

# CRITICS' CHOICE

Ever wondered what it's like to be a restaurant critic? Dan Keeling joins Giles Coren and Marina O'Loughlin on the quest for the ultimate London meal

Photos by Elena Heatherwick



(Right) Giles Coren & Marina O'Loughlin, Rules, Covent Garden 5th January 2017

“**S**top calling me Marina!” Marina O’Loughlin administers a sharp kick to the shins by way of an accent. *Noble Rot* may pride itself on being an organ of discretion, but it’s difficult to continually keep reminding yourself that one of your dining companions is British journalism’s answer to the Scarlet Pimpernel. However, try we must, because at significant risk to Marina’s anonymity as *The Guardian*’s restaurant critic, we’re sat around the marble dining counter of Soho’s stylish Bocca di Lupo with the totally conspicuous Giles Coren (her opposite number at *The Times*), the first stop of a six-course lunch intended to represent the ultimate London meal. “Marina, I’d like to know what you gain by being anonymous,” demands Coren, O’Loughlin’s razor-witted co-conspirator. “Well, I get the shitty service and the...” Marina begins. “No, what do you *gain*?” Coren cuts her short. “It’s the same reason Greg Wallace is employed on *MasterChef*; because he’s everyman. You’re making something that’s wanky and elitist accessible,” Marina explains, “though I can’t believe I’ve been put in a position to bring out the gurning greengrocer card”.

“If I wasn’t your friend and didn’t admire you,” retorts Coren, “I’d say something similar to what I said about [famous anonymous New York restaurant critic] Ruth Reichl. She’d write a review saying (adopting a hammy tone), ‘I was Marianne, and wore this jacket and this hat, and I realised I had *become Marianne*’. You think, you ... !” “She did write the most pompous book I’ve ever read about restaurants, *Garlic and Sapphires*,” O’Loughlin laughs. “There’s an earlier one called *Fuck Me with Apples*, or something, which is even worse,” says Coren.

The idea that it’s outdated to review restaurants anonymously in these days of informal dining is one Giles seems keen to explore (“I only started reviewing restaurants so they’d be extra nice to me.”). But first we need to button down what words like ‘best’ and ‘favourite’ mean in the context of putting together an ultimate London meal. Giles: “As a critic it is important that I have no ‘favourites’ as it will upset too many people who I don’t include.” Marina: “But wouldn’t a teeny bit of friendly competition be fun?”

Finally we agree to choose three brilliant platefuls from three different restaurants – a starter, main course and dessert – that can fit together as part of a delicious lunch. Whether or not there is a competitive element between their choices remains to be seen, but considering they’ve been picked by two of the UK’s most eloquent, opinionated and unflinchingly truthful restaurant critics there’s a chance that might happen. (Spoiler: of course it does.)



Midday

Bocca di Lupo, 12 Archer St, Soho,  
London W1D 7BB  
www.boccadilupo.com

## Marina’s Starter

### Orecchiette di grano arso con cime di rapa

Served with 2015 Masseria Li Veli, Verdeca, Valle d’Itria, Puglia

When Marina wrote about her ‘50 favourite UK restaurants’ in 2015, chef Jacob Kenedy’s joyful Italian odyssey Bocca di Lupo made it to a very respectable number six. Having had a very public Twitter spat about Italian food (distilled – Giles: ‘Italian food is a bit rubbish’; Marina: ‘don’t be a numpty’; Giles: “\*%&@\*”), Marina kicks off with what appears to be a contentious choice. Until it transpires that Giles actually went to school with Jacob.

**Marina O’Loughlin** (taking a photo of the dish): I love orecchiette made with grano arso. After the harvest the farmers used to torch the stubble in the fields and then gather up all the burnt bits of grain because it was all they could afford, but now they burn it on purpose.

**Giles Coren**: You’re taking photographs of your food, even today?

**MO**: Yes, but for my own benefit. That’s all there is in

my phone: pictures of food, no children, no husband. What do you think Giles, absolutely delicious? And that olive oil is glorious.

