

Accountants Can Cook

By

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Introduction

I have spent the first forty years of my life eating good food and drinking fine wines, ales and spirits; I fully intend to continue in the same vein over the next forty, or so, years. However, when I do finally “pop my clogs” I would like to be made into a pate which would be served at my wake. That way my friends will be able to relive the culinary experiences of my life. Should you not wish to wait that long, then may I suggest that you read on.

I suspect all of you can think of a particular dish that reminds you of a place, person or event in your life. Many will be recipes that you had as a child, and some will be dishes you have had on holiday. This collection is amassed from my experiences, and memories, both as a child and adult.

However, before continuing I would like to give you a little background on myself (even if it seems somewhat unremarkable) to date. This I hope, will give you a little more background flavour to the dishes I present; thereby adding the essential human element lacking in the idealised food pumped out on the television by celebrity chefs, many of whom run professional kitchens. I am neither a celebrity, nor professional chef; I am merely an accountant (a professional Internal Auditor to be precise) who enjoys food, and has taken the trouble to learn the basics.

Those of you unfamiliar with the world of internal audit may care to read the following:

- There is a table, on that table is a pint bottle, in that bottle is half a pint of milk.
- The optimistic businessman says that the bottle is half full.
- The pessimistic businessman says that the bottle is half empty.
- The internal auditor says that the milk is sour.

Here is a “brief” potted history of my career path; which inevitably has affected my life path.

- I was born in Croydon (a suburb of London) in 1962.
- I studied Economics and Accounting at Edinburgh University (1980-84) a splendid and enjoyable time, a lovely city; I even managed to gain an MA despite the distractions!
- I joined KPMG London (1984-1989), and qualified as a chartered accountant; hard work!
- I joined Philips Electronics UK (1989) as an Internal Audit Manager; travelling to many parts of the UK and Ireland, visiting factories, sales organisations etc and meeting a very broad cross section of people.
- In the mid 90’s my work took on a more international flavour, and I spent time in such places as Simi Valley, Salt Lake City, Darmstadt, Eindhoven and Seoul. Great fun (can an internal auditor have fun?) and most definitely life enhancing; I even popped up to the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) in Korea and stared at the North Koreans, as they stared back at me.

- In 1996 I moved to Stockholm (a wonderful city); to set up the Philips Nordic audit department. This gave me the opportunity to regularly travel, at the company's expense (why pay for something yourself when you can get someone else to; always better value that way!), to Norway, Finland, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Life enhancing experiences which I will not forget. During this time I met my partner (Eva).
- We moved to London in 2000, and I joined De Beers as Head of Audit (can you see a pattern forming here?) of their non mining operations. Yet more travel, at other peoples' expense, this time to Namibia, South Africa (I went down a diamond mine there), Russia and Switzerland.
- I left De Beers in 2001, and decided that the time was right to try my hand at writing. I have always enjoyed cooking (I started testing my "skills" in the kitchen when I was seven); and decided to compile a selection of my favourite recipes (approx 120), coupled with a travelogue of the places I have visited and experiences I have enjoyed (eg quaffing whisky with a colleague at 2:00AM under the stars in a game reserve near Windhoek; whilst the lions, and other assorted wildlife, roared and grunted in the background).

Hand in hand with the book, I have set up a website www.kenfrost.com "The Living Brand" (please pay a visit); which serves to stimulate the intellectual and gastric juices, as well as to entertain. The site contains:

- A sample of my recipes.
- Reviews of restaurants Eva and I have visited (we enjoy food!). This, unlike the numerous audit reports I have written, gives me the opportunity to use words such as "eclectic" and "medley".
- My opinions on topical issues of the day; such as corporate governance and how to avoid other Enron/Marconi/WorldCom scandals.
- Views of the News, a satirical slant on the headlines of the day from around the world.
- Other self indulgent trivia which may, or may not, entertain people.
- An interactive message board and chat room.

