



February & March

All the fruit is dripping off the trees; summer is here in its full pregnant bounty, with peaches, nectarines and blackberries. In the day I wave goodbye to the gardenias and their heady perfume and at night I bury my face in figs. I love summer.

There's something so lovely about lunch, especially if I am hungry and I have done a hard morning's work; it's a welcome chance to stop, breathe and reflect. At Manna from Heaven we stop every day for lunch, usually cooked by Kelly, Lorna or Jay. We might have Lorna's lentils and rice and her ridiculously garlicky cabbage salad; Jay might make us a stir-fry or Kelly can do a pasta or get everything together for toasted sandwiches and a big salad. The important thing is we all come together. I love to be with everybody, and with the different mixture of nationalities, religions and skills coming together around a big table, the conversation is often heated and certainly animated.

At Christmas it was my turn to cook lunch for everybody in the kitchen. We all met in the rotunda at Petersham Park after Olive and I had been up for hours preparing all the food. Debbie had helped me the day before, too. We had crusty sliced baguettes topped with Tetsuya's trout and avocado, herbs and capers for the vegetarians among us (Amy and Jackie loved the avocado). I cooked a big Provençal tian of zucchini and tomatoes, just like the one I'd made for the Elizabeth David lunch at Accoutrement earlier in the year. I made a kind of Salade Niçoise with tuna marinated in verjuice, herbs and anchovies. I butterflied lamb and cooked it with olives, preserved lemons and oregano. There was sweet potato baked with cumin and coriander, French beans and a couscous salad with almonds. For pudding I made an apricot and frangipani tart and I bought some nougat and Hershey bars of 'cookies and cream'. We washed this down with some rosé wine — perfect with all the garlic. It was lovely to stop and say thank you to everybody at that busy crazy Christmas time.

I have continually looked for opportunities to visit Glebe Point Diner since I first went to dinner there six months ago. I have had lunch with some of my best friends, I have had lunch for business, I have lunched with my daughter as she played her new Nintendo DS and I read the papers and we both enjoyed the food, and the last time it was with my step-mum, Jane. (She was en route to New Zealand and I was happy to show her my new favourite restaurant.) So when it came to taking our office staff out for a meal, Glebe Point Diner was the obvious choice.

The Diner has the essence of Sean's Panorama lurking in some of the staff (some worked there), and by dilution this comes out in the food, which is good because Sean Moran is one of my favourite Sydney chefs. His food always begins with the ingredients and from that inspiration a menu is created. The food at the Diner is simple, well cooked and presented in a very uncluttered manner; you can choose from about five entrees and five mains and don't forget to leave space for dessert. These are very good: in fact, on my last visit, the strawberry granita with blackberry ripple ice-cream was a triumph — the iciness of the strawberry contrasts beautifully with the creaminess of the ice-cream. (Do try my plum sorbet recipe: in this summer heat it's the time for icy cold things.)

With Jane, I shared a delicious green fig salad with shaved parmesan and fennel — just perfect. They make their own chips (and their own bread and butter): a rare treat in Sydney. Every time I have been there is Camden organic chook on the menu, but that visit I found it hard to go past a duck salad with cherries; the salad cuts through the fat and skin of the duck perfectly. All the food is popped without adornment onto the plates so that the ingredients really jump out and I just want to eat. Olive had stuffed roasted squid with gremolata and tomato, and a tall thin glass of lemonade. When I asked her what she thought of the restaurant, she said she was having a déjà vu — surely a very good sign. I wonder how many times I can do lunch here in 2008?



Tom Ford Perfumes

Tom Ford did wonderful things in his designs for Gucci; I coveted his eighties reincarnations and lusted after one of his watches. He has now moved his handsomeness (he sports designer stubble and wears immaculate suits, well) and talent to the cosmetic world with a range of twelve fragrances; the one that I am in love with is 'Oud Wood', a heady, sexy mix that unfolds as you smell it — rather like a fine wine. The perfume is wood, vanilla, amber and cardamom and it goes perfectly with my star anise ice-cream (see recipe).

Penelope Guseford



MANNA FROM HEAVEN
HANDMADE IN AUSTRALIA