’s state-of-the-art dry ageing room, before being prepared by their highly skilled in-house butchers. It’s this farm-to-table attention to detail that ensures every cut, every steak, every burger is the best it can possibly be. So, how do you like your beef?

May we suggest:

1. El Capo (Manchester)
2. El Bandito (Liverpool)
3. Lucha Libre (Manchester)
4. Patrón (Liverpool)
5. Lucha Libre (Liverpool)

And the basics start at the source. IR’s Dinmore Manor Estate in North Herefordshire. Here, and 1800 acres of rich pastures and rolling farmland. A working farm with a proud history, Dinmore is home to IR’s herd of British Limousin cattle managed under the watchful eye of head farmer, Paul Dawes...

The secret of good beef is happy and healthy cows. It’s that simple. Dawes tells Bitten.

COTE DE BOEUF: Dry aged for 35 days, this is a ribeye steak with its rib bone still attached. An extremely flavoursome cut as it comes from a well-used muscle, with plenty of delicious fat marbling through it.

USDA: This season, IR have teamed up with the finest producers of natural beef in the US to bring you 150 day corn fed 100% Aberdeen Angus ribeye steaks, 300g or 400g, handcut daily.

How do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow how do you like yours? Get in touch on Twitter @clubindividual and follow...
The best butcher’s in Britain? As the town rises and falls around it, New Ferry’s Edge and Son continues to outflank the rest. David Lloyd meets the Radio 4 award-winning crew. Photos: Chris Leah.

Dive deep behind the gleaming counters and trussed parcels of pink lamb shanks. Continue past refrigeration units so state-of-the-art bacteria back away in fear, past whitewashed rough stone walls and scrubbed steel worktops, where lines of young lads strip and flense, carve and cleave, and you see Edge and Son for what it really is. This is a butcher’s shop as complete, perfectly evolved living organism. Every anteroom has its function, every bolted-on extension a role to play in its meticulous, surgical and forensic theatre of operations. From out-back abattoir to bagged-up sausages is no more than a few metres. Food metres.

This is what happens when a family decides, as the South Sea Bubble rumbles on and Jonathan Swift sits down to write Gulliver’s Travels, to make butchery its business.

Callum Edge talks – as well he might – of the intense, full flavoured hit of his five week-dry aged beef (thanks to that Italian, bacteria-busting refrigeration). We’d say, just to make sure, it’s a good idea to add three hundred years. The deep time of centuries spent living and working alongside Herefords and Long Horns. The knife-wielding muscle memory passed, father to son, for seven generations. The Edge advantage that runs, like marbling in rib-eye, through everything in this shop. A shop that’s as much history lesson as Butchery’s future blueprint.

“It’s not the shop, it’s the cattle I remember first,” Edge says, packed tightly into a corner of his tiny office, while the nose-to-tail business of the day goes on around us. “I’d go to Beeston cattle market every Monday. I must have been about five. My dad would pick me up from school and I’d be mesmerised by the atmosphere, the buzz of it all.”

Those footsore early seventies Afternoons might have been Callum’s first steps – but, save for the odd incursion of dual carriageway and overflow estate – they etched out exactly the journey taken by his family for centuries, over fertile Cheshire plain, and on to the burgeoning trading towns strung out along the banks of Dee and Mersey.

“We’ve chased our family tree back at least seven generations, and we know we started trading in the village of Edge (a diminutive Cheshire parish) in 1720,” Callum says, reaching for a laminated print out, tracing a line back to a John Edge, smallholder, 1720, and on to his father, James Edge. We wonder: but we very much doubt, if the fella serving shrinkwrapped chops on Morrison’s ‘Market Street’ can present such a powerful provenance.

“We’ve unearthed county documents showing how he’d walk his stock from Edge through to New Ferry, and how he saw this was a place where he could build a home,” Callum says.

Another laminate is produced, of a humble timber framed farmhouse – wrapped in mature orchards – a property squarely on Callum’s wishlist when its current owner moves on. This is John Edge’s house – like the business he set in motion, still standing after three hundred years.

Time and tide have not been kind to New Ferry. Once, this straggling village sat at the edge of a royal hunting forest – a disembarkation point for kings, pilgrims and seafarers (even,
tucked up to a minstrel at his door. When Tesco and co sliced and diced the high street, and when we all took a bypass direct to their doors.

When all of this happened – while it is still happening – Callum continued. Continued on insisting his cattle travelled no more than 25 miles from farm to slaughter. Continued caring about husbandry and dignity and compassion before Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall got a book deal. Continued believing in the link between happy animals and healthy food.

“You know what commuter trains are like in the morning,” he says. “Bloody hell, it’s horrific! So why would we expect cattle and sheep, loaded into vehicles, travelling for miles on motorways at peak time, to benefit, in any way, from that kind of experience.”

It’s a very Edge way of looking at the world. A re-engineering of the food chain to allow space for the animal’s point of view. No one’s pretending this story’s gonna end well for them. But, as Callum says, compassion should be as essential a part of a butcher’s tool kit as a boning knife.

Edge does the morning run a little differently. It’s one of the reasons it’s twice won the RSPCA Good Business Award. One of the reasons why its meat tastes just so good.

“Most of our lambs are on the road for ten minutes, and we transport them early in the morning, when it’s nice and cool, the roads are empty, and they’re relaxed and unspooked.”

It’s something, no doubt, Callum’s forefathers just got – that stress and discomfort during lairage and movement of animals has a direct effect on meat quality. Now there’s actual hard science to back it up. The Journal of Animal Science, the Livestock Conservation Institute, and Abstracts from Veterinary Colleges from Maastricht to Liverpool all publishing variations on a theme: stressful pre-slaughter handling results in meat that’s darker and drier than normal, with a tough, closed texture, and a less pronounced taste. We all know this.