My career has, through the money I earned and locations I was working in, enabled me to have travelled extensively throughout the UK and abroad; enjoying (sometimes not enjoying) restaurants, hotels, culture and cuisine of the areas that I have visited and lived in.

Please read on, and taste my life.

Ken

Genesis

Since day one I have been ingesting nourishment; graduating from milk and mush, to solids. My mother felt that the tinned baby foods on offer should be supplemented with more natural products. She would on occasions buy a steak, cook it, and finely mince a portion of it for me to eat. An excellent start to my life of gastronomy!

I graduated from just eating to cooking, and have spent the last thirty two years or so cooking as well as eating; using my experiences from the world around me to recreate, or change, dishes I have eaten or I have read about. This book contains a selection of some of my favourite recipes, which I have developed over the years; as I progressed from child to adult.

The Captain's Table

My father was a captain in the merchant navy, and was often away at sea when I was a child; indeed he was at sea when I was born. He was notified of my birth by telegram, we still have a copy of that "historic" document, which states that I weighed in at over 9lbs. The position of captain did have its advantages, when I was three mum and myself accompanied dad on one of his voyages for six months. This took us around the Persian Gulf and down to Durban in South Africa. As a child, being on a ship made some overwhelming impressions on me. The smell of ship oil, the background throb of the engines and the gentle swaying motion all combined to make a lasting impression on me. On the subject of the swaying of the ship, my mother also can testify to that producing a special impression on her; regrettably she is prone to sea sickness and often suffered from this during our voyage.

The time spent on the ship marked my first experiences of eating in a restaurant, by definition we dined at the captain's table every day. Dining on the ship (which was not a holiday cruise ship) was a very special experience. Each meal was announced by a white uniformed steward who walked through the main deck of the ship chiming a glockenspiel; breakfast, lunch and dinner each had its own distinctive five note tune. Those of you who are familiar with the story of Pavlov's dogs, and how they were conditioned to salivate whenever they hear a bell, may witness the same condition with myself and a glockenspiel. The tables on board were very professionally laid; starched white table cloths, linen napkins, silver salt and pepper pots and a silver tablesized flag pole with the company flag. The service is professional silver service by white uniformed stewards. There are many restaurants that could do well to emulate the standards of cuisine, service and décor of ship's dining room. These early dining experiences have made an indelible impression on me, and I use these experiences as a benchmark when writing my restaurant reviews.

Fried Bloaters and Scrambled Eggs

Our family connection with the sea goes further back than my father, my grandfather also was an old "sea-dog". He ran away to sea in his early teens, joining the Royal Navy, and a few years later found himself involved in the First World war. He was wounded in 1915, and honourably discharged, after that he joined the merchant navy. With more than a little irritation he found himself, yet again, involved in another war 1939-1945. I understand from dad that on the day war was declared granddad returned home from the pub, a little worse for wear, with a lobster that he bought from a man he met in the pub. He then proceeded to attempt to cook the crustacean, naming one claw Mussolini and the other Hitler. Dad tells me that, owing to granddad's surfeit of alcohol, the cat ended up with most of the lobster.

When granddad reached seventy he moved in with us, and brought with him a few culinary techniques learnt at sea to the family kitchen. He had a particular fondness for a fish called a bloater, for those of you unfamiliar with this particular denizen of the deep I would simply say that it is not for the fainthearted. It is an oily and smelly fish; when granddad cooked it, flouring it and frying it in a shallow pan, the smell would engulfed the entire house. My mother would have to open the windows for a few hours afterwards to extricate the smell. However, our cat most certainly appreciated it and would go into a frenzy for a morsel or two from granddad's plate. On one particular occasion the cat was so over enthused by the prospect of bloater, that he jumped up on granddad's shoulder whilst he was cooking it to watch the process.

Another, more conventional dish that granddad was an expert on was scrambled eggs; made with vast quantities of butter. I can tell you with my hand on my heart, I have never since tasted any scrambled eggs quite as good as those. I have included my version of his recipe (see page 147), but I will confess that this recipe does not come up to his standards.

