



Beef onglet, braised short rib, and sticky glazed beets

Masters in the Kitchen

Winners or not, *MasterChef* contestants know their way around a kitchen. Here's one chef putting his television tricks to the test.

Back in 2015, notably moustachioed Tony Rodd was one of the *MasterChef* finalists. He's also a local of Blackheath in Southeast London. Last year, he and his wife Becky gave birth to Copper & Ink, taking over an old Strada unit and turning it into a cosy, yet spacious, split-level restaurant.

Tony's not the only *MasterChef* in the kitchen, either – Copper & Ink's Head Chef Rob Parks made his mark on the show in the same year. The pair connected back then and continue to do so, evidenced by their light-hearted banter and competitive natures.



Chocolate delight with banana brûlée and hazelnut ice cream

Tony tells my friend Katy and I that the dishes on the menu are a joint effort, with all of the chefs having input. Each month, they come up with dishes based around seasonal ingredients and have a taste test to determine the best. The winning creations make it onto the monthly tasting menu. Whatever they're doing, it seems to be working.

After quaffing our delectable bramble cocktails, Katy and I are ready to get started on the five-course menu – which is something of a bargain at £40 per person, an additional £30 with paired wines. It's also almost evenly balanced between savoury and sweet, with two desserts represented. This makes my sweet tooth happy.

The degustation begins with a combination of caramelised whey carrot, raw milk curd, white peach, almonds, and lovage oil, served on a lightly ribbed white plate. It's a lovely light dish, the natural sweetness of the carrots enhanced by the lovage oil and tamed by the curd, which has the faintest sense of goat cheese about it.



Caramelised whey carrot, raw milk curd, white peach, almonds, and lovage oil

This is paired with an intriguing Nachbil Grunspitz wine, hailing from the North-Western Transylvania region of Romania. The only ingredient used in wine production at Nachbil is grapes. The native Grunspitz grape is handpicked, fermented in open-top stainless steel with wild yeast, then bottled unrefined and unfiltered, leading to a cloudy, orange-noted wine with earthy minerality.

Next up on the food front is prawn, lemongrass and ginger tortellini with crispy shallots, in a prawn and coconut broth. Each of the mid-sized tortellini in the trio is topped with a slice of red chilli, giving a piquant edge to the delicate flavours. The only dilemma is whether to cut the morsels in half and risk them falling apart, or to gobble them up in a single bite. On a date, I would choose the former. With Katy, I choose the latter, revelling in each rather loaded mouthful. It pairs beautifully with a Cape Coral 2018 Rosé from the Stellenbosch region of South Africa.

Another South African contributes to our final savoury course, the lively Circumstance Cabernet Franc. This tastes like one of those red wines that would complement any full-flavoured dish and it certainly works with this course. Like the wine, this is one of those deeply flavoured dishes that sticks in your mind long after you've burned its calories. There are three distinct elements – beef onglet, braised short rib, and sticky



The interior of Copper & Ink



Pressed apple terrine, blackcurrant sorbet and buckwheat meringue cake

glazed beets, the last providing a pop of colour on the plate. The beef is pink in the middle, topped with a citrus gremolata, while the short rib is so tender it dissolves in the mouth, the beets acting as the perfect pick-me-up to moderate the deliciously intense flavours.

A Shilfwein from Sepp Moser, a biodynamic Austrian wine producer, precedes our first dessert. It's known as a 'straw wine', because, when it was originally made, the grapes were laid out on beds of straw to raisin in the sun. The sweet, deep yellow wine often accompanies fruit desserts, and tonight is no exception. A cube of pressed apple terrine rests by a scoop of blackcurrant sorbet with fresh blackberries and chunks of buckwheat meringue cake. It's a fabulous contrast of flavours and textures, with deep, sweet berries, a hint of cinnamon, the tang of the sorbet, dense apple and fluffy cake.

The pièce de résistance, served with a Red Muscat from Corsica, is a round of oh-so-smooth chocolate delice with banana brûlée and hazelnut ice cream. This alone is a dessert worth coming back for – Tony is known for his chocolate skills after all – but should we be in any doubt, we are also presented with a selection of petit fours, macaroons and cubes of red velvet cake with Cape gooseberries.

Ultimately, Tony may not have won *MasterChef* but, joined by Rob, he's dishing up a winning storm at Copper & Ink.

For more information about Copper & Ink, see www.copperandink.com

Here are some other restaurants with *MasterChef* connections:



The Bridge of Orchy Hotel in Argyll has appointed chef David Hetherington to lead its mission to create a foodie haven in the Highlands, serving up the best in local Scottish produce. Hetherington took part in *MasterChef: The Professionals* in 2012.

www.bridgeoforchy.co.uk



The Beach at Bude is a boutique hotel and restaurant on the north coast of Cornwall. Its award-winning head chef, Jamie Coleman, previously appeared on *MasterChef: The Professionals*, and has also worked with the likes of Gordon Ramsay and Michael Caines.

www.thebeachatbude.co.uk



2015 *MasterChef* Champion Simon Wood has launched a fine-dining menu at Wood Manchester. The hero dish, Citrus Tutti-frutti, tells of his time on *MasterChef* up to today. It was presented in the final, as a lollipop, and is now a pre-dessert.

www.woodrestaurantgroup.com



Lisa Goodwin-Allen, Executive Chef at Northcote in Lancashire, appeared as a Chef Mentor and Judge on *MasterChef: The Professionals* in 2015 and 2017–19, and as a judge on *Celebrity MasterChef* 2017–18. Lisa oversees the Michelin-starred restaurant at the hotel.

www.northcote.com