**GC**: It’s too small. I’m starving. I could eat vast amounts of it. All this Nigella stuff like, “I went into this room, you couldn’t even see it was a restaurant because it had no sign, and a beautiful naked maiden walked into the ruins of an old abbey where her father had just killed a goat and we ate the bollocks

roasted over coals.” I never have those Italy experiences. But about six months ago in Sicily, I did go to a town where there were no tourists, just tiny men in black sitting at cafés all staring at me as though I’m David Attenborough walking down the high street in my pants. I needed olive oil and after asking four shops in my best Italian, they’d never heard of it. Eventually someone says they can get me some and a 100-year-old man in a beret

arrives on a bicycle with an Evian bottle, plonks it down, and says that’ll be seven pence. The most fucking delicious olive oil ever.

**MO:** I love the bitterness of the bright green cime di rapa.

**GC:** Is the bitterness from the oil or the turnip tops or the burnt grain?

**Jacob Kenedy:** Everything is bitter, apart from the Pecorino cheese on top.

**NR:** So Giles, has coming back to Bocca di Lupo convinced you that...

**GC:** Oh yeah: Marina takes me to an Italian restaurant run by one of my sister’s friends. Maybe I’ll concede that Marina is right.

**MO:** I want you to say, ‘I am a numpty’.

**GC:** As Fortnum & Mason Food Writer of the Year I will say to the former Food Writer of the Year: you’re right, I’m a numpty. The world breathed a sigh of relief when I won that award last year. But what’s important to me is not that I won, it’s just that Marina hadn’t.

**MO:** I find awards embarrassing. Though I enjoy having more awards than you do.

**GC:** I won without actually writing about food.



(Above) Jacob Kenedy, Dan Keeling, Giles Coren

(Right) Jacob Kenedy, Bocca di Lupo kitchen



Ben Chapman, chef/patron Kiln

## Giles’ Starter

### Baked glass noodles with pork belly and brown crab

Served with NV Riesling Sekt, Peter Lauer, Mosel, Germany

12.45pm

Kiln, 58 Brewer St, London W1F9TL  
www.kilnsoho.com

Kiln has been gaining many plaudits for its Northern Thai and Laos-influenced food cooked over barbecue since opening in late 2016 (the restaurant’s open-plan kitchen deliberately has no working gas). The brainchild of Ben Chapman – chef behind Smoking Goat – the ground floor restaurant is centred around a Barrafinasque countertop where diners enjoy a menu of excellent small dishes and a wine list compiled by *Noble Rot*’s own Zeren Wilson.

**Giles Coren:** I’d been to Kiln the day before we chose where we are going today, and I loved it. What Bocca di Lupo proves to me is that Italian food can be cooked really well by an English public school boy in Soho. Here, at Smoking Goat and at Som Saa, you have a similar thing happening: an Englishman travels widely in South-East Asia, comes back with a brilliant understanding of what’s exciting and different about Thai cooking and how to

present it over here. Whereas Thai people, for the last 30 years, have thought that we want the kind of stuff that’s traditionally given to English tourists in Thailand. Whereas a particular kind of...

**Marina O’Loughlin:** British spod...

**GC:** Yes, British spod, can go there and understand that people like me and Marina will complain if they haven’t used this leek or that leek, or if it’s not spicy enough. One of

the reasons I said yes to this feature was because I never go out and eat for fun, ever. I cook for my kids, I eat at the pizza place down the road and I go out to review. And I don't want to give bad reviews, so I'm used to eating out two or three times a week then reviewing the one that was great.

(Cumin lamb skewers and langoustines with kefir lime and mint are ordered whilst baked glass noodles with pork belly and brown crab is cooked in a clay pot over coals. Talk turns, bizarrely, the time Giles "sucked cock for drugs," until *Noble Rot* attempts to steer it elsewhere.)

**NR:** As a restaurant critic, is it all red carpet and Champagne when you eat out?

**GC:** Well I don't take anything for free, but I can walk into any one of hundreds of restaurants I've been nice about, plus restaurants I haven't been to before, and by and large I get treated like a regular. Do you know what baffles me about Marina having to protect her anonymity? I grew up reading superhero comic books, so I understand the idea of the masked avenger, but I always knew I could never be Batman because I'd keep wanting to go, it's me! I don't know how she can bear to go into a restaurant where she might have turned their life around with an 8/10 review and they treat her like shit because she could be anyone.