Granddad still had a souvenir from the First World war, namely some shrapnel floating around inside of him from a wound that he received when his ship (HMS Pegasus) was sunk. This caused him to suffer from dizzy spells and exacerbated his anaemia. The doctors prescribed that he needed to boost his iron levels, no problem food wise. Liver, being an excellent source of iron, was regularly on the menu (see page 229) together with other blood rich dishes such as black pudding and kidneys (see page 227). In addition to blood rich food, he also drank Mackesons a sweet stout; not totally dissimilar to Guinness, that was rich in iron. I would often share a small glass with him, by the way it is also very good for adding to stews.

The Budding Einstein

Some of you may feel that it seems somewhat incongruous that an accountant has such an interest in food and cooking. I would suggest that, experimentation with mixing and cooking ingredients has always been in my nature.

As a pre teen, when I was not messing about in the kitchen, I was either redesigning my model railway (ignoring the build "by rote" methodology of tried and tested track plans and diagrams, available in books and magazines), or messing around with my chemistry and electronics sets. These kits, quite properly, came with experiments and instructions designed to educate and prevent the young Einsteins of the sixties from blowing themselves up prematurely.

However, this particular Einstein ignored all instructions and mixed whatever came to hand; using the spirit burner from my chemistry set or electrodes from my electronics kit (plugged into the transformer of my Scalextric set), to produce some noxious gasses, and the occasional exploding test-tube.

I remember trying to reanimate a dead fly using the current from the Scalextric transformer. Psychologists are welcome to offer their opinions on the "sanity", or otherwise, of this behaviour. One notorious occasion I managed to blow the fuses on the first floor of our house, my father was highly impressed!

Therefore, is it not surprising that I am interested in cooking (this being a form of chemistry after all). Try not to be too alarmed; I have yet to poison anyone. However, my father might interject at this point; and remind me of the time he had a gastronomic "run in" with one of my creations.

I had seen a recipe on Blue Peter (a children's TV magazine programme) for bird cake; from memory this consisted of a large amount of melted fat mixed together with bird seed, poured into a pudding basin with a long piece of string. The idea being that when the mixture hardened, you would turn it out and hang it from a tree so that the birds would have something to eat.

I had put together this concoction and left it in the fridge. This being the same day that dad was due back from his ship. Mum and I left the house for a while, and came back to find dad had already arrived ahead of schedule. Dad and I share the same habit, namely that whenever we pass a fridge we are impelled with an overwhelming curiosity as to the contents of the fridge. Specifically we open the door, examine the contents and take a little nibble of anything that looks interesting. I don't think I need to explain further; except for the fact that whilst bird cake may be popular with birds, a slice of it does very little to inspire the human pallet. That should have taught dad not to nibble again, but it hasn't!

The Basics

Both my parents were supportive, and instructive, with regard to my cooking. I would help my father with the Sunday roast, learning the basics of basting, cooking and timing etc. Specifically I would, on occasions, be left in charge of preparing the Yorkshire pudding batter (see recipe 175). When dad was away at sea mum would let me loose, and trust me, to cook the occasional meal; basics such as lamb cutlets, stuffed baked potatoes and meringues (see pages 200, 270, 304). Poor mum became something of a "test rabbit" for my culinary experiments. The first official lesson in cooking, I remember, was my mum showing me how to fry an egg. Here is the method:

- Melt a good sized knob of lard, or dripping, in a frying pan over a medium heat.
- Break an egg into a cup.
- When the fat begins to smoke, tip the pan to one side so that the fat collects in the corner.
- Tip the cup and gently slip the egg into the fat.
- Baste with a spatula until cooked to your satisfaction, eg sunny side up.

You may well think that being taught how to fry an egg is a little unnecessary. However, many years later I was watching one of the Roux brothers being interviewed; he said that when interviewing trainee chefs he gives them a practical test; frying an egg! I don't know if the method I describe above would past muster with him, but the point is; show care and attention to detail in your cooking, and the results will pay dividends.