We’ve tasted it. “The best quality meat definitely comes from animals that are not stressed. The whole muscle is tense. That’s why it was common practice to give animals an electric shock before slaughter, which would tense and release the muscle. But is that the most humane way?”

Callum shifts uneasily in his chair, as if butcher’s bloody past sits on his shoulders alone. “I like to think we’ve come a bit further in life, that we’re beyond all that,” he says, but you get the feeling he’s letting hope win out over the benefit of experience.

“How do you get fantastic meat? You have to breed it, feed it, and slaughter it right. And then you’ve got to look after the meat well. Do it that way, and you embrace a lot of traditional ways and values.”

Traditional values Callum owes to that lifelong apprenticeship – set in train on those Beeston market mornings – with his father, who died two years ago.

“I had an amazingly close relationship with my father,” he says. “I miss him hugely. He was a very strong character, and we had some of the biggest arguments. We locked horns. But he gave me the benefit of experience.”

It was a brave move – Edge reasserting their commitment to their traditional roots on an arcade of video stores and charity shops – and long slow climb. New Ferry continued to crumble. Supermarkets refined their offer. Grewe smarter. Negotiated harder.

“In our situation it would have been easy to say we’re all doomed. But if I decide that Aldi is my competitor, I won’t beat that either. But if I decide that Watroese is my competitor, I won’t beat that either. So you look for your advantage. We say that super markets can’t compete due to their commercial demands and the margins they really need.

“We say they’re limited in their filtration system to ensure there’s astonishingly hi-tech – the ageing kit: “For a small butchers they’re unchartered territories the ‘fifth quarter’ has to offer.”

“This revolution is happening, and it’s fantastic,” Callum says. “You’ve got Aldi building a meat oven in his garden to smoke his meat. Two girls came in for a pigs head to make brawn. That was their weekend fun! You wouldn’t get that ten years ago.”

What turn our turbulent, faddy relationship with meat takes next it’s hard to imagine. But we’re fairly sure Edge and Son will have their knives out, ready.

Edge and Son
61 New Chester Rd, Wirral, www.traditionalmeat.com

There’s no bigger change than now. We’re much more educat ed with food. I remember saying to my father – what do I do when all our customers die? That was the way it was ten, twenty years ago.

Now we’re all hot-footing it back from France, demanding angling steaks, diving into Jamie’s latest collection and scouting for a bit of skirt. Staring, slack jawed at the unchartered ter ritories the ‘fifth quarter’ has to offer.”

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61 New Chester Rd, Wirral, www.traditionalmeat.com
“WATER, water, everywhere. Nor any drop to drink. But, lucky there’s loads of tasty stuff to eat in it. So let’s crack open a crab, and a bottle and tuck in. Anyone got any cider?”

Thud nearly spoke the Ancient Mariner of lore. Well he would have if he’d stopped buggerying about with alboreassness and checked out the coasts of the North West, which are absolutely swirling with a host of splendid shellfish. Our shrimps and Queenies mightn’t look so manly in a beach line up next to the pumped up king scallops and super-sized langoustines of the Hebrides, but they’re no slouch where it matters – in the flavour department. Compact little flavour bombs of oozey marine goodness, a little of these beauties goes a very long way.

MUSSELS

In years gone by nearly 100 fishermen were said to have fished for mussels on the Conwy river. The current Conwy Mussels crew dig rather than dredge, which they say leads to less damage of the shellfish. They don’t rope-grow, but harvest direct from naturally replenishing beds. Conwy Mussels sell their large and meaty seafood direct from their shop at the quay in Conwy as well as by mail order. The hand-picking of the cockles and meaty seafood direct from their shop at the quay in Conwy as well as at markets throughout the North West and as far away as Birmingham and Leeds during the season of 1 September to 30 April.

www.conwymussels.com

CRABS AND LOBSTERS

Selective Seafoods won the Seafood Taste and Talent award for the best seafood of the year at the Pebblebed Food Festival. Most pubs and seafood restaurants feature the sweet, delicate shellfish which is now under a Protected Designation of Origin and fully sustainable following a serious rethink of harvesting practices in 2011. Queenie season runs from June to October. Queenies are available by mail order from various providers including www.islandsseafood.co.uk and www.manxkippers.com – both of which also carry IoM’s other delicacy, the King Scallop.

www.selectiveseafoods.com

CONWAY MUSSELS’ MOULES MARINIÈRES

Finally chop garlic, onion and celery and add to a large pan or wok. Fry over a gentle heat for a couple of minutes until softening. Fry in a handful of dried white wine and add seafood. Stir everything together pop the lid on, turn up the heat, and let them steam for 4–6 minutes until the majority of the mussels have opened.

Share the mussels from a nice big bowl, remembering to pour over the delicious juices from the pan. Enjoy with a big chunk of crusty bread, frites and chilled white wine.

MUSSELS

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MANX QUEENIE

The Queen Scallop is well-loved over a the Isle Of Man and even has its own shrindg: the Queenie Festival. Most pubs and seafood restaurants feature the sweet, delicate shellfish which is now under a Protected Designation of Origin and fully sustainable following a serious rethink of harvesting practices in 2011. Queenie season runs from June to October. Queenies are available by mail order from various providers including www.islandsseafood.co.uk and www.manxkippers.com – both of which also carry IoM’s other delicacy, the King Scallop.

www.selectiveseafoods.com

MANX QUEENIES WITH BURY BLACK PUDDING

1 small fennel bulb, finely sliced (greenery set aside for garnish),
2 tablespoons olive oil
100g black pudding, cut into slices,
8 to 10 fresh scallops & corals on top of the butter, add the fresh scallops and corals to the pan once the butter is hot and frothy and stir for 2 to 3 minutes on both sides, or until just seared.
Arrange the fritata lettuce leaves on a plate along with a scallop shell if you have one. Spoon the warm fennel salad and serve it with warm bread rolls or slices of rye bread.
Recipe Karen Booth
www.lavenderandivory.com
**Veal: A Fresh Start**

Ask your butcher for melt-in-the-mouth rose veal, and try these easy-to-master recipes. Your new favourite meat? It’s entirely possible. Photos by Chris Leah. Recipes by Kate Parr.

