



A DISH OF RED PRAWNS

GOURMET DINING IS AN
INTRINSIC PART OF THE
SUPERYACHT EXPERIENCE,
WITH MANY A CRUISING
ITINERARY INFLUENCED BY
GASTRONOMIC PREFERENCE.
CELEBRATED BRITISH CHEF
**HESTON
BLUMENTHAL**
REFLECTS ON FOOD, PLACE,
MEMORY AND HIS OWN
YACHTING EXPERIENCES.

BY CARRIE WORRALL

Heston Blumenthal's star is on the rise in the world of fine cuisine. A familiar television presenter and author of numerous books, he was awarded an OBE by Her Majesty the Queen in 2006 for his services to British gastronomy. His first restaurant, the Fat Duck at Bray, is one of the most celebrated eateries in the world: three Michelin stars in 2004; Best Restaurant in the World in 2005; Good Food Guide 10/10 and Best Restaurant in Britain from 2008-2011. He now also has a London venue, Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, at the Mandarin Oriental, Hyde Park. "It has been a bit hectic," reflects the chef, after a long day of filming for his latest TV series.

HESTON'S FAMOUS 'SOUNDS OF THE SEA' FOLLOWED: A SEAFOOD DISH SERVED WITH HEADPHONES PLAYING THE SOUND OF WAVES LAPPING ON THE SHORE.



“I HAVE SEEN PEOPLE IN TEARS WITH THAT DISH, AS IT TOOK THEM BACK TO SOMEWHERE SPECIAL,” HE RECALLS. “I’VE SEEN A TABLE ARGUING OVER WHERE THEY WERE: ONE WAS IN MAINE, ANOTHER IN CORNWALL, A THIRD IN SICILY.”



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BEING ON HOLIDAY, BEING ON THE SEA, HEIGHTENS YOUR SENSES - YOU ARE MORE AWARE OF SOUNDS AND SMELLS, YOU TASTE THINGS DIFFERENTLY, TIME IS DIFFERENT.

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I HATED GOING TO BUY MEAT IN ST TROPEZ AND DISCOVERING THAT THE ONLY BEEF THEY HAD WAS IRISH. IRISH BEEF IS EXCELLENT, BUT I WANT SOMETHING LOCAL.



With such a resumé, it is fair to say that Heston Blumenthal knows something about food. But his success is based not on classical haute cuisine, but on what has been called culinary alchemy, a scientific approach to understanding the links between taste and mood, between the senses and our experience.

“Smell and taste are the biggest triggers of memory,” says Heston. “I can show you a photograph of a seaside town, but it’s specific to that location. If you catch a scent, or hear a sound, or taste something that has associations for you personally, it’s a much more intense experience.”

A while ago, Heston joined researchers at Oxford University conducting a number of experiments into the experience of eating. “We don’t just eat with our eyes,” he says. “If you record the crunch of a potato crisp, and play it back louder as someone eating a crisp, they think the crisp is crispier! The sound of the crunch improves the taste.”

Nowhere is the link between food and mood clearer than on board a yacht, where the emphasis is on physical relaxation and sensory pleasure. “As soon as you step on board, your shoulders drop, the tension goes,” says Heston. “A yachting holiday is a great way to relax. I love eating out under the stars - it’s the sense of freedom. I have to get my fix of watersports or running before lunchtime, so I can indulge without guilt.”

“Most things taste better when you eat them where they come from,” reflects Heston. “I was cruising in the Balearics and

there are these fantastic Spanish red prawns (you find them off the Ligurian Coast, too). Cook them for a minute at most and they are unbelievable. The best bit is the head: suck out the juices and you get this rich, sweet, nutty, fantastic, roasted-crab-shell flavour. For me, that red prawn, with a glass of sherry, is the taste of the Mediterranean.”

Home or away, Heston is passionate about local specialities. “If you are in Turkey, or Italy or Greece, why would you not eat what belongs there? Seek out local ingredients, especially seafood because it is so varied from place to place. You just have to wander around the fish markets to see that. The best in the world are Tsukiji, in Tokyo, and Sydney, Australia, but wherever I am, I love going to the local markets to see what’s there.”

Heston is always curious about the things people eat that you can’t find at home. So has he ever tasted a dish he didn’t like? “Oh yes, in Iceland: skata. It’s putrefied skate, basically they leave it to rot until it is really smelly. I tried - I put it in my mouth, but my instinct was just to spit it out again. The ammonia smell was so powerful it went against every instinct to swallow it.”

With the possible exception of Iceland, then, Heston’s philosophy is to eat the food that belongs to the place you find yourself in, and wash it down with the wine, beer or spirit that is locally produced.

“If you are cruising, you must also go ashore and taste what really great chefs are doing in the best restaurants. They will be sourcing as much as possible locally. They will know their producers, the farms and dairies, they’ll have their foragers: it’s exactly what we do at the Fat Duck.”

Heston Blumenthal has come a long way since devouring fish paste and white bread sandwiches on a Cornish beach with a sprinkling of sand (one of his earliest food/holiday memories). But when he says that Naples, for him, is “picking the juiciest San Marzano tomato in the hot sunshine at the foot of Vesuvius” you know what he means. Taste and memory are very close together in the mind.

“A dish of red prawns with a glass of Spanish sherry is all it takes to be back on board in an instant.”