

FOSH FOODS

BY DONNA DAILEY AND MIKE GERRARD

It's 10 P.M. in Palma, on the Spanish island of Mallorca, and a furious argument has broken out over a sausage.

We are at a cooking demonstration, and it looks to be turning into an international incident. A tall young businessman, face flushed and tie askew, is jabbing his finger at the English chef and shouting in Catalan. His blond companion nods vigorously, backing him up with a “*Si, si, si!*” At the end of the counter a middle-aged woman chimes in, high pitched and rapid-fire, frantically waving a sheet of paper to get the chef's attention. Passers-by on the street begin peering in the open front door. It's warm outside, and getting hotter inside too.

The chef in question, Marc Fosh, turns to us bewildered English speakers. His eyes twinkling with mischief, Marc confesses, “I'm winding them up a bit.”

“This is *sobrasada*,” he explains, holding forth the object of so much passion, a red lump of cold sausage. “It's typical Mallorquin sausage and the islanders love it. You'll see kids on the beach with *sobrasada* and tomato sandwiches. But it's full of fat and all the parts of the pig you don't even want to think about eating. I've just told them that, and as you can see, they're defending it.”

Whatever the dubious merits of *sobrasada*, they're not bad enough to stop Fosh adding a pinch of it to the pork dish we're cooking this evening. After all, this is a class on modern Mallorquin cuisine, and Fosh's specialty is transforming traditional foods into culinary masterpieces. His skill has made him the first British chef to win a Michelin star in Spain, for his restaurant at the luxurious Read's Hotel and Spa, out in the rolling, green, Mallorquin countryside. Today Mallorca is a Mediterranean culinary hotspot, and has seven of the prestigious stars.

Fosh Foods is Marc's newest venture, a gourmet food shop which is also an eating and meeting place that's somewhere between a delicatessen, a coffee bar and a small casual restaurant. Several evenings a week it becomes a cookery school, and tonight, twelve of us sit around the counter at the open kitchen. Marc's business partner, Canadian chef Robert Bragagnolo, greets us in typical Spanish fashion: “Would you like a glass of red, white or Cava?” We opt for the Spanish sparkling wine and Robert hands us some in two magical glasses: the kind that miraculously refill when you're



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not looking. Behind the scenes Robert's wife and sister attend to the customers (the shop stays open late), clear the dishes away, do the washing up and keep wine and water glasses filled.

Later in the week we will attend Robert's demonstration on cooking with seafood and shellfish, but tonight's guest chef is Marcos Morey, head chef at another classy Palma restaurant, Ses Aubergines. It's his first time at Fosh Foods, and Marc is giving him a helping hand. We students are a mix of locals, visitors and foreigners living on Mallorca, where there is a big international community. Marc himself arrived back earlier in the day from Moscow, where he's a restaurant consultant.

We have assumed that during the class we will only be given bite-sized samples of the meals being prepared, and so have indulged ourselves with a late lunch at Es Baluard, one of Palma's oldest and best-respected restaurants. There we feasted on their seasonal tasting menu, which included local specialities such as baked cod and suckling pig cooked with honey.

We finished our lunch at the suitably late Spanish time of 5 P.M., and at 8 P.M. present ourselves at Fosh Foods, where we quickly discover that Marc and Marcos are going to prepare a full plate of every dish for everyone. All twelve of us will get, in addition to the demonstration, a four-course meal prepared by two top chefs, all the wine we can drink, and all for the equivalent of about \$40 per person. It must be the best dining bargain on Mallorca. And you don't even need to leave a tip.

In fact the tips come the other way, thick and fast, as Marc and Marcos talk us through the dishes, in both Spanish and English. First course is red mullet in a black olive crust, served with a pomegranate syrup. Our ears prick up. We have inherited a pomegranate tree at our new house in Arizona, and have been wondering what to do with all the fruit.

The syrup is simple but incredibly tasty, as are most of the evening's dishes. They have to be simple, to be able to do them twelve times over in the space of just over two hours.

"Cut the pomegranate in half," Marc tells us, "and whack each half on the back with a rolling pin and the seeds all fall out." Thus are the subtle secrets of the gourmet chef revealed: whacking things with rolling pins.

Marcos shows us the equally simple black olive crust, mixing pitted black olives and bread in a blender, dropping in a little salt and gently pouring in olive oil till he's happy with the consistency. The red mullets are covered with the mixture, and put in the oven for just three or four minutes.

"Make sure the fish is under- rather than over-cooked," Marc advises. "Mullet is one of those fish that can easily dry out. You can also use sea bream or tuna—tuna makes it easier because you don't need to fillet it."

Marcos has boiled some potatoes, which he cuts in half and mixes with olive oil, salt, pepper and chopped parsley. He places two half-potatoes on each plate, balances the mullet carefully on top of them, adds a few arugula leaves and an artful splash of pomegranate syrup, and the dish looks simple but superb. As the dishes are handed out, ladies first, we switch from Cava to the house white, and decide that learning to cook has never been such fun.