(Above) Kiln interior



(Left) Baked glass noodles with pork belly and brown crab

**MO:** That happened to me in Som Saa. I wrote a review and gave it a 5/5 and absolutely adored it, and then when I arranged to meet a work colleague there they wouldn't give me a table. There was a table for two in the middle of the room and I asked, 'can we not have that table', and they said 'no', and I said 'but I thought you don't take bookings'. I ended up virtually begging – I think they thought I was quite mad.

**GC:** Marina's whole life's work is to prove, by being anonymous, that people in the catering industry are cunts like everybody else.

**MO** (eating langoustines with kefir lime and mint): Oh, that's delicious...

**GC** (to the waitress): What's that black roe all about?

**Waitress:** It's langoustine roe.

**GC:** But it's weird and black, isn't it? It's all a bit too attached for me.

**MO:** Suck it. Suck it like the cock.

**GC:** I kept that story quiet for years. I was with a girl and I wasn't sure if it counted as being unfaithful, but I did get

a gram of coke out of it and I did share it with her. We'd been out clubbing and we'd had a few lines we got it from this guy, Arseholio – he looked like Arsenio Hall and he liked it up the arse so we called him Arseholio, which we thought was hilarious, until I found myself noshing his cock at three in the morning. I don't really remember but I must have been quite drunk.

**MO:** Did you like it?

**GC:** Not really. But I did it properly, not like that blowjob women give you where they give it a nibble at the top. I felt guilty for a very long time, and then I gradually started telling my gay friends.

**MO** (boggling and changing the subject): Er, I just wanted to finish what you were saying about how you like being recognised and loved in restaurants...

**GC:** And hated, I don't mind being hated. My life has been transformed by restaurants like this [Kiln], where they couldn't give a fuck who I was. I couldn't give a fuck if he noticed me, I love what he does, they bang it out, I think it's wonderful.

**Giles on Marina's choice:**  
"So you're trying to convince me of the superiority of Italian food by bringing me to somewhere owned by an English public schoolboy?"

**Marina on Giles' choice:**  
"I don't want to leave. I want to sit in front of the blazing heat of the open kitchen and eat the whole menu."



1.30pm

Kitty Fisher's, 10 Shepherd Market, London W1J 7QF  
www.kittyfishers.com

## Giles' Main

**Beef sirloin, onion, pink fir potatoes,  
pickled walnut and Tunworth**

*Served with 2014 Jean Foillard Morgon 'Côte du Py', Beaujolais, France*

A second contentious choice, one that Marina and Giles completely disagreed over in print. Owned by Giles' friend Oz (is there any fashionable restaurant in an upmarket London postcode not owned by one of his friends?), the tiny Kitty Fisher's has the feel of a hidden, old-school Mayfair drinking den with a menu by (outgoing) Head Chef Tomos Parry [see recipes, p42]. Described by Giles in *The Times* as cooking "the best steak I've ever had" and "exactly the sort of restaurant I would open myself, if I weren't such a miserable wanker", Marina was nowhere near as keen. "Reckon I'll wait until Parry gets his own joint somewhere a little less Bullingdon Club," she opined.

**GC:** What was your problem with Kitty Fisher's, Marina? You compared it to the Bullingdon Club, but based on a prejudice from what you'd read presumably?

**MO:** Based on sitting beside fucking what's-his-face. [Marina's review mentions being "sandwiched between a famous mag editor and

his chums shrieking, 'Aldeburgh!' 'Ski-ing!' 'The cottage!'" ]

**GC:** [Redacted] didn't even go to fucking school! [Redacted]'s a moron! He's got an IQ of 95 and is interested only in suits – he's a parvenu, he's common as shite! You wouldn't have that man in the Bullingdon club! My mate Oz who runs this place, he never went to – oh, he went to Eton, I grant you.