Aside from learning the basics of cooking; I was also fortunate to be given a good grounding by my dad as to what constitutes good quality meat, eg well hung beef (see recipe for roast beef page 175), proper layers of fat and "you get what you pay for". These lessons were enhanced by the fact that my parents were friends with a couple who owned a butchers in Egham (a village on the outskirts of London). I remember visiting the shop and being taken into the walk in refrigerator to be shown the hanging carcasses of pigs, lambs and beef. This may sound gruesome to those of you used to buying your meat in plastic wrapped boxes from the supermarkets. However, it gave me a good grounding in understanding the differences between the cuts, and quality, of meat on offer. The highlight of the butcher shop tour was naturally watching the sausage machine in operation, no I have never tried to make my own!

A Turkey is for Life, Not Just Christmas

Planning and preparation for Christmas tended to start early in the Frost household. Mum would start weighing and portioning the ingredients for the Christmas cakes, she made two one large one for us and a smaller one for her mother and brother, in September. The ingredients would be left for a couple of days to “rest”, before being mixed together and baked in lined cake tins. I would note that the act of lining the tins seemed to take more time, and trouble, than the actual mixing and cooking. Eva will attest to this, as she tried to follow mum’s step by step guide for lining the tins when she tried her hand at the recipe some years later; with the help of a Finnish friend it took them most of the night, and half a bottle of whisky). The oven was set at a very low heat, and the cooking time took about four hours. During the cooking process I was under strict instructions not to slam doors, jump about or in anyway cause minor earth tremors, as these would cause the cakes to sink.

The cooking process complete, the cakes would be turned out of their tins and allowed to cool overnight on wire racks. They would then be sealed in airtight tins, opened occasionally so as to be fed with brandy, until two weeks before Christmas. They were then covered in a thick layer of home-made marzipan, and iced, ready for the feeding frenzy that would follow.

Naturally, to compliment the cakes we had the usual Christmas fayre of turkey, giblet gravy, stuffing and boiled ham (see pages 218, 317, 159). The Christmas day meal would be attended by a varying assortment of relatives and family friends, sadly in some years dad was away at sea; it was always an extra special day if was able to make it home for the holiday.

Naturally, there was always a substantial quantity of turkey and ham left over. This would be used for sandwiches, cold cuts, turkey and ham pies and split pea soup (see page 148).

Curry in Manchester Docks

As a child my first experience of a “curry” was the version my mother used to make, using pre-cooked chicken and ready mixed curry pastes in jars. These were very enjoyable, especially when served with all the traditional British condiments such as; mango chutney, tomatoes, onions, coconut, sultanas and sliced bananas. However, these meals represented an “Anglicised” version of Asian cuisine; as far removed from the original as London is from Delhi. My first experience of the more genuine article came when I was ten years old. Dad was temporarily stationed in Manchester, so it was decided that mum and myself should go to visit him one week. This coincided with an invitation dad received to a cocktail party on board a ship, which was temporarily in dry dock, captained by one of his colleagues. So family Frost duly decamped, from the hotel that evening, to the dockyards for the party.

Very sensibly, in my opinion, it was recognised by all that a cocktail party may not be the most suitable event for a ten year old to attend; both from the adults’ and child’s perspective. Therefore, a rather clever solution was formulated. The party was to take place in the officers’ dining room; this was positioned at the top of a flight of stairs that, in addition to providing access to that particular deck, also opened onto a wider open area which acted as a viewing platform to the deck below. A table was laid for me at the top of the stairs, complete with mandatory starched white table cloth, linen napkins and company silver ware. This provided me with the opportunity to feel part of the event, as everyone going to the party or visiting the facilities had to walk past the table, but not be in the way.