Next dish is another local fish, *llampuga*, with eggplant stuffed with three kinds of mushroom and served with a sweet and sour fig sauce. The eggplants are small and white, with delicate purple streaks. The figs are luscious and juicy. They scoop the fig pulp out, add some balsamic vinegar, salt and pepper and mix it all up thoroughly. The result is an almost instant and delicious sauce.

"I want to contrast the salt of the egg-

plant with the sweet of the figs," Marcos says, and Marc agrees: "And we're trying to get a sweet and sour thing going with the figs and the vinegar as well. Figs are only in season for about six weeks of the year, so instead of using figs you could try dried apricots. Put them in a food processor with a bit of sherry vinegar. I think every dish should have a little bit of everything that the tongue can pick up, so if a dish is just sweet it becomes very boring after one or two mouthfuls because all you've got is that sweetness in your mouth. But if you pick it up with something acidic, your taste buds are jerking back into life."

"Some of us like to combine unusual ingredients and it does startle people sometimes. I've got a chocolate dish with salt—just a little *fleur de sel* on the top, it's not a salty chocolate dish. I tasted it when we first did it without salt and it was fine, but it just needed something to pick it up and the salt really gave it an edge for me. Nine times out of ten people love the dish but occasionally you get someone who says 'it's not for me,' and that's fine, it's only natural. For me it's all about contrasts—sweet and sour, hot and cold, rough and smooth, all on the same plate."

While we sample the *llampuga*, Marc and Marcos start the next dish. It's pork loin cooked Mallorquin style with a touch of *sobrasada*, pine nuts, raisins, mushrooms and sweet paprika, served with a purée of sweet potato and almonds.

Thankfully, Marc survives the ensuing great *sobrasada* debate, as the next morning we have a rare treat, which is part of the Gourmet Palma package we've booked. We get to go shopping with Marc himself in Palma's old Santa Catalina market.

"It's important for me to go 'round the markets," Marc says as we have a coffee with him back at Fosh Foods at 10 A.M. the next morning. "I have to know what's coming into season, what's past



GETTING THERE

From the UK, try easyJet to Mallorca www.easyjet.com. Fly to your European destination of choice from home and then zip around on these inter European flights.

GOURMET TOURS

The Palma Gastro Tour is exclusive to Balearic Discovery, a Mallorquin-based tour. Prices start at \$600 per person double occupancy and include three night's accommodation with breakfast, airport taxi transfers, two cooking demonstrations at Fosh Foods, the market tour, dinner at Read's, transport to and from Read's and a walking tour of Palma. www.balearicdiscovery.com.





its best, what the prices are. And it's a chance to meet other chefs. You can get a bit isolated in a kitchen."

The market stalls are wonderfully colorful and buzzing with life. Spanish hams hang from ceilings and cheeses spread across counters. The vegetable stalls are like painters' palettes of vivid hues.

"The most important part of any recipe," Marc tells us, "is the shopping beforehand. The ingredients are paramount. We don't cover everything in sauces, so the actual ingredients are vital. It's all on show and you can see everything as well as taste it, so you are so reliant on your basic produce. If it's not good then you're in big, big trouble."

"Look at that skate. See how healthy that skin looks, like it's just come out of the water. Skate is a fish that deteriorates very quickly; you have to use it the same day. And look at the eye on that one," Marc says, his fervor for the food instantly apparent. "With a fish, the eyes say everything. Look at that eye. It's just looking at me and saying this fish is lovely and fresh. Tomorrow that will be slightly more sunken, it won't be so bright. So that's a beautiful-looking John Dory."

We get a crash course in shopping for food, and why it's important to pay more for the best produce. "It's all about good ingredients. I don't have access to anything the ordinary person can't buy,

apart from a few specialist things that we get from the market in Paris. But apart from a few things, I source everything on the island, and a lot from this market especially. So anyone can come here and buy what I buy. It's what you do with it afterwards that makes the difference."

"The meat's not so good today, so I won't be doing much meat tonight. Apart from that suckling pig, it's not very inspiring."

Marc, however, is totally inspiring, as we have already seen at his cooking demonstration, and as we're about to find out again when we dine at Read's, also part of our package. Marc Fosh has turned Read's into the best restaurant on Mallorca, and has had a Michelin star since 2002. The restaurant is an elegant, high-ceilinged room, with murals on the wall, and we dine beneath the arches.

And what a meal: a smoked eel salad with passion fruit oil; foie gras with orange, beet jelly and cacao dust; roast duck with eucalyptus and pineapple; and, yes, a chocolate and olive oil truffle with just a sprinkle of salt on top. Your mouth zings with surprise, and we both love it. It's one of the best meals we've ever had in our lives.

Marc comes out afterwards and says: "How was it? Edible?" "It would have been better with some sobrasada," I reply. "Out!" he said, pointing to the door and laughing.

RED SNAPPER WITH SWEET AND SOUR FIG SAUCE

SERVES 4

Marc Fosh makes this dish with a local species called llampuga; you can use sea bass or red snapper. This dish is normally made with a combination of three local wild mushrooms.

