

The New Review

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

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THE FASHION ISSUE

From high street to high glamour *plus* our secret style heroes

Laura Santtini

'Flavour is my thing, so I love all smelly little spice shops'

INTERVIEW BY HUGH MONTGOMERY

MY EARLIEST FOOD MEMORY... The potato gnocchi my grandmother used to make. I remember watching the soft pillows of potato bounce to the surface of the water. She was an extraordinary cook and a very strong woman, who was an inspiration to me.

MY STORE-CUPBOARD ESSENTIALS... Olive oil, soy sauce, curry paste, harissa and my No 5 umami paste. I invented it, and if there's one thing I'll be able to look back and say I've done in my life, it's that. It's like a graphic equaliser for food – whenever deliciousness is needed, you can squeeze it in. Also, I have lots of quirky things – from strange spices and petals to edible gold and silver, which I call "food bling". You can do something really cheap and simple such as a cauliflower-and-potato soup and then bling it up with a bit of magic.

MY FAVOURITE COOKBOOK... The internet. I love it because you can see thousands of takes on the same recipe from all over the world and all levels of cooks. Amateur recipes are the best, in the sense that they're the true recipes – things people have tried and are really proud of; as a writer, it's important to understand what people are really up to.

THE KITCHEN GADGET I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT... My Flintstones-style pestle and mortar. I've had a few over the years, and I always seem to break the pestle – they roll off the kitchen surface when I go to answer the phone, for example. I think they should start selling each mortar with two pestles so you have one spare.

MY FAVOURITE FOOD SHOP... Any shop which is open when I'm looking for last-minute ingredients, which I invariably am. There's also a wonderful shop called Kalustyan's in New York, which has every spice under the sun; flavour is my thing, so I love all smelly little spice shops.

MY TOP TABLE... Nobu. I recently had the pleasure of dining with [chef] Nobu Matsuhisa at an umami tasting dinner he had devised, and it was really one of the most memorable meals I've ever had. He really is the rock star of cooking; the way he combines Japanese and South American flavours is unique and exciting.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE... A Domino's pepperoni pizza would probably be my guiltiest pleasure. It is packed with



umami. My new book is all about having an 80/20 lifestyle [live 80 per cent of your life well and enjoy the rest], so I'm not ashamed that a Pepperoni Passion is in that 20 per cent of my life.

MY DESERT-ISLAND DISH My husband, because if we'd got to that point when Armageddon was coming, I think I would have probably lost my appetite

MY COMFORT FOOD... Dirty quinoa, which I invented myself. It's basically sloppy, spicy porridge made with quinoa, coconut milk and red or green Thai curry paste. It's in one of my books: I wanted to create something healthy but comforting and that's what came out.

MY PET HATES... I hate foams and skids on plates. I don't like that texture of frothy gobbiness; I don't know why anyone thought it would be interesting to

emulate one of the most revolting bodily fluids and put it all over your food. Is it a way to shock the senses before you start or to try and make a dull dish interesting?

MY TIPPLE OF CHOICE... I don't really drink, but there is a little granny in my soul which means I love a drop of Harveys Bristol Cream every now and then; there goes every bit of credibility I ever had! But my favourite drink is one I made myself, which is sparkling mineral water with lemon slices and a splash of red wine. I love that Joan Armatrading song "Water with the Wine". God knows what would have happened if I hadn't learnt to drink water with my wine, given all the trouble I've got into anyway! •

Laura Santtini is a food writer and restaurateur. Her latest book, 'Flash Cooking: Fit Fast Flavours for Busy People', (£20, Quadrille) is out now

Wines of the week

Terry Kirby selects the best bottles to buy

SUNDAY LUNCH

MARK HAISMA BURGOGNE 2009 Burgundy is the perfect autumnal wine, with its elegant, violets-and-woodsmoke aromas, and sensual, bright, cherry flavours perfect for completing foods such as pheasant or mushrooms. Here, Australian-born and trained, but settled in the land of his mother, Mark Haisma has produced a wine that exemplifies many of the qualities that make great Burgundy without the normal high prices they attract. A name to watch. £14.45, from vineyardsdirect.com

MIDWEEK MEAL

THE NED WAIHOPAI RIVER PINOT GRIGIO 2010

Proof, if it were needed, that the Kiwis can work the same magic on Pinot Grigio as on Sauvignon Blanc, transforming the grape from blandness into vigorosity, with refreshing, clean flavours of pears, apples and an underlying hint of spiciness. There is enough body here to make dishes such as pasta with blue cheese and walnuts or pork escalopes with grain-mustard sauce. £6.99 until 9 November (usually £9.99), waitrose.co.uk; £9.99, majestic.co.uk (as part of a minimum purchase six mixed bottles)

BARGAIN BASEMENT

LATE BOTTLED VINTAGE PORT 2005 M&S's own label LBV comes from Taylor's, one of the great names in port who pioneered this "second wine" style of vintage port. It is close to the time when we buy our one bottle of port for Christmas, so this is a good bargain to snap up now, when it is up to 50 per cent cheaper than when sold as Taylor's LBV. A big, rich, sweet and brambly mouthful. £9.99 (until 30 October; normally £12.99), Marks & Spencer