**MO:** I'd just like to say this is nothing to do with being Northern. If you come from Glasgow you think you are one of the masters of the universe, you know you are superior to all these Eton sorts.

**NR:** Is the key to what you do as restaurant critics, week in, week out, about being entertaining?

**GC:** It's not the restaurant's job to be interesting, it's our job to be interesting and it's the restaurant's job to serve food.

**MO:** But sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's like the



(Above) Beef sirloin, onion, pink fir potatoes, pickled walnut and Tunworth

(Right) He did say "the best steak I've ever had"



one I wrote yesterday, where it's like trepanning your own head it's so hard.

**NR:** Do you have a specific reader in mind when you write?

**GC:** No. The advice I give to people who can't write – and Marina isn't one of them but most of the other food critics are – is imagine you're writing a long email to an old mate who shares all your frames of reference and who you're not embarrassed at expressing yourself to. I read some other restaurant reviewers, the kind of people who want to say "it was an accurate bisque followed by a correct broth". Fucking hell!

**NR:** Do you ever finish a piece and feel pleased as it's one of the best you've done?

**GC:** I generally stand up from the computer and punch the air three times in a piece, and if I don't I file it anyway but feel sad. I also talk to myself.

**MO:** There's this imposter syndrome, which I think women are far more prey to than men. I still think somebody's going to come along and say "we gave you that job by mistake and now we're going to give it to the person whose job it really is".

**GC:** There's no question that the only two restaurant critics of any significance are

me and Marina and everyone else are just fucking organ grinders' monkeys tap-dancing on the periphery and they don't really matter, but – she's nodding, let the records show! The first time I went to Quo Vadis, when it opened, somebody asked who it was that really put bums on seats in restaurants, and I was waiting for them to say me, then they said 'it's her in the *Metro*' and I was like, what?

**MO:** That's your thing Giles, you have that weird kind of no-self-esteem-but-big-ego thing. I thought nobody took me seriously, then I got into the *Evening Standard's* 500 most influential people and reckoned I'd made it! But what they actually wrote about me was "she writes restaurant reviews for people who don't normally read restaurant reviews".

**GC:** Ooh, Jersey Royals with Tunworth cheese – you will do a little shit when you eat that! When I try to roast a fillet or a whole ribeye at home I can never really get it actually blackened on the outside and then completely red throughout.

**MO:** You need to dry it out. You don't want water in your steak, you want blood and fat, and salting it gives it that fantastically dry black crust. This is very good.

**GC:** I mean, this fat approaches the quality of marrow. (Giles picks up his almost empty plate and begins licking the beef juices from it.)

2.45pm

Gymkhana, 42 Albemarle St, Mayfair, London W1S 4JH  
www.gymkhanalondon.com

## Marina's Main

### Wild muntjac biryani with pomegranate and mint raita

Served with 2012 Sette Fratelli, Sangiovese/Cabernet Sauvignon blend, Motewadi, India.

One of London's most refined but satisfying Indians, Gymkhana's dark wooden panelling, wicker lined booths and faded photographic decorations lend it the feel of one of the colonial Anglo-Indian clubs from which its name derives. Whilst *Noble Rot* would be happy devouring anything off Gymkhana's excellent menu, it's the wild

muntjac biryani that has been selected as our second main course, a gloriously aromatic mix of spiced deer and buttery basmati rice that arrives at table under a flaky pastry dome.

**NR:** Giles, didn't you call Gymkhana your "favourite restaurant ever" when it first opened?

**GC:** Yeah – I had the whole menu, then I came back straight away and had it again. I've always loved a shit brown curry up the high street – there's good shit high street curry and bad shit high street curry – but a few weeks before I first ate at Gymkhana I reviewed [other high-end Indian restaurant] Chutney Mary and I thought



the food and the service were terrible. They were so furious with my review that they tried to take me to court – the first time in years that a restaurant had tried to do that, and they cited the fact that AA Gill had really liked it. Then three weeks later I went to Gymkhana and thought everything on the menu was just brilliant – proper curry.

