

# The Observer Food

August 2002 No 17

Monthly

Photograph by  
Sophia Evans

## Fresh from France

The best rural markets from Picardy to Provence

Balthaz  
The East  
Survival  
Why fry-



**OFM**

# Top ten cookery schools in Europe

We went, we saw, we were conquered... OFM's team of amateur chefs polish their skills on the continent

## **1** Menfi Sicily

available through Tasting Places  
Tel: 020 7460 0077

Website: [www.tastingplaces.com](http://www.tastingplaces.com)

Cookery writer Maxine Clark happily admits she loves Sicily more than any other part of Italy and it shows in the enthusiasm and wealth of local knowledge she brings to the courses she teaches in Menfi. Sicilian food is an earthy and exotic mix of European and Arab influences. Staples such as pizza and home-made pasta are also tackled, with Maxine exhorting her students to 'knead the dough from cellulite to a baby's bottom'. The week-long course takes place in the romantic setting of the eighteenth-century Villa Ravidà, the private home of a grand Sicilian family who now produce award-winning extra virgin olive oil. Early evening cocktails are served in the villa's elegant drawing room, which is decorated with faded frescoes and meals are eaten outdoors with unlimited supplies of Sicilian wine.

POLLY ROGER BROWN

## **2** Finca Buen Vino Spain

through Pata Negra cooking schools  
Tel: 01722 750 174





meantime, between watching the maestro and feeling depressed at your own incompetence, you can enjoy the beautiful surroundings of the hotel (a spa is opening soon) and drink copious amounts of their Bellavista 'bubbles'. Gualtiero is the consummate chef and he immerses you in the heart and soul of Italy. Included in the course are two guided tours of local vineyards, three nights, breakfast and lunch and three dinners. LUCY CAVENDISH

## 6 L'Ecole de Cuisine Bordeaux, France

Tel: 00 33 5 56 90 91 92

Email: [contact@ecoledubordeaux.com](mailto:contact@ecoledubordeaux.com)

L'Ecole de Cuisine is run from the bowels of one of France's most historic and celebrated restaurants, Le Chapon Fin. Owned by the Cazes family – proprietors of the Lynch-Bages wine estate – the cookery side is designed and overseen by Michelin two-star chef, Thierry Marx. Run in English and French, it is open to amateurs and professionals alike. A sommelier is on hand to demonstrate wine and food harmony, and the course concentrates on typical south-western cooking, with a bias towards Marx's *terre et estuaire* (land and estuary) cuisine. It takes place at Le Chapon Fin from Tuesday to Saturday. Lunch or dinner are included. MARK PORTER

## 7 Cooking with Stavros Symi, Greece

available through Laskarina

Tel: 01629 822203

Website: [www.laskarina.co.uk](http://www.laskarina.co.uk)

Stavros Gogios is chef and owner of Mythos, the best restaurant on the small Greek island of Symi which specialises in traditional medézhes (essentially a Greek version of tapas) with a modern twist. Persuaded to share his recipes by holiday company Laskarina, Stavros now runs week-long cooking demonstrations in his restaurant kitchen.

On the first morning of my week Stavros took us for a walk through the picturesque harbour town of Symi,



Terre et Estuaire cuisine at L'Ecole de Cuisine, Bordeaux.

introducing us to his father-in-law Yannis, who sells dried herbs gathered from the local hills, and then showing us the greengrocer, baker and butcher where he buys his fresh produce. He taught us how to make stifádho (beef stew with tomatoes and onions), spanokópitta (spinach and cheese pie) and baklava (a layered filo pie with honey and nuts) as well as the other, more experimental dishes he's become known for – feta mousse, squid in basil sauce and courgette parcels stuffed with mushrooms. 'I think that cooking is a bit of fantasy – a way of expressing yourself,' said Stavros as he filled everyone's glasses up again. POLLY ROGER BROWN

## 8 Casa Ombuto Tuscany, Italy

Tel: 0039 34873 63864

[www.italiancookingcourse.com](http://www.italiancookingcourse.com)

High in the hills of the Casentino valley, 50km south of Florence is Casa Ombuto – an amazing house with a swimming pool and views to die for. Michele, interpreter and frontman, and his wife Carla, one of the most respected chefs in Tuscany run the inspiring seven-day cookery course, held in the cave-like cantina of the villa.

I tried everything from basic pasta-making to a delicious wild boar in tomato and herb dish. I had a day's excursion which ended in the most stunning restaurant for dinner, and a day free to view the surrounding wildlife or visit Florence. The other five days are for cooking, which starts at 3pm. This course suits those who are keen to learn with little experience to those established cooks looking to broaden their tastes and techniques. WENDY GEOGHEGAN

## 9 Promenades Gourmandes with Paule Caillat

Paris, France

available through Gourmet on Tour

Tel: 020 7396 5550

This is a non-residential cookery course designed to be slotted into a weekend, or long visit to Paris. You could just about do it on Eurostar for the day. It's a terrific way of discovering the food underbelly of the city, as the Cordon Bleu chef and guide, Paule Caillat, leads the class round markets, butchers, the kitchens at the Hotel de Crillo, truffle and herb shops. You then return to Caillat's kitchen in the Marais and cook up your shopping. KATIE LEE

## 10 Refúgio da Vila Portel, Alentejo, Portugal

Tel: 00351 266619010

[www.refugiodavila.com](http://www.refugiodavila.com)

'The richness of our food comes from the poverty of our people,' says Miguel Amaral, head chef at the elegant Refúgio da Vila hotel in Portel, in southern Portugal. The Alentejo is one of the most traditional and poorest regions of Portugal, a land of wheat fields and olive groves – two of the ingredients which form the basics of the region's cuisine along with herbs, rabbit, pork and eggs. As Miguel says, local recipes, such as *coelho á carvoeiro* (rabbit and tomato stew) have been improvised to turn staple foodstuffs into tasty meals.

POLLY ROGER BROWN

OFM

Right: the cookery school of three-star chef Gualtiero Marchesi in L'Albereta, Italy.

