



THE QUEST OF A LIFETIME

Melissa Blease talks to Helen Rich, founder of Rich Pickings and creator of more than 40 different pâté and terrine recipes about her long obsession with authentic French dishes

If you love your grub, spending a Saturday morning tasting your way round Bath Farmers' Market in Green Park Station turns food shopping into a pleasurable treat. Established in 1997, it was the first of its kind in the UK, and today continues to thrive and develop at the heart of Bath's local food scene.

At the centre of the action, the Rich Pickings pâté and terrine stall – overseen by Bath-born Goddess of Good Taste Helen Rich – attracts hordes of established customers and foodies in search of tasty victuals for supper, dinner parties or just to munch while walking around the market every week, often selling out of stock before many of us have even woken up.

And Helen enjoys the Saturday morning buzz: “The customers at Bath Farmers' Market are total legends! My regulars have become proper friends, really dear to my heart.”

“But the whole place is full of exceptional people, and produce to die for. Here you can buy the best cheese in the world, the largest selection of apple juice in the world – all kinds of everything good. Many folk still don't realise that the market offers really good value too; I do my weekly shop there for less than £35 for two of us, and we eat like kings!”

Indeed – it's wonderful to have one of our Food Heroes flying the flag for her fellow traders, let alone the gloriousness of the farmers' market in general.

But for the purposes of this story, we're putting the spotlight on Ms Rich herself – and once we pin her down to talking about her own indisputable

talents, she has plenty of tasty anecdotes to share.

“I'm proud to have grown up as part of a clan of foodies. My mum inspired me with her homemade bread, stocks, pies and cakes – she made sure I knew how to cook by the age of four.

“My dad is our wine and cheese wing man. On our many family holidays in France we sampled Beaujolais and Pinot Noir over a good local mountain cheese and discussed matches and provenance. My aunt is a massive inspiration to me too – everything she makes is food gold, all about generosity and enjoyment.

“Unsurprisingly, my husband is also a total foodie. Discussion in our house is always food-related, our holidays, social and family life – all food-focused.”

In Helen's world, good food is all about simplicity, quality ingredients and joie de vivre – she describes her idea of heaven as shopping in French markets and eating in a rustic auberge, preferably with the sound of live jazz floating on a soft breeze.

“British food has been through a renaissance in recent decades and is now exceptional, but I believe we can still look to France for inspiration, where the focus is on seasonal produce, local delicacies and respect for your ingredients,” she declares.

“Ever since I was little I've been obsessed with French pâté. My dad and I would go around the local butchers in French towns and try them all out together, but I was always gutted when we came home because supermarkets only stock what we call pâté Playdough in this country. So my pâtés are based on classic French incarnations, only

anglicised in terms of being gluten-free, with less liver and fat.

“I don't use any filler – just meat, vegetables, fruit and copious alcohol!”

Of the 45+ different recipes that Helen uses to stock her stall with sumptuous scrumptiousness on a weekly basis, her own favourites are the wood pigeon, truffle and pancetta, or rabbit, Armagnac and three-nut terrines and her chicken liver and white port parfait. But really, it'd be pretty much impossible to find a Rich Pickings dish that you couldn't become addicted to.

But as solid as her reputation and the busyness of her stall, Helen has development plans in the pipeline that further support and bolster her ethos as a champion of fellow local producers.

TASTY TREATS: main picture, one of Rich Pickings' terrines and opposite page, Helen Rich on her stall at Green Park Station, and far right, one of her French inspired chicken liver pâtés

Each bespoke hamper will be stocked with food and drink produced within a ten-mile radius of Bath city centre

This month, Helen will use her former experience in retail to launch her own hamper company, Taste of Bath. Each bespoke hamper will be stocked with food and drink produced with a ten-mile radius of Bath city centre, packaged in a small, medium or large English handcrafted apple crate, available for purchase online and delivered anywhere on mainland UK.

The research for the new service has been very thorough.

“I've been taste-testing prospective



always remain core to my business strategy. And when I'm running a multi-national hamper company, I'm still going to be serving at my stall in Bath Farmers' Market on a Saturday morning!"

PERFECT PÂTÉ, TERRIFIC TERRINES: HELEN'S TOP TIPS

You don't necessarily have to follow one recipe. If you read a handful of recipes, you'll see themes recurring . . . then you can get creative, this is meant to be fun. I find I produce much better results when I go with my gut instinct – a pâté artist, if you like!

- Blend all your salt, pepper, spices and fresh herbs/zests together in a spice/coffee blender – this gives real depth of flavour.
- Marinate everything overnight: the chunks of meat in rapeseed oil and alcohol; the fruit fillings in booze.
- Don't rush it; my terrines take six days to come together.
- Use a food processor to cut all the vegetables and herbs – this will speed up the process considerably but won't affect the outcome.
- For a really good finish, press for 48 hours – and trust me when I tell you that good things come to those who wait.

Helen Rich can be contacted, tel: 01225 683021 / 07813439572; web: www.taste-of.co.uk; Twitter @rich_pickings Bath Farmers' Market is at Green Park Station every Saturday from 9am-1.30pm; web: www.bathfarmersmarket.co.uk / www.greenparkstation.com

hamper ingredient suppliers for two years now and have personally selected produce from the finest local suppliers so that local people, local businesses and tourists can have easy access to all of it," Helen explains. But there's far more to this new business than first meets the eye.

"As a food producer myself, I know how hard distribution can be. You just can't be at every market, shop or deli flaunting your wares, and these days it can be difficult for customers to identify the authenticity of 'locally produced' claims. And anyway, not all customers have the time or money to go to each individual stockist; people want ease, and if they like certain

products they want to know where they can buy it again.

"My website offers links to my producers' websites, telling my customers where and how each product was made, and who made it. So my new business will serve as a platform for local producers to shine, develop and promote themselves too. My retail experience showed me how important it is to cherish and value suppliers, which many big businesses totally fail to do."

And when Helen says she's taking on the Fat Cats, she's thinking big. "When I expand my Taste of... hampers to other cities in the next few years, the ethos that I've outlined here will

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