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### VEAL ESCALOPE

8 pieces of veal shin bone, cross cut (approx 5cm long)  
1 tbsp good olive oil  

For the salad  
Large handful of fresh parsley  
Small red onion finely sliced  
Unwaxed lemon, zested and juiced (with lemony bits added)  

**Method**  
Preheat oven to 180°C, gas mark 6. Toss the veal bones in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side). Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### VEAL MARROW BONES WITH PARSLEY SALAD

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### PARSLEY SALAD

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### PARSLEY MARROW BONES

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### OSSOBUCO

**Method**  
Toss the veal pieces in the seasoned flour and shake off any excess. Heat half the oil in a large saucepan and pan fry the veal until browned all over. Remove the veal from the pan, save any crispy bits, then reheat the pan to remove any buried flour. Heat the remaining oil and gently sauté the onions, carrots and celery until tender, but not browned. Add white wine and reduce to a syrup. Add the remaining flour and cook for 1 minute. Gradually add the chicken stock, return the veal to the pan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and allow to simmer for 1½ to 2 hours, until the meat is tender and the sauce has thickened.

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### PICKLED ONIONS

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### PICKLED VEGETABLES

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### AUGUST PICCALILLI

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### SEPTEMBER'S PICKLE

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### AUTUMN PICCALILLI

**Method**  
Place each steak on a solid surface, cover with a piece of greaseproof paper, beat with a mallet or rolling pin until 1cm thick. Toss each steak in the seasoned flour, then the egg, and finally the breadcrumbs. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large frying pan and gently fry each steak on both sides until cooked through (about four minutes a side).

Serve with baby new potatoes and green salad or tender vegetables. You may have to cook the steaks in batches – simply keep them warm until needed.

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### VEAL MARROW BONES WITH PARSLEY SALAD

*Veal: A Fresh Start*
How To Feed A CAGE FIGHTER

Want to know how to lose almost ten percent of your body weight overnight? It takes blood, sweat and tears...

HE’S earned a World Submission Record for his fearless take-downs of the world’s most not MMA fighters (his triangle choke is a particular favourite of Bitter’s), but for Liverpool’s Paul Sass, there is a tougher challenge than any three-round world championship contest:

Making weight. Every fighter knows of the particular, sweet agonies involved in that last minute scramble to shed the pounds,ORED their bodies, and hit their fighting weight target for the weigh in. For Sass, who fights at 70kg (154lb) that usually means losing a stone (7kg) in a day. And, to do that, it’s back to a week or so...

“For a couple of weeks before the weigh in, I take in about two gallons of water a day,” Sass explains. “I literally carry a jug of water everywhere with me.” This increased water intake triggers hormones in the body to excrete more urine than usual. The response will be essential in losing fluid the day before the weigh in. “Two days before my weigh in, I’ll cut my fluids, and for the last day I won’t have any at all. I know I’m at 79kg on the Wednesday. I can be at 78kg at Friday’s weigh in.”

“I sweat it out. Throw a suit on, track lines for 20 minutes, then have a hot bath for ten minutes, get out, put towels all over me. I’ll do that six times. And if I don’t cut, neither too, so I’ll have no energy at all.”

Sounds grim.

“IT’S all about getting a size advantage. The bigger you are, the harder you hit. The bigger you are, the more you can make the opponent. If you know how to hit, and want to hit, you’ll have the upper hand.”

Which is, er, handy, when you’re fighting one-handed. “I won my last match with one arm. I’d torn all the ligaments in the other one, and ripped my bicep muscle. I’d torn all the ligaments in the other one, and ripped my bicep arm. I’d torn all the ligaments in the other one, and ripped my bicep arm. I’d torn all the ligaments in the other one, and ripped my bicep arm. It’s all about getting a size advantage.”

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With weigh-ins usually a day or two before a fight, the race is then on to pile all that weight lost beforehand back on.

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Bringing a sense of place back to Prestwich, Aumbry is a love letter to the very best made-in-Manchester produce. David Lloyd meets chef-patron Mary-Ellen McTague.

MARY-ELLEN McTague is excited. The Cornish sardines are back, and word is they’re fantastic. “There’s so much flavour in those tiny fish,” she beams. “I can’t wait to taste them.”

As we talk, she’s reworking menus that shift and mutate as swiftly – and unpredictably – as the Manchester weather. Tomorrow, a school of the silvery darlings will be heading Prestwich-way, to be teamed with not-yet-picked local produce – highlight of another perfectly composed tasting menu.

Chef-patron of Prestwich’s Aumbry restaurant (together with husband Laurence Tottingham), McTague might have big plans for the future – a book here, another restaurant there, a third somewhere else – but when it comes to food, her focus is ruthlessly in the present tense. “My menus are completely driven by produce,” she says. “I’ll speak to my Manchester vegetable growers, they’ll tell me what’s good and they’ll pick it to order. I’ll build my meals around that. It also means there’s very little wastage.”

It’s a philosophy that infuses Aumbry with its unmistakable sense of time and place. Spend an evening in its intimate dining room and, such is the total immersion in local and seasonal, you get the feeling that, months later, forensics experts could swab your shoes and pinpoint what night you ate there. Aumbry’s that good.

But it’s also a philosophy deeply connected to McTague’s East Lancs roots (she was born in the village of Greenmount, tucked into the folds between Ramsbottom and Bury). “I’m from a big Irish Catholic family,” she laughs, “I was one of six kids. You needed sharp elbows to fight your way to the table.”

Sharp elbows or, as McTague confesses, sharp tactics: “Mum would put piles of food in middle of table, and when her back was turned we’d spot what we fancied, pick it up and lick it. Marking our territory, if you like.”