**NR:** Have you been to Gymkhana's sibling



(Above) Wild muntjac biryani with pomegranate and mint raita

(Opposite page) BBR signature chocolate glory

restaurants, Hoopers and Trishna?

**GC:** I went to Trishna first and it was good, but Gymkhana really opened my eyes. And is Hoppers them too? Adrian [Gill] liked that... What do we do without him? Who's going to take his job?

*(Wild muntjac biryani with pomegranate and mint raita is served)*

**NR:** What's the most cutting review you've ever read?

**MO:** Adrian wrote some fantastically vicious reviews, but 99 times out of 100 the places deserved it. I love this biryani, it's perfectly spiced and so moreish. This is the standout for me so far, the one I'm coming back for soonest.

**GC:** I love it. Oh, god, I'm so full. Someone just kill me.

*A weary Giles has a lie down on a close-by banquette.*



**Giles on Marina's choice:** "I loved Gymkhana too. In fact, I saw it first. Of course it's brilliant."

**Marina on Giles' choice:** "It's a whole lot less Bullingdon when you're pals with the owner. (And yes, he is very charming.) And oh god that steak – yes it really is amongst the best in the city."

3.45pm

Bob Bob Ricard, 1 Upper James St, Soho, London W1F 9DF  
www.bobbobricard.com

## Marina's Pudding

**BBR signature chocolate glory at Bob Bob Ricard**

*Served with espresso martinis*

"We all needs a good dose of decadence every now and then. And when I'm in the mood, this eccentric glamourpuss is the only destination," said Marina of Bob Bob Ricard when awarding it eighth place in her '50 favourite UK restaurants' (Giles' review wasn't entirely complimentary and AA Gill gave it no stars). Completely unique in London restaurant terms, Bob Bob Ricard's menu mixes Russian and British classics (beef Wellington, chicken Kiev, copious amounts of caviar and Champagne), in kitsch David Collins-styled surroundings. "It doesn't make a lot of sense, but I don't need it to," Marina concluded. "Anywhere that has a button at every table saying 'press for Champagne' is OK by me."

**GC:** The greatest shock of my professional life was coming here, with its preposterous decorations and ridiculous costumes, writing it up as the biggest nought out of 10, and then going to some restaurant awards and finding Marina and Fay [Maschler] both loved it. You push a button and one of the partners off *Strictly Come*



*Dancing*, some sort of mandarin-skinned Jayne Torvill type, totters over and offers you a warm glass of industrial Champagne...

**MO:** Where's your joy? Where's your dancing-round-a-handbag-enjoying-Lambrini joy? I was somewhere in Newcastle two days ago and ordered a Porn Star Martini, which came with a little cutting of actual porn, and a side shot of Lambrini. That was absolute happiness, how could you not love that?

**GC:** Do you know what this is like to me? It's like a bar in a

hotel in Disneyland. The kids are in bed, you've done fucking Mickey Mouse all day and blokes in cutaway waistcoats make you cocktails with no actual booze in them. Then you hit a button and Champagne comes.

**MO:** But as soon as you come in, it's pavlovian, you can't help pressing for Champagne.

**GC:** I like a bottle of vintage stuff at Christmas or special occasions but I don't understand.

**MO:** I think you can be snarky about other people's idea of what is joyful and fun!

5pm

Rules, 34-35 Maiden Ln, London WC2E 7LB  
www.rules.co.uk

## Giles' Pudding

### Golden syrup steamed sponge with custard and Welsh rarebit at Rules

*Served with more martinis*

The iconic Rules is the capital's oldest restaurant (founded in 1798) and the ideal place to finish the ultimate London meal. Specialising in traditional British food – game, oysters, pies and proper puddings – this opulently appointed aristocrat has counted everyone from Charles Dickens to Laurence Olivier as customers. One of few top end restaurants that serve their full menu continuously through the day (with a brilliant hideaway bar on the first floor), the martinis are starting to do their work as the conversation centres itself around Brexit, politics and whether or not restaurant reviews are becoming obsolete.