A special curry (“the real Macoy”) was prepared for me by the chief steward, using ground spices such as chilli and ginger (no ready made pastes). I would point out that the majority of the ship’s, indeed most merchant naval vessels’, galley staff and stewards were employed directly from the Asian subcontinent. Therefore a merchant vessel’s dining room was one of the best places to sample Asian cuisine. I thoroughly enjoyed both the meal (succulent, aromatic, piquant and flavoursome) and the party; everyone stopped to talk to me, and mum and dad would regularly come out of the party to see that I was okay. The chief steward chatted with me and explained the basics of the dish, I have included a recipe that tries to capture the flavours of the dish (see page 236).

Family Holidays

As a child I would go on holiday with my parents to Mousehole (pronounced "mozel" by the locals), a fishing village near to Penzance in Cornwall. We would stay at the Lobster Pot, a charming hotel overlooking the harbour, run (at that time) by a retired major from the British army who had a penchant for taking a few G&T’s every evening in the bar. We would often encounter him at the end of the evening, having had an “elegant sufficiency” trying to open the front door to his house which was opposite to the hotel. The restaurant was superb, offering a symphony of local fish dishes together with an exceptional selection of meat and vegetables. My favourite dish was steak in pepper sauce (see page 322), which at my tender age then was the epitome of haute cuisine.

A Baked Potato a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

I have a particular for the baked potatoes, which arises from childhood. My mother used to make these quite often, especially with dishes such as baked beans and frankfurters (see page 190). When I had a cold she would wrap a potato up in aluminium foil, and put it in the hot coals of the central heating boiler to cook. The heat from the potato, and rich vitamin C content, would aid my recovery; not to mention the fact that it is a most excellent form of comfort food. I think it is true to say that what one is exposed to as a child, food wise, shapes your taste and culinary desires in your adult life. I would also say that bad food experiences as a child serve to put you off in adult life. My own particular pet hates being:

- Boiled fish, 3 miserable years at a catholic school; coupled with their most appalling catering and their obsession with forcing you to take a full plate, even if you did not want it. Then making you eat everything “did my appetite in”, for both boiled fish and organised religion.
- Spinach, despite the valiant efforts Popeye made to promote the brand, this always induces a retching feeling within my guts whenever I think of it.

My mother inadvertently almost put me off stuffed baked potatoes. One particular day when I was but a “wee lad” she was making cheese and bacon stuffed baked potatoes. As you can see from my recipes (see pages 270), one key step in the process is to cut the potatoes in two and scoop out the insides; for combination with the other ingredients. No problem with these steps. Potatoes were halved, and contents scooped. However, then a distraction occurred, I think the phone rang or something similar. Mum, having been distracted, came back to the kitchen and continued with the task in hand. However, following the good chef’s maxim of clearing up as you go along, she decided that the potato skins needed to be cleared away; and so put them out on the lawn for the birds to eat. She continued with her task of mashing the potatoes, cheese and bacon. The came the next important step, put the mixture back into the skins. OOPS!

She made a bolt for the lawn and managed to scare away some rather hungry (disappointed I would suspect) birds; rescuing the skins before they had been too badly pecked apart. I wasn't told of this little incident until I had eaten them. No ill effects, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. As you can see from the number of baked potato recipes I have included in this book, that did not put me off the baked spud!

Chips, Chips and Even More Chips

School catering no doubt stirs memories in many of you, be they pleasant or not so pleasant. In many respects my sympathies lie with the school cooks who laboured each day to provide nutritious, tasty and economical meals for several hundred pupils. However, there were times when the catering arrangements really did hit "rock bottom" in terms of quality, presentation and lack of imagination.

I attended three different schools during my pre university days; a primary school up until I was seven, a catholic school until I was eleven, then Dulwich (a public school) until I went to university. Each had their own unique catering "style", partly based on economics and partly based on other factors; such as religion in the case of the catholic school.

The primary school, providing food for five to seven year olds, generally churned out edible filling stodge; shepherds pie, sausages and stew. My only dislike, food wise, from that particular establishment was the boiled fish that would sometimes be served. This was bland, full of bones and served plain; to the taste buds of a six year old to be forced to eat every mouthful, as we were, was torture on a plate. This early experience with fish has, I am afraid to say, rather put me off this dish; yes I like smoked salmon, crab, mussels, prawns and lobster, but I have no great love affair with this amphibious creature.