And the food – hearty stews, roasts and salads piled high with allotment-grown veg – was well worth staking a claim for. Not that the young McTague appreciated it all. “I was weird about food when I was younger. Mostly, I ate chips, cheese and chocolate. I don’t think I touched green veg til I was 18…”

Everything changed when, as a languages student at Manchester Uni, McTague took a part time job at Manchester’s fabled Roadhouse, and was given the daunting task of whipping up meals for the venue’s touring bands. “I took it to better than I ever thought I would,” she recalls. “I’d be making up exotic curries, or macrobiotic meals for Californian indie bands, and I took it all in my stride. There’s something in me that’s fascinated by the way things are put together. That could be languages, but it could equally be ingredients. That sense of curiosity will always find an outlet.”

The Eureka moment appeared soon afterwards. Conveniently enough, it was in a bath. “I was lying there, having a good soak, knowing I had an enormous essay to write, and thought that’s it. No more. I’m giving up Uni to be a chef.”

Feverish letter writing ensued. Not, as you might have thought, to Frankie and Benny’s or the local Chef & Brewer, but to Heston Blumenthal’s Fat Duck, Sharrow...
Bay in the Lake District and a host of other Michelin-toting restaurants.

“I was only 20. I suppose I was a bit headstrong.” Sharrow Bay said yes, and the baptism of fire commenced.

“It was terrifying,” McTague laughs. “I cried every night for months. It was such a blokey place. For six months the two head chefs wouldn’t even speak to me. If they wanted me to do something, the message would get passed on through other people.”

But McTague persisted.

“I was so hopeless for such a long time, but after 18 months I came out a chef. And I bloody loved it. I loved the physicality of it, the scrubbing of the stoves, the 70 hour weeks, all of it!”

What happened in that year and a half galvanised McTague; turned the bath-soaking dreamer into a regimented, super-sharp, methodical master of the service. And spells in the US and, later, at Blumenthal’s Fat Duck encouraged the young chef to pursue her passion for tracing our food’s history. Chasing it back through the centuries. Unearthing skills we’ve lost along the way.

“I worked with food historians at Hampton Court Palace, had access to ancient manuscripts, old cookbooks. It was an incredible experience,” she says.

It’s clear that much of Aumbry’s surefooted success can be traced back to McTague’s premier-league apprenticeships (Heston’s wide-eyed joy of juxtaposition especially), but perhaps even more important is McTague’s passion for place, and her determination to create a space where she could go upstream to the source. To be part of a continuum of tradition, rather than a parachuted-in primadonna.

“To me, where you grow up gives your cooking an accent every bit as identifiable as your voice. It’s inescapable,” she says.

Some things don’t change. The hours are still as gruelling (although, with a team around her, McTague claws back some time to spend with her young family), and the curiosity is as vital a driving force as ever.

“I’ve recently discovered running,” she admits. “It’s a brilliant way to have a proper think. It’s when I get my very best ideas.”

And will these ideas – winning her plaudits, Restaurant of the Year awards, regular columns in the Guardian, and spots on the Great British Menu – attract the attention of the men and women from Michelin? We think it’s only a matter of time.

“Look at my face,” she smiles, “do I look bothered? Oh, OK, I’m a bit bothered. But I’ve stopped thinking about it. I just do what I think is right. The minute you start to try and cook for them, it takes all the joy out of it. Running a restaurant is always a knife-edged existence. You’ve got so many responsibilities. Firstly, not to poison anyone.”

Thank God for those sardines. They should keep McTague happy for a few days. Pretty soon, though, we think she’ll have bigger fish to fry.

www.aumbryrestaurant.co.uk
Manchester’s store house of made-here magic, Lissom & Muster.

Make and Do

Scottish cashmere shaped by our unique geography and climate. Scottish cashmere is a vestige of a faded past, beloved only by tourists. Products – boots, bags and leather goods – are part of a disposable culture that values consumption over longevity. One can be tempted in by a window of high street brands here. No ‘this season’s must have’ instead the shop is full of crafted items that reflect the manufacturing strengths we have retained. But mention to John Rogers, owner of Lissom & Muster, that what his shop is full of crafted items that reflect the manufacturing strengths we have retained. But mention to John Rogers that what his shop sells is heritage or craft items of a bygone era and he’ll visibly bristle. “Well yes,” replies John enthusiastically. “We’re interested in products that people will have a long relationship with. Boots that they’ll want to have repaired when the soles wear down, a coat that is their favourite to wear, year after year. Things that people have been proud to make. By and large contemporary garments are part of a disposable culture that values consumption over craftsmanship and longevity. But we’re working on a new product with a small company just up the road who make bespoke gear for polar explorers and Everest ascensionists. It’s serious high-tech stuff if it’s the best then it’s good enough for us.”

The reason that we in the North of England can lay claim to a proud history of expert manufacture of textiles is partly down to the legacy of the Industrial Revolution. As the North became a powerhouse of industry skilled workers from all over Britain and indeed the world flocked to our cities and towns to provide for their families using their skills in service of King Cotton – tailors, embroiders, weavers and many other disciplines. What emerged from this outward looking, melting pot of talents was a looking, melting pot of talents was an immensely curious world.

People tend to stumble across Lissom & Muster. It is rather key, as perhaps it should be. They are tempted in by a window of beautiful hand-finished clothing and other carefully chosen products – boots, bags and leather goods, Welsh blankets and handmade shoe brushes – and discover an immaculately curated world. No high street brands here. No ‘this season’s must have’. Instead the shop is full of crafted items that reflect the manufacturing strengths we have retained. But mention to John Rogers that what his shop sells is heritage or craft items of a bygone era and he’ll visibly bristle. “Yes the products are part of our heritage,” he’ll concede. “But heritage for its own sake is of no interest to me. What we source and have made to stock in the shop are the very best products we can find - refined over many years to do the best job they can in the environment they’ve made for.”