**GC:** I've never competed to be the first person to eat somewhere or to discover a restaurant. There are these mystical bloggers that 'discover' places, but writers like Marina and I do something else, and since Adrian Gill died there's one fewer of those. There are other critics like Fay who, because she's in a paper rather than a glossy, can get into a restaurant earlier, and

it matters to her to be the first one in. Most of her reviews begin, "I was wearing a hard hat and there was no plumbing but I gather the menu will contain prawns...", and that's fine, but I like being free to leave that behind. I started before the internet, when reviewers had actual power. Restaurateurs like Chris Galvin would tell me, "I put my children through school thanks to your review". Now you wouldn't pretend to have that kind of influence.

*(A waiter arrives with a perfect golden syrup steamed sponge with custard, and a round of Welsh rarebit.)*

**Giles** (poking his finger straight in the top of the hot pudding) : Oww!

**Marina:** Ha, serves you right!

**NR:** Marina, what do you think of all the restaurants today?

**MO:** Can I just say Bocca di Lupo: looved. Can I just say Kiln: looved. Gymkhana: looved. Even bloody Kitty Fisher's: looved. Bob Bob Ricard: looved and Rules:

Popping the cork on some fizz to me signals that I'm about to have fun. It's as childish as that.

*[BBR's Signature Chocolate Pudding arrives]*

**MO:** That's so completely the 1980's.

**GC:** That's a Hatchimal.

*(The waiter pours warm chocolate over the egg, causing it to melt and reveal a chocolate centre.)*

**GC:** Oh, so it's not a Hatchimal?

**MO:** It's a Fabergé egg, Giles. Look at that, it's a cabinet of curiosities.

**NR:** So you don't like Bob Bob Ricard any more now than when you first reviewed it, Giles?

**GC:** No.

**MO:** How can you tell from a gilded pudding and a very good espresso martini – just what we need to give us a wee boost after four other restaurants?

**GC:** This opened the week of the banking crisis in 2008 and I thought it was comic. And then I found out that my fellow restaurant critics thought it was brilliant.

**MO:** That's because some of us know how to have fun.



*(Left) Golden syrup steamed sponge with custard*

thought it was all shit – um, no. Bocca di Lupo was lovely, I haven't been for a while. Kiln I thought was terrific, the aged lamb kebabs with cumin I thought were absolutely delicious. Kitty Fisher's was great, the Galician beef was as good as I remember and I'm glad that Marina, with the chip removed from her shoulder and placed on the table for all to view, had a very nice time. Didn't you.

*(Marina orders another martini.)*

looove. I looove them all! (drinks another martini)

**NR:** Giles?

**GC** (Wolfing down the golden syrup steamed sponge like his life depends on it): I

**NR:** Bob Bob Ricard and Rules?

**GC:** The highlight of Bob Bob Ricard was leaving. I didn't get it at the time, I don't get it now. Rules? How could anyone not love this food?



**Giles on Marina's choice:** "It's the dancing round handbags section of the restaurant critic industry."

**Marina on Giles' choice:** "I would happily die eating Rules' Welsh rarebit and necking their incredible martinis. Can I have another martini?"

## Burnt grain orecchiette with cime di rapa (turnip tops)

By Jacob Kenedy

Cucina povera – food of the poor – is root and stem of much of Italy’s most exalted cooking today. People talk about the ‘good old days’ everywhere – nostalgia for better times helps us to preserve our traditions but also leads us, for better or for worse, along roads of retreat such as the one to Brexit.

The good old days were not necessarily so good. Italy was once governed under a feudal system, where poor *contadine* would toil the land for their lordly masters. It used to be common practice to burn field stubble after grain harvest, to return the ash (potassium, phosphorus and other minerals) to the soil. In Puglia – in southernmost, poorest Italy – so poor were the *contadine* that, after the fields were torched, they would scabble in the dirt for the few remaining kernels of charred wheat. This meagre sustenance was called grano arso – burned grain.

Today, in utter perversion, foods of the poor have become so sought-after as to cost

more than everyday nourishment. Thus chestnuts are expensive and sit in the speciality aisle of fine grocers, oysters are a privilege of the well-off, and grano arso is as dear as gold dust. You might be able to find it but if not, you can make your own approximation by roasting fine wholemeal flour or buckwheat flour to a dark nut brown.

