

A Parlour of Creativity

From all you can eat breakfast toast to chef's tables, Parlour has something for everyone. Giselle Whiteaker talks to Chef Jesse Dunford Wood about chicken Kiev, the potential of pubs and what's in a cow pie.



Did you always know that you were going to be a chef?

Definitely not, but I knew that I was going to be creative because I'm from a creative family. I went to Art College and then got a job washing dishes in a restaurant and I knew that that was the way for me – not the dishes bit, but the cooking bit – because it brings everyone together. You feed people, nourish people, surprise and delight people. You can make it look pretty, and even make it delicious tasting. It's a multi-sensory thing.

What is the concept of Parlour?

Parlour is a hub of the local community in London's NW10. Most people don't quite know what it is. It is in a pub building and it has many pub elements – you walk in and there's a bar with beer – but then we have newspapers, and a big table with toast so you can help yourself, and jams and a toaster. We make amazing coffee. We've got Wi-Fi and breakfasty things from 10 o'clock every day except Monday. That morphs into lunch, which morphs into dinner. It's a versatile and wonderful place, but it's hard to put your finger on exactly what it is. I own the joint and I don't even really know.

So it's an everything kind of place?

I love the accessibility. Pubs in history have had Fred the dustman sitting next to Henry the banker, both enjoying a pint of beer after a hard day's work, and that's a wonderful thing. We've had a lot of issues with pubs, with a lot closing down, and people lose that community go-to place. This is a modern interpretation of what maybe a pub could be. A parlour is kind of a meeting place and that's a good start on how to describe it.

We've been careful to make it a bit of a blank canvas in order for people to make what they want of it. This is a lovely place to bring kids, but it's also a nice place to take your wife out for a treat, or your parents for Sunday lunch.

How would you describe the style of food?

Some people describe it as funky British. We take inspiration from everyday supermarket food and people's secret TV dinners, like chicken Kiev or a slice of arctic roll. Those are two of our famous dishes. It's an accessible menu, but we also have delicious seasonal delights. At the moment we've got parsnips and wonderful beetroot things. It evolves

with the season but there are also some robust and season-proof dishes, which will always be on the menu.

What is your current favourite?

We've got a lovely dish called blue cheese custard with lots of bits to dip. Custard is a favourite British dish, which usually comes with some kind of stodgy steamed or crumbly thing. We've made it into a brûlée texture, but instead of sugar it's got blue cheese, so it's a savoury custard with crunchy hazelnuts on top. [It comes with] a wonderful selection of seasonal crudités, like purple carrots and sea kale or white-sprouting broccoli, stripy beetroot, little Japanese artichokes, Nasturtium roots...all sorts of things people aren't familiar with. I love the fact that lots of things on the plate have to be explored by the customer as they're eating, and that forces interaction with the waiting staff. You get the vegetables and think: 'Well, I don't know what that is. It tastes nice, but I'm foxed here...'

So it's taking the familiar, but making it unfamiliar?

Exactly. We have a lot of things which are in theory very simple, but in reality are a bit different than what you expect. There's a famous restaurant that writes their menu in a very bold way. It might be pigeon with peas and bacon and that's what you get on your plate. I like a little more mystery with my food. It might say pigeon, peas and bacon, but there'll be all sorts of little nooks and crannies to look into while you're eating.

We've got another famous dish called Cow Pie. If you're from North America, a cow pie is something that comes out of the back of a cow onto a field. In this country it's a dish eaten by a character called Desperate Dan from *Dandy* magazine. The dish is called Cow Pie, with or without. People ask what's in the cow pie all the time. I don't know if it's a joke or whether they're interested to know, apart from cow, what's in the thing. Essentially it's a steak and ale pie, which is a traditional pub classic, but in the middle of the pastry we've got a marrow bone, with bone marrow, parsley and breadcrumbs exploding out of the middle of the stew below. It's so beefy that even the pastry's got cow in it – it's made with beef fat. It comes with or without green vegetables. We've called it something different and for the foodies it's interesting to have the bone marrow. It looks great, it tastes great and there's a story behind it, so it works on different levels for different people. That's an example of what we're trying to get at.

So it's about taking British staples and elevating them?

That's exactly what we try to do. I am inspired by the everyday. There are reasons why people love getting chicken Kievs and sitting in front of the tele feeling a bit guilty about the pre-prepared dish they've just warmed up. We have a toasted marshmallow Wagon Wheel on the dessert menu, which evokes all sorts of nostalgic thoughts. You get two biscuits, both covered in chocolate, one of them with wonderful home-made marshmallows on top, then the waiter comes along with an industrial blowtorch and burnishes it in front of you, then you squash the two sides together and there you have it. If you don't book a table after this conversation, there's something wrong with you.



Parlour is open 6 days a week from 10am until midnight.
For details see www.parlourkensal.com.

Serves 5

1kg Diced stewing beef
 100g Peeled baby onions
 100g Sliced onions
 100g Sliced mushrooms
 1 Pint of ale
 500g Chicken stock
 10g Chopped thyme
 50g Butter
 75g Flour
 1tsp Dijon mustard
Puff Pastry
 1 egg yolk

Jesse's Cow Pie

Stew both the baby and sliced onions and the sliced mushrooms together with the chopped thyme in the butter, seasoning well, until soft. Add the flour, then adding the beer and chicken stock, bring this mixture to the boil. Re-season with salt, pepper and Dijon mustard. Add the beef, and cook out like a good old fashioned casserole for three hours at 150 degrees, or on a low setting.

When the beef is tender (we call it fork-friendly), leave it to cool down. When cool, you can top the pie with puff pastry, brush with egg yolk, and if you can find one, stuff a bone in the middle for authenticity, just like we do at Parlour.