“Heritage”, to John, isn’t an aesthetic or a style choice – it’s about generations of accumulated knowledge, skill and innovation.

Britain is an island nation of moorland and woodland, hills and valleys. Good leather boots, Shetland knitwear, wool cloth and waxed canvas drew on locally available raw materials and have suited the needs of people who live and work in our landscape for centuries. The skills we have retained in making these products are testament to their continued relevance alongside contemporary materials such as Gore-Tex – which, of course was borne out of the same innovative British textiles tradition. So what of the contemporary fabrics? Is there room for Gore-Tex or Primaloft on the rails in the kind of shops like Lissom & Muster?

“Heritage” – tailors, embroiders, weavers and many other disciplines. What emerged from this outward looking, melting pot of talents was something unique and localised. Of course tweed, to pick just one example, existed before the 1750s but it was only with the innovations that came with the Industrial Revolution that we gained the ability to manufacture and volume produce such specialist textiles. The same goes for the Goodyear Welted shoe – still the benchmark of quality over a century on.

But these are products made possible by a factory system. “It’s industry, not olde worlde handicraft,” says John. But ours – a factory system characterised by engaged skill and experience, rather than automated large-scale mass production.

Because of this, it is disingenuous to see heritage in terms of the romantic image of a craftsman hunched over his

Richard Hector-Jones talks collaboration and craft with Manchester’s store house of made-here magic, Lissom & Muster.
workbench. “Manchester was never about that,” says John. “It was never about looking back. You could write a whole book about the things that were invented here. Our tradition is about people using their expertise to do things in new and better ways.” Be romantic by all means, but get it right.

One of the most startling things you notice once you begin to explore heritage without rose-tinted spectacles is that these old geographically located skills are still in vogue contrary to what many laypeople will tell you. For example – cotton – to the surprise of many – is still manufactured in Oldham and of a remarkable quality and still manufactured in Oldham and in Pembrokeshire, finished in Galashiels and waterproof bonded to a cotton lining in Oldham. Our saddle leather or leather from Northern Irish Hereford Cross hides that are pit-tanned in Derbyshire. We apply the same theory to all our raw materials and attempt to source them from the British Isles. “I’m personally interested in Britain’s manufacturing heritage. My father was a shoemaker working for the same company for 43 years. His father and grandfather were arts and crafts-era carpenters working in Corston around the turn of last century, when John Ruskin lived there. He visited them regularly when working from Brantwood. That’s an unproven family story that they made his coffin. Tailors and seamstresses have a wonderful family tree.”

One of the many philosophies that inform businesses such as Lissom & Muster and Cherchbi is the satisfaction of having a connection with the people that make things. “It’s a connection and a relationship, rather than a transaction,” says John.

Aesthetics of fading and refinement

One of the companies that Lissom & Muster has a close relationship with – they collaborate on a number of products such as holdalls and belts – is Cherchbi. They are part of an unofficial network of like-minded in this area of expertise. Cherchbi’s roots are in Kendal though its headquarters are now in London. Like Lissom & Muster the ‘form follows function’ philosophy is at the heart of the business that makes bags and leather goods. Cherchbi is a regular in magazines such as GQ Esquire, Conde Nast Traveller. Its bags and leather goods are second to none and again borne of a British manufacturing tradition that is deep-rooted and time-honoured, rather than nostalgic; just informed by timeless materials and the very best manufacturing traditions. They work closely with manufacturers to ensure their products are repairable by skilled hands. Artistry borne of industrial knowledge and heritage is even more sustainable than the high street. It’s a philosophy that holds the high street shops in an anaconda. “In Britain we are brilliant at spinning yarn, making knitwear, footwear, socks, leather goods, weaving cloth and so on,” says John. “And these are all things that work really well for us in our climate and landscape. So let’s continue to look at these exceptional raw ingredients and talents we have and create beautiful, functional products with them.”

How authenticity and heritage really means to John – it’s the continual refinement, development and application of centuries of accumulated knowledge and skill. “It’s nothing to do with dressing like Ernest Shackleton or unimaginatively regurgitating some old thing we did 100 years ago.”
Merry berry Bellinis  
Cranberry relish  
candied chestnuts  
honey roasted  
Lakeland turkey  
pumpkin and squash  
Wirral wood pigeon  
Victorian plum pudding  
pomegranate pavlova  
Wirral wood pigeon  
Victorian plum pudding  
Honey roasted  
Lakeland turkey  
pumpkin and squash  
pomegranate pavlova  
Wirral wood pigeon  
dark chocolate

Just some of the reasons The London Carriage Works loves Christmas

Menus from £26.50 for two courses

THE LONDON CARRIAGE WORKS
40 Hope St, Liverpool, L1 9DA
(0151) 705 2222  www.thelondoncarriageworks.co.uk

WE ALL know a joke about drummers. They’re the ones who hang around music shops. But have you heard the one about Paul Weller’s drummer? He’s the type who doesn’t think twice about giving away his earnings every month. One per cent of his earnings, to be precise.

Scouser Steve Pilgrim is the tub thumper in question and the ex- The Stands and Cast man brought his famous boss to Liverpool for a one-off charity gig at East Village Arts Club this summer.

The charity? Be One Percent - founded by the modfather’s Scouse drummer, Paul Weller - and the one it raised over £50,000 to help the world’s poorest people. People in Malawi, Haiti, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nepal, Liberia and Zambia.

Paul Weller arrived in Liverpool for a one-off charity gig at East Village Arts Club this summer. The charity? Be One Percent - founded by the modfather’s Scouse drummer, Steve Pilgrim. Alan O’Hare helped him set the kit up. Photos: Mark McNulty
Summer in the northwestern edge of the British Isles is a time for beach barbecues and evenings that stretch on forever. A Spell on Tiree

I was told.

for its landed-in-Tiree produce. though the Co is, it’s not known

capital, Scaranish. But, lifeline

of cottages claiming to be Tiree’s

whitewashed Co-op, in the cluster

the Hebridean seas and we’d not

on a green raft in the heart of

for a beach barbecue I realised –

across the land like a Tsunami.