Catering in the catholic school was, to put it delicately, truly abysmal. Dishes that by normal standards that should have been simple, wholesome and tasty, such as stew, were destroyed by the "professionals" working in the kitchens of that establishment. The stew that was slopped onto our plates consisted of two or three lumps of an inedible, chewy, tasteless meat-like substance; surrounded by a clear gelatinous liquid, speckled with grey flecks. To this day I have no idea how they managed to create such an abomination on a plate. I have put together a decent recipe for stew (see page 157), which should restore this normally respectable dish's good name. Their shepherds pie was a sloppy, unrecognisable mess that was unable to hold its form or dignity on the plate. I have enclosed a recipe for a more edifying, tasty and wholesome version of this dish (see page 230).

This being a catholic school, fish was the order of the day every Friday. I have mentioned how bad the fish at the primary school was; that was nothing in comparison with the sad, boiled, dry tasteless specimen served up by this place. Naturally, for reasons that have yet to be rationally explained, we were expected to eat every last spoonful of this muck and could not leave the table until having done so. One particularly gruesome Friday I endured an hour of masticating the hapless beast before my "food overseer" finally gave up and let me deposit the sad remains into the waste basket where it belonged. These experiences, I am afraid, further served to put me off fish. Additionally, coupled with the daily indoctrination of catechism, where you are told that you will burn in hell for your sins (not a healthy way to educate a seven year old) I was most certainly put off the catholic church for life. Some free advice to those of you thinking of sending your children to a catholic school, **DON'T!**

Dulwich catering was a distinct improvement on the previous two institutions. The food in my first two years there may not have been that imaginative, but it did at least resemble what it claimed to be. Additionally, we were generally able to choose how much or how little of meat, potatoes and vegetables we wanted; and if there were leftovers on the plate no one stood over us to finish them up. I say that, but on certain days there was a rather amusing “catch 22” exception. The dining room was overseen by different duty masters each day. Two of whom made an interesting double act in perverse logic. I shall save their blushes, and call one master “A” and the other “B”. Master A would stand at the serving counter and had an obsession with boiled cabbage, don’t ask me why. We being small boys had a natural aversion to boiled cabbage. Therefore, as we tried to reject the cabbage offered by our kind, and patient “dinner ladies”, he would insist it be piled on the plate. Needless to say we did not eat it, and so at the end of the meal it was unceremoniously thrown into the waste bucket. This of course sparked master B into action; he, quite correctly, abhorred waste (see my recipe of bubble and squeak for a waste avoiding page 245) and would lecture us at the end of each meal that we should not throw food away:

“Gentlemen, if you don’t want the food then don’t take it”

Quite, but please tell that to master A.

Another peculiarity, well for a British school anyway, was that for the first two years I was at Dulwich they never once served chips; boiled potatoes, mashed potatoes, rice but no chips. At our age we were very disappointed by this lack of imagination from our catering staff. However, things were to change, one day in my third year there we were trooping into the dining room and the smell that greeted us said one thing “Chips!”. The whisper spread along the lunch queue as fast as a ripple on a quilt being flicked taut. Our mouths salivated like Pavlov’s dogs (I am reminded of a quote, from I believe Dr Johnston, “*A small boy in search of vitals is an abomination*”); we were greeted by the sight of vast trays of chunky, succulent British (not American fries) chips. We gorged ourselves into a stupor, like the beadle in Oliver Twist’s orphanage. Not only could we take one helping, we could take two and then three! Christmas truly had arrived early. Everyone recognised this to be a success, from the smallest boy to the most senior master and catering lady. Each day for the rest of the week, chips were served; quite a turnaround. I have included my recipe for chips (see page 247).