The shape of pasta (orecchiette – little ears), is also emblematic of cucina povera – it is made with a wheat-and-water dough (no need for once-expensive eggs), and shaped with nothing but hands and a table knife. If you don’t fancy making your own, you can just buy them – though they will be made from white (not burned) grain, the dish will still be delicious and earthy. At Bocca di Lupo we serve them the most classic way, with cime di rapa – turnip tops (again, poor man’s food) – you could substitute with foraged dandelions or nettles, kale or simply broccoli florets, but use proper cime if you can get them.

**Serves 4 as a main, 6-8 as a starter**

**For the pasta** (if not making your own orecchiette: 400g fresh is best, 300g dried will do)

100g grano arso (to make your own: 100g buckwheat flour or fine-milled brown flour)  
200g durum wheat semolina  
200ml water

**For the dish**

1kg bunch of cime di rapa  
Salt  
8 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
4 big (or 6 medium) garlic cloves, thinly sliced  
½ tsp crushed dried chilli flakes (or more or less, as you like)  
Pepper  
100g grated Pecorino Romano

**To make the orecchiette** (this act of love is only for the devoted, or those with time to kill):

1. If making your own sort-of grano arso, preheat the oven to 200°C and roast the flour, stirring every 15 minutes until it turns golden brown, then stirring every 5-10 minutes until it turns a deep red-brown colour, like a dark chestnut skin. This will take some time. Take it out and leave to cool before using.
2. For the dough, mix the semolina, grano arso and water and knead to a smooth, supple but firm dough.
3. Roll the dough into a sausage 1cm in diameter (it may help to work in a few batches). Cut across to make 1cm dumplings, and roll each into a hazelnut-sized ball. Take a cheap table knife (like the kind they used to have at school – basic, rounded and bluntly serrated) and make the orecchiette one by one.
4. With the flat of the knife at 45° to the table, use a smearing action (away from your body) to press the dumpling out, using the rounded end of the blade. It helps to keep the knife a constant height (3mm) above the work surface – to do this, hold the knife firmly against your thumb, and slide your thumb across the worktop for stability, drawing it against, over and through the dough. The pasta should stretch, flatten and curl around the blade, becoming thinner in the middle than at the edges, one of which should be slightly stuck to the blade of the knife. Put your index finger gently against the centre of the little curl of pasta, hold the loose edge carefully with your thumb, and use the knife to simultaneously invert the pasta over your fingertip and pull the knife away (and detach it) from the pasta. The pasta should now look like a little ear, with a slightly thick rim (the lobe), and a rough texture on the thinner centre, from where the knife pulled against the dough. This seems a lot of words for a very small pasta! Orecchiette take some practise before they come out right, but then are as easy as pie. Repeat until all the dough is used up, and look up a video online before starting (it will help).
5. Lay them out on a wooden surface to dry until leathery, then cover and refrigerate or freeze until ready to cook and serve.

**To make the dish**

1. Prepare the cime di rapa – break off the larger leaves and remove the dark green lamina from the tough stem, discarding the latter. Keep the smallest leaves attached to the broccoli-like inflorescences. Cut everything into forkful-sized pieces, bearing in mind it will shrink when cooking.
2. The cime di rapa need to cook a good 10-12 minutes to become as soft and supple as Italians like them, and cook in the same water (at the same time) as the pasta. So bring a large pan of well-salted water to the boil.
3. If using dried orecchiette, which take an age to cook, put them in the water at the same time as the cime. If using fresh orecchiette (as one should), start the cime off first, and then when tender but not quite as soft as they could be, add the pasta and cook 2-3 minutes more until both are done.
4. Also 2-3 minutes before the cime are done, put the oil and garlic into a cold frying pan, wide enough eventually to take all the pasta and cime, and fry the garlic over a high heat till the very edges of one or two slices start to turn golden. Take the pan off the heat and add the chilli.
5. Drain the pasta and cime when done – pasta al dente, cime absolutely not so – and put them into the garlicky oil while still dripping with plenty of their cooking water. Sauté over a high heat until most of the cooking liquid has been absorbed, and season with pepper (and salt if needed, which it wouldn’t be if your water was correctly salted). Serve with grated Pecorino on top.