Sea and sky are everything

I did. I crossed the reef – the

“Go to the garage at Crossapol,”

operations). The following night they

here. But they couldn’t have been

parish, Newfoundland.

island seemed to hold its breath.

sapphire phosphorescence. The

around £80 return.

to Tiree (about forty minutes), for

CalMac ferries operate the route

www.calmac.co.uk

four hours), price for car plus two

from Oban to Tiree (takes about

CalMac operate flights from Glasgow

£150 return. FlyBe operate flights from Glasgow

to Tiree (about sixty minutes), for

£150 return. www.flybe.com

For accreditation, visit www.skhifreem.com/accreditation

TRAVEL

A Spell on Tiree

SUMMER TRAVEL

WHAT?

No kebab? There’s more, much more, to street food, Istanbul-style than a greasy donor. But, yeah, there’s that too. Snack shops or burets, and stall vendors add spice to every street. From the savoury bırek pastries to the meaty köfte lamb’n’herby balls, every street has its speciality. It’s go-to food-on-the-go spot. Head to Eminönü, the markets of Kızılsu and Ayvansaray. Fatsi (for a real kebab fix) and, of course, the waterfront, that_Avi-metsa_Europe nexus where, taste-wise, anything can happen.

LAHMACUN

A round, roughly pizza-esque base topped with mince and herbs, stuffed with vegetables. Roll it up and eat it like a burrito for the ultimate mobile energy-delivery system. Some vendors slap oozes of beyaz peynir (a mild, white cheese) on top that’s a bit gilding the lily for our tastes. Try Hali Lahmacun and Borsam Taş Fırın in Karaköy and Frıck Kebap in Arnavutköy.

SIMIT

You’ll smell these moreish, sesame seed encrusted bagels before you see the stalls. They’re dipped in molasses, and showered in crunchy sesame seeds. Simple. Delicious. Istanbul is full of tiny bakeries specialising in the made-for-breakfast buns. Try Cıtır in the Karaköy neighbourhood. It’s all they do. And they do it better than most.

POĞAÇA

Plump, flaky, savoury pastries, Poğaça are best enjoyed when they’re stuffed with cheese (payır). But you can get meat-stuffed (koyun) or olive-stuffed (zeytinyağlı). They make a great, budget breakfast. Try Istoç Şahin Börek & Ekmek, silver No.139 Mahmutbey Bagıcal, Istanbul 3.

NOT FOR THE SQUEAMISH, KOKOREŞ

Not for the squeamish, kokoreç is actually spiced and skinned sheep intestines, spit roasted and served in a pita bread, with garlic, maybe a little salad, and plenty of grease. It is, as you can imagine, the go-to hangover cure for the morning after the night before. The Şamyon Köşk, across the city – is your best bet.

DÜRÜM

A flatbread wrap, stuffed with whatever takes your fancy – chicken, beef, cheese or char-grilled peppers and courgettes. Durums are the ultimate in simple, filling take-away food. They’re a kebab in a sandwich, really. Which is every bit as good as that sounds. Try Bam Brita or Kızılkayalar in Taksim Square at any hour of the day.

BÖREK

Fresh, street-served bırek usually comes with cheese (and occasionally caramelised onions) between layers of doughy bread, and sits somewhere between a cheese pastry and chewy garlic bread. Try Piyabahane Caddesi 45/5 in Sultanahmet, or Alp Kebap, 135, Tophane, a crispy outer pastry shell, with crumbly walnuts, is wrapped around a syrupy apricot interior. It’s wrong, but it’s so right.
Gushing rivers, guano and gaping chasms – Northwich-born photographer Robbie Shone goes to great depths to illuminate the magic and mystery beneath our feet.

ON HIS third day beneath the ground, Robbie Shone swung from a rope, no wider than a Sharpie, that descended 70 metres into uncharted territory. He was at the edge of the known world – chasing it deep into shadows that receded 200 metres beneath him.

Shone was in the Mulu National Park (or, more correctly, he was entombed half a kilometre below it and heading down into a parallel world – a meta world of sensory overload among whimsical, dreamlike grottoes of Sarawak). The return abseil to basecamp was part of the process. When you draw the map as you go, it’s a yo-yo existence of inching forward and doubling back. For every connecting shaft, a dead-end; every boulder-blocked passageway a vaulting, cathedral-sized cavity.

As part of a British expedition intent on mapping the space inside Borneo’s Sarawak Chamber, Shone was there to illumine – for the rest of us – the places where no light had ever fallen. Shone was tracing out a parallel world of yawning caverns arcing in emptiness below the steamy rainforests of Sarawak.

“Every bit of light required has to be carried in by hand and this can mean dragging bags for days and days to the ends of the earth just for one shot,” he says. “But when the flashbulbs crackle into life revealing the beauty of the space you’re in, every hard won metre is repaid a thousand times.”

With a volume of 11 million cubic metres, Sarawak Chamber is currently the world’s largest enclosed space: think four O2 arenas, and then some. But it’s merely a nucleus in a labyrinth of looping passageways that force their way between fault lines, and burrow through the bedrock.
Shone and his team were inching further and deeper than any expedition had previously ventured. With the weight of the world on their shoulders, they were expanding our knowledge of the place we call home.

Heavy rain had swollen the rivers that disappeared into the fissures and sinkholes above, to emerge in roaring cataracts and white water rapids that foamed and settled over pinnacle-studded river beds.

“The floor, or at least the ground that I was walking on, was a maze of gigantic boulders, some the size of houses,” Shone recalls. “These mega obstacles made it very difficult to cross and the noise was so ferocious communication was impossible.”