- 3 small eggplants
- Maldon sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 3¹/₂ tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for frying fish and drizzling eggplants
- 1 cup wild fresh mushrooms, chopped
- ¹/₄ cup chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 3¹/₂ tablespoons white wine
- Scant 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- Pinch chopped parsley
- 4 sea bass or red snapper fillets, about 5 ounces each
- Pulp of 4 figs
- 1¹/₂ tablespoons balsamic vinegar

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Cut eggplants in half and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Drizzle with olive oil, wrap in aluminum foil and bake until tender, about 35 minutes. Leave oven on.
3. Remove eggplants and unwrap. When cool enough to handle, scoop out flesh, chop and set aside in a bowl. Reserve hollowed-out eggplant skins.
4. Heat a medium skillet over medium high heat. Add 2 tablespoons. Add mushrooms



and sauté 10 minutes, until browned. Remove from skillet and set aside.

5. Add remainder of olive oil to skillet. Add onion and garlic and cook over medium heat until soft. Add chopped eggplant, mushrooms, white wine and season with salt and pepper.

6. Add cream and chopped parsley and stir to combine. Fill eggplant halves and keep warm until ready to serve.

7. Season fish fillets with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large ovenproof skillet. When oil is very hot, add fish, skin side down, and sear for 2 minutes. Turn over and sear other side. Finish cooking in pan, or, if fish is very thick, transfer fish to oven to finish cooking.

8. While fish cooks, prepare fig sauce. Combine fig pulp and vinegar in a small bowl, adjusting amount of vinegar to taste. Season with salt and pepper and mix well.

9. To serve, place stuffed eggplant half in center of a plate and place fish fillet on top. Pour 3 tablespoons of fig sauce around eggplants and serve.

FILLET OF SEA BASS WITH ANCHOVY PARMENTIER AND PARSLEY-LICORICE SAUCE

SERVES 8

For Parmentier:

- 2 cups fish stock
- 3 large potatoes, peeled and diced
- 3 salted anchovies, washed
- Juice of half a lemon
- White pepper

For sauce:

- 2 cups fish stock
- 1 bunch of parsley, leaves only
- 1/2 teaspoon licorice paste or extract
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into chunks
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

For tomato sauce:

- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 cups seeded and chopped tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon tomato paste
- 1/2 Spanish onion, chopped

- 3 1/2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

For fish

- 8 fillets of sea bass, 5 to 6 ounces each
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

1. Make Parmentier. Combine fish stock, potatoes, anchovies and lemon juice in a medium saucepan. Bring to a gentle boil and cook until potatoes are tender. Transfer to a blender or food processor and purée. Force mixture through a food mill or fine-mesh sieve and season with white pepper. Set aside and keep warm.

2. Make parsley-licorice sauce. Bring fish stock to a boil in a medium saucepan. Remove from heat and add parsley. Transfer to a blender or food processor and purée. Stir in licorice paste and then force mixture through a food mill or fine-mesh sieve. Using a hand held blender, whisk in butter to make a froth and season with salt and pepper. Set aside and keep warm.

3. Make tomato sauce. Heat olive oil over medium heat in a heavy-bottomed frying pan and add onions, sauté for 1 minute. Add garlic cloves, chopped tomatoes and tomato paste and cook another 2 to 3 minutes. Add sherry vinegar, brown sugar and fresh thyme and bay leaf. Cook slowly until all liquid has evaporated, about 20 minutes. Remove bay leaf. Season with salt and pepper.

4. Preheat oven to 350°F.

5. Heat olive oil in a large oven-safe skillet. Add fish fillets, skin side down, and cook until golden brown and crisp. Turn over and place in oven to finish cooking, 1 to 2 minutes.

6. To serve, place 2 tablespoons of anchovy Parmentier in center of soup bowl. Sit sea bass on top and place a spoonful of tomato fondue over fish. Spoon warm parsley-licorice sauce around Parmentier and serve.

RED MULLET WITH AN OLIVE CRUST AND POMEGRANATE SYRUP

SERVES 4

You can also use mahi mahi, mackerel, or any other oily fish.

For potatoes

- 2 Yukon gold potatoes, peeled
- Splash olive oil
- Maldon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch chopped parsley

For olive paste

- 1 3/4 ounces kalamata olives
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 3 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

For pomegranate sauce

- Seeds of 2 pomegranates
- Scant cup sugar

For garnish

- Handful arugula leaves

For fish

- 4 fillets red mullet, spines removed

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.

2. Boil potatoes until cooked and cut in half. Mix olive oil, salt, pepper and chopped parsley. Set aside.

3. Remove pits from olives. Transfer to a blender along with breadcrumbs, a pinch salt and olive oil. Blend until smooth.

4. Place pomegranate seeds in a medium saucepan with sugar. Cook over medium-high heat until syrupy. Strain juice and reserve.

5. In a small bowl, toss arugula leaves with olive oil and salt.

6. Season fish with salt and pepper. Place on a greased or parchment-paper lined baking sheet and cover surface with black olive paste. Transfer to oven and cook until done, 3 to 4 minutes depending on thickness of fish.

7. To serve, place 1 potato half in center of each plate of a plate, topped by 1 fish fillet and a few dressed arugula leaves. Surround fish with 3 tablespoons pomegranate syrup and serve.