**Classic variations:**

**Sausage & cime di rapa:** Take 300g Italian sausage from the skin, crumble it and fry in one third of the oil till browned. Then add the remaining cold oil and the garlic, and proceed as above.

**Anchovy:** Add 8 chopped fillets of salted anchovy along with the chilli. Serve with crispy breadcrumbs instead of Pecorino.



## Crab, Barbecued Cucumber, Hispi, Laverbread & Dill

By Tomos Parry, Kitty Fisher's

This dish has evolved over time and takes a strong influence from growing up in Wales. The key elements of the dish are crab, laverbread and cucumber. Laverbread is one of my favourite ingredients and a traditional Welsh delicacy (Richard Burton referred to it as “Welshman’s caviar”) made from laver seaweed. To make laverbread, the seaweed is boiled for several hours, then minced into a gelatinous, rich paste. It is traditionally eaten

fried with bacon and cockles as part of a Welsh breakfast.

Cooking over wood and fire is an important element of my cooking and using barbecued cucumber and cabbage works very well in this dish. The smokiness and bitterness of the charred cucumber skins, along with the freshness of the crab, pickle and seaweed, gives the dish delicious depth of flavour.

### 1. Make the laverbread pickle & seaweed oil

12g nori seaweed sheets  
100ml + 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar  
100g caster sugar  
100ml water  
80g laverbread  
15g chives, roughly chopped  
7g parsley, picked from the stalk  
15g dill, picked from the stalk  
1 tsp fine table salt

#### Laverbread pickle

1. Cut 6g of the nori seaweed sheets into thin slices.
2. In a saucepan, boil the rice wine vinegar, caster sugar and water.
3. Take the pan off the heat and add the cut nori and the laverbread.
4. Allow to cool.

#### Seaweed Oil

1. Combine the remaining 6g nori with the chives, parsley, dill and 150ml rapeseed oil.
2. Blend at high speed for 30 seconds, season with 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar and 1 tsp salt.

### 2. Pick white crab & make the brown crab emulsion

150g white crab meat, picked  
20ml (+ extra to season) lemon juice  
Olive oil  
Fine table salt  
60g brown crab meat  
2 egg yolks  
10g ginger, grated  
50ml rapeseed oil

#### White crab

1. Many fishmongers will have picked crab meat (and brown meat separated) for sale, but it is worth re-picking through it yourself.
2. Season to taste with lemon, olive oil and salt.
3. Leave in fridge.

#### Brown crab

1. Whisk together the brown crab meat with the egg yolks, ginger and 20ml lemon juice.
2. Slowly add the rapeseed oil, whisking to create an emulsion.
3. Season with salt.

### 3. Blanch the cabbage & barbecue the cucumber

1 cucumber, small  
Olive oil  
Fine table salt  
1 Hispi cabbage heart  
Water, boiling and cold

#### Cucumber

1. Lightly oil and season the cucumber and place it on a hot grill.
2. Grill for 10-12 minutes, turning every couple of minutes until the cucumber is heavily charred and starting to give slightly.
3. Once grilled, cut the cucumber into small irregular-shaped pieces, around 2cm in size.

#### Cabbage

1. While the cucumber is barbecuing, prepare the cabbage heart by cutting it into 1in pieces. Bring a pan of salted water to boil and blanch the cabbage by boiling it for 30 seconds, then plunging into cold water to stop the cooking.
2. Dry the cabbage leaves and dress lightly with oil and salt.
3. Grill the leaves until they char lightly, not too heavily.

### 4. Assembling the dish

Combine the grilled cucumber pieces with the charred cabbage, 30g seaweed oil and 30g pickled laverbread. Check if extra seasoning is necessary. A generous amount of the brown crab goes on the plate first, then the white crab followed by the cucumber and cabbage mix, finished with extra white crab meat.