The catering revolution did not stop there. In my fifth year at Dulwich the principle of democratic catering was tried out. We the pupils were given a vote as to whether to continue with the one full meal (meat and two veg.), no choice policy, or adopt a more cafeteria style approach. Namely, hamburgers, hotdogs, chips and salads would be offered; the pupils would pick what they wanted and serve themselves. Can you guess dear readers how a school of 1400 boys voted? Cafeteria style all the way, naturally!

There is one additional Dulwich dining experience that I should mention, namely the obligatory monthly lunch for selected prefects at “top table” with The Master (this is how Dulwich referred to the Headmaster). A handful of those pupils aged sixteen and above were selected by the masters each year; by a process of random chance, reading the entrails of chickens and other mysterious processes to serve as prefects. This gave the lucky few, of which I was one, certain privileges such as; a common room, free lunch and the right to wear a different colour tie (how about that for status!). However, with rank comes responsibility, prefects were assigned certain duties such as; controlling the lunch queue (a process more akin to lion taming than civilised crowd management), monitoring the school buildings during lunch break, other sundry disciplinary duties and attending, by rota, lunch for a week with The Master.

The latter duty required you to assemble, with four other prefects, outside The Master's office at 12:45pm on Monday; where he would invite you in for sherry. We would then troop off to the dining room; where instead of sitting on the ordinary benches, with the rest of the school, we would sit at the far end of the room on a raised platform at a special table. This was specially laid for the senior masters, the junior masters had to eat with the rest, and any visiting guests. The food was exactly the same, expect that it was served from a special serving trolley on wheels that was placed at the side of the table. This proved to be useful training in mastering the etiquette of talking trivia with people you hardly knew; much like the many business meals I have attended, except for the lack of alcohol.

“Ken That sauce Looks Like Semen”

Cooking is not at all plain sailing, there have been numerous occasions when the outcome of my labours did not turn out as expected, resulting in culinary cock ups. I submit the following examples, taken from my personal hall of shame:

- As a young lad I used to be reasonably adept at making a Victoria sandwich, a two part sponge cake sandwiched together with jam and cream. The mixture of eggs, flour, butter and sugar was straightforward; all that was then required was 25 minutes or so in an oven and voila! However, on one occasion (maybe the butter was too cold) a light fluffy sponge did not emerge; instead two hard biscuit like objects frying in butter (which had separated from the mixture) were retrieved from the oven. The birds had a feast that day!
- When at university I would, if I could borrow someone's kitchen, turn my hand to the occasional dinner for my ever hungry chums. One particular occasion I made chicken with lemon and oregano (see page 162). However, I did not measured the flour and butter properly (an excess of alcohol before, and during, the cooking process had deadened my culinary skills). The result a sauce that had an unfortunate texture and appearance; as one of my friends put it so succinctly “the sauce looks like semen Ken”. We still ate it nonetheless.
- On another evening, at the same person's house, I was cooking roast beef with all the trimmings (see page 175). Ten minutes after putting on some carrots I noticed a strange smell, rather like burning. I looked at the meat and at the potatoes in the oven, no problem there. I puzzled about this for the next few minutes. I then realised where the smell was coming from, a plastic clockwork egg timer was sitting too closely to the carrot pot and off course melted. I bought a replacement for my host's mother, who owned the kitchen and egg timer, the next day.
- On one occasion I had invited half a dozen people round for dinner (7:30pm for 8:00pm). However, a variety of distractions caused some delay in my normally well timed schedule. My girlfriend, of the day was late and needed to be picked up form the station. Preparation of the ingredients was delayed by discussion, drinking, canoodleing in the kitchen, guests arriving etc. We finally sat down, having averted a near riot by sending out for more booze, at 11:00pm. Not my finest hour!

There are other mishaps and tales of woe, but I won't bore you with them. The point I am trying to get across is that cooking does not always turn out like the well lit, perfectly presented pages of a professional chef's recipe book. No matter, the important thing is that you should enjoy it. Put these little mishaps down to experience.