It was, in other words, business as usual for the Northwich-born photographer; and the culmination of a journey that began in the hollows and caverns far closer to home.

The snaking systems of the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales

“I was studying art at Sheffield Uni and wanted something to do at the weekend,” he says, “something to inspire my painting.”

“A friend from Formby said I should go caving, so we headed off to the Yorkshire Dales and, that day, my life changed. It’s that simple.”

They’d scrambled down Long Churn, part of the famous Aire Pot system in the limestone of the Dales, on a wild caving expedition. En route they’d abseiled down waterfalls, swum through subterranean lakes and squeezed through apertures so tight they took his breadth away.

“I was blown away by the fact that we were in a completely black space,” he says. “But when you shine a light in there you could see this amazing world, so different from the one we’d left behind.”

The artist in him soon realised that painting made caves didn’t really work (“they’re not the easiest places to take as a canvas into”). So, the next Monday, Shone visited the University’s photography lecturer and borrowed some kit. He was to become a cave photographer.

“I was bitten by the bug,” he says. “It was intense and also incredibly immediate.”

In parallel with his immersion in the underworld Shone was learning the particular – and peculiar – art of capturing the blackest places on (or in) earth.

“It was all film back then. I’d go into the lab and spend a day processing a film, to find only one had good image. It’s so easy now,” he says. “Fifteen years ago, you couldn’t see the image on the camera when you took it. You’d have 16 shots per reel of film, and the kit was so heavy.”

But he was never - from day one – afflicted by even the slightest sense of agoraphobia.

“I was happy with moving through a cave. It wasn’t second nature. Boulders would move. I’d drop my tripod into a rushing river and that was it – game over.”

His fortunes turned when, working as part of a digging project in 2006, Shone dug through to a 146 meter shaft. Taller than the London Eye, Derbyshire’s Titan was the deepest cavern in the UK – and Shone was the first photographer on the scene. It was, almost too literally, the breakthrough he’d been looking for.

Since then, he’s documented expeditions in France, China, Thailand and – this month – the high altitude ice caves of Uzbekistan (in off seasons, Shone initially kept his skills sharp by abseiling down office blocks to clean windows: the equal and opposite real-world jobs many cavers take on to pay for their airfare). On the way, he became a regular team member for some of Brian’s best-respected cave explorers.

He’s discovered over 20 kilometres of totally new systems, prehistoric bacteria alive inside stalactites and ancient human burial grounds.

And he’s learnt to make darkness his ally rather than his enemy.

“Mulu has the largest chamber, possibly the largest cave by volume, and one of the largest passages in the world. But Papua New Guinea’s caves taught me more than anything. I’d no idea how dangerous water was until then. Working in river caves is intense, dangerous and, yes, thrilling.”

Gruelling too.

“Mulu was a day’s caving to get to the expedition’s starting point – and that’s after you’ve trekked through the forest, and rafted down rivers, pushing all your equipment. You set up remote camp, then go off to uncharted cave passages for another 18 hours or so.

“You’re not restricted to the end of the day. As long as your body can stand being awake you carry on. During that trip I had a leech stuck to my eyeball for a couple of days. We tried caving it off with some raw meat and salt.”

Negotiating slime-covered scree, swimming against the raging torrents. Shone and his team were battling on all fronts. Their headlamps, essential for pointing the way forward, were also attracting the flood which fed on the half-a-kome of bat guano deposited in the caves every day, only to find their way down the gasping throats of the explorers, making the team retch and convulse their way forward.

“That’s not much fun, but that’s part of the deal. You’re in the privileged position of being the first humans to ever see these amazing places. There are really only the deepest caves, and the deepest oceans left to explore. Deep underground always beats above, wouldn’t you wonder?” Shone pauses.

“Well, a blazing sunrise is nice,” he pondered. “But everyone seems keen. Swin' something beautiful for the first time in the Earth’s history? You can’t beat that.”

Like a latter day Theseus, Shone pushes on into the darkness. Forces the labyrinth to grudgingly give up its secrets.

And when he gets back, we’ll all see.

Fancy the thought of getting down and dirty yourself? There are plenty of opportunities to give caving a try. Do as Robbie did, and start your subterranean explorations close to home, before heading further afield to the huge cave systems of the French Alps.

YORKSHIRE

Ingleton’s most dramatic caverns can be explored in a newly opened series of underground tours – Clapham Adventure’s caving tours guide you through the passages of Cellar Gallery, over pools, under arches and through to the Giant’s Hall. No previous experience necessary – but a fresh change of clothes afterwards will be.

www.claphamadventure.co.uk/ingleborough-cave-trip/

DERBYSHIRE

Derbyshire’s Peak District caving systems offer plenty of opportunities for taster sessions.

The Peak-Speedwell system, with its 14km of passageways, is home to the biggest underground cavity (Titan) discovered by Robbie and his team Derbyshire’s Steep & Deep offer a range of caving and potholing possibilities, exploring a variety of cave passages under expert instruction. From horizontal crawling to vertical abseils for the more adventurous.

www.steep-deep.co.uk

FRANCE

The Devil’s Maso is riddled with so many caves it’s virtually hollow – the limestone ridge is the base for Undiscovered Alps’ 600 underground playground. Rushing rivers, vast lakes and tight passageways make for some seriously exhilarating expeditions. You can even climb in ice caves and walk through the heart of an underground glacier. You can book caving as part of a regular holiday or they can organise a week of pure caving fun.

www.undiscoveredalps.com
50 butchers you have to try

We've scoured North West England and North Wales for the butchers that are, simply a cut above, here in our cut out and keep directory. Research: Paul Riley

Cheshire

Burtenshaw's Butchers

153 Railway Street, Nether Alsop, DERBY

Family-run shop focusing on traditional cuts, award-winning pies, sausages and sausages and sausages. A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

Cloverfield Meats

64 65 and 66 Neville Street, Manchester M2 1AQ

A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

Braga's Delicatessen

124 The Square, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester

Second generation butchers whose range of traditional products is second to none. A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

The Hollies Farm Shop

Tarpoleyn Road, Little Budworth, Tarporley CW3 6ES

We love to see a farm shop and butcher's shop with a sustainability focus. Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

Muncaster Farm Shop

Unit 14, The Arcades, Warrington WA4 6BT

Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

Cumbria

Gill's Family Butchers

156 Main Street, Kirkby Lonsdale LA6 8DN

A wet-market style butchery which offers a wide range of meat products. Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

Acorn Farm

123 Sandham Hall Road, Windermere LA11 7EH

Organic Free Range Egg and Dairy farm. Great service, lovely staff and – a dead certainty – you won't find better cuts of meat. Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

Cumbria's Best Beef

19 High Street, Consett, County Durham

Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

The Butcher's Shop

389 Pensby Road, Wirral CH61 9PR

Small butchers that have built a local reputation for quality food, value for money, and a quirky clean and welcoming shop.

Steadman Butchers

2 Frikside Street, Sedbergh, Cumbria LA10 5DH

As well as winning 2000 North of England Best Butcher, these guys, who specialize in pork, offer something truly spectacular. A bird, in a bird; in a bird, in a bird. A bird. Eight birds in one, interleaved with rosemary and cranberry stuffing. That sounds like a serious meat feast.

Blundells Butchers

30 Old Chester Road, New Ferry, Wirral CH62 1AB

You and Your Best Food Retailer of the Year in the BBC Food Awards, and winning Farmer Awards, Edges & Soul and Slimming World's Best Butcher. They offer a wide range of meat products. Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

Cumbria's Finest Butcher

11 Lord Street, Kirkby Lonsdale LA6 8DN

Small butchers that have built a local reputation for quality food, value for money, and a quirky clean and welcoming shop.

The Livermore Butchers

25 Lodge Lane, L19 3DG

A supermarket with a difference, this once-abandoned Kirk Save has been taken over by the most welcoming man in town. A wide range of meat products. Award-winning produce such as grass-fed and free-range meats, and eggs.

Seeds Quality Meats

599-603 Burnley Road, Burnley BB2 1TA

Family-run shop focusing on traditional cuts, award-winning pies, sausages and sausages and sausages. A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

Krukowski's Butchers

13 Ball Street, Poulton-le-Fylde, FY6 2B7

Family-run shop focusing on traditional cuts, award-winning pies, sausages and sausages and sausages. A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

Good Earth Butchers

220 Dickson Road, Blackpool FY1 2JS

Starting off as a small shop in 1986, this family-run shop focuses on traditional cuts, award-winning pies, sausages and sausages and sausages. A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

The Butcher's Shop

153 Railway Street, Nether Alsop, Derby, S33 6AN

Family-run shop focusing on traditional cuts, award-winning pies, sausages and sausages and sausages. A very clean, welcoming and family-friendly place. They cater to all needs, including vegan and gluten-free options.

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What happens when Cerys Matthews takes control of the music...and the food?

WANT TO cram cigar rolling, cakes and continent-spanning music into one giddy headrush of a day? And want extra portions of Cerys Matthews? Has anyone ever told you you’re a little bit needy?

This month sees the inaugural Good Life Food Fest, in the badlands of Hawarden, Clwyd. A dawn-to-dusk celebration of good times, great food and grin-inducing music, it’s curated by Cerys, and features Tom Herbert of The Fabulous Baker Brothers cooking on a campfire, classes with Australian restaurateur Bill Granger, sausage-making courses and a massive tent full of craft beers.

We caught up with Cerys about the rise and rise of food and music fests.

“I’ve been to too many festivals to mention,” she tells Bitten, “and one major shortcoming is the food. So, in starting the Good Life, the aim was clear – great, fresh food at a decent price (we’re keeping it to £7 a meal), and all of the food being locally sourced.”

“What are you most looking forward to?”

“I guess it’s the chance to have a go at things that I wouldn’t come into contact with. Well, without a lot of Googling on specialist websites! Top of the list has to be axe throwing…”

Hurling skull-splitting instruments aside, Cerys has rounded up an impressively eclectic roster of folky barnstormers.

“Paprika are the best live band I’ve seen all year,” she says. “CC Smugglers the best get up and dance band, Georgia Ruth the most interesting artist working around the folk genre, and the Bulgarian Choir will make a sound that is both unworldly and beautiful…”

The Good Life Hawarden Estate 20 September thegoodlifefestival.co.uk

GUITY PLEASURE? I can’t find any guilt in eating any food. It’s a basic pleasure to be enjoyed.

WHAT’S YOUR SIGNATURE DISH? It has to be paella: the fresher the seafood, the subtler the saffron and the keener the bite on the fresh chilli, the better.

BEST FESTIVAL FOOD EXPERIENCE? I really enjoyed the Madras Cafe at WOMAD. It’s staffed by volunteer cooks and servers (www.actionvillageindia.org.uk/madrascafe).

RECIPE - SLAVISHLY FOLLOW, OR GO OFF-PITSE? Make it up as you go.

FAVOURITE WORLD CUISINE? Japanese.

FOOD YOU’VE NEVER GOT? The craving for greasy food, can’t understand why that’s having a moment these days.

MEAL YOU’LL NEVER FORGET? My first experience of creative cooking with vegan foods at Real Food Daily, La Cienega, Los Angeles.

CONJURE US UP A CERYS COCKTAIL. It has to be gin based. Gin!

LAST MEAL? A BBQ. That’s when I’m happiest. Food is best when it’s served simply – a la plancha or cooked on a lovely open fire.
In our business anyone can suffer a personal or financial crisis. That’s why Hospitality Action is always there to help. So please show your support and become a member for just £25 per year. Your membership can make a real difference. To find out more, simply call us on 020 3004 5500 or visit our website www.hospitalityaction.org.uk You look after others, we look after you.

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