Edinburgh UK

Edinburgh, capital of Scotland, is known as the Athens of the North. As well as being the capital city housing shops, restaurants, hotels, the Scottish parliament and all the other infrastructure associated with a city of just under half a million people; it is also home to one of Scotland's finest universities (my Alma Mater as it happens).

Edinburgh overflows with history both architecturally, in places such as the castle which dominates the skyline, and by association with people such as; John Knox, Adam Smith, Mary Queen of Scots, Burke and Hare and Robert Louis Stevenson.

The city is home to the internationally renowned Edinburgh festival, which is held for three weeks every August. During this time the city hosts an array of artistic, cultural and literary events ranging from street theatre, stand up comedy to theatrical productions and musical recitals; performed by the famous and not so famous. It is also home to the world's largest street party held to celebrate New Year (Hogmanay), Eva and I witnessed the 2002 celebrations in The Tower restaurant, to read about our evening visit the restaurant review section of my website www.kenfrost.com.

Should the cultural events prove too much then there are many places to visit such as the castle, the Britannia (the ex Royal Yacht), Holyrood palace, John Knox's House etc etc. It would of course be very remiss of me not to mention the staggering choice of pubs, and restaurants that abound within the city.

The Mansion House Gang

I spent four happy years at university, both studying and living in Edinburgh. My first year's accommodation was based in Leith, near the docks, staying at a bed and breakfast run by a married couple (George and Fiona). During the summer season they took in tourists; during term time, when the tourists were in short supply, they supplemented their income by taking in six male students. That was very brave of them, in my opinion. However, it was a good way to start university; we got to know each other and "mucked in together" as a pseudo oversized family.

However, one year of living the eighties equivalent of the Waltons was enough for growing lads; and at the end of the first year we all set our minds to finding alternative styles of accommodation for the future. Edinburgh is a large city, with a large student and resident town population; all competing for a limited supply of accommodation. The task was not easy; I spent most of the summer months based back home in Croydon trying to find suitable accommodation for myself, and three other friends, who had decided to throw their lot in together. Come to think of it why was I the one left to do the donkey work? They told me that it was because I was the most suited to organise things, ie I could organise a "piss up in a brewery", and strike a good deal; quite so.

Lady luck smiled upon us, in the final few weeks of the summer vacation I secured accommodation for us in a place in Duddingston called the Mansion House Hotel. Now this really was a find. The Mansion House, as the name suggested, was a large mansion situated in beautiful wooded grounds adjacent to Duddingston golf course and Duddingston Loch. The house was owned by a descendant of the British Prime Minister Gladstone; and was being run as a hotel; catering mainly for tourist parties who visited Edinburgh during the summer months. Naturally, just as with the bed and breakfast in Leith, the owners needed to supplement their income during the lean non tourist season; students were an ideal solution.

The main house itself had, much like an ageing dowager, seen better days and was past its prime. However, the owner, his wife and their boxer dog Zak (a lumbering, wheezing, gentle giant of a beast who had a habit of running into your room should you leave the door open) did their utmost to keep it in as best a state of repair as could be afforded. The accommodations were varied to say the least:

- The main building, had an imposing Georgian style façade; as you mounted the steps going to the front door your expectations were high. Opening the door you were greeted by the entrance hall and main staircase leading to some bedrooms upstairs. Dotted around the entrance hall were tables and chairs, painted in faded gold; in one corner was an aged space invaders table top video game. The carpets had seen better days, but were not threadbare.
- On the right of the entrance hall was a small bar and separate snooker room; these most excellent facilities were used by us and by members of the Duddingston Social Club. This was a pleasant group of local people who would come across most evenings, and at the weekends brings their wives, to have a drink and play snooker. Their social secretary who was also the head lavatory attendant at Waverley railway station, seemed to be in a perpetual state of inebriation. We spent three years at the Mansion House, and despite bumping into this gentleman regularly, he never seemed to know who we were.
- On the left of the entrance hall was a door that led to the television room; containing, yes, an elderly television and some chairs.
- Moving through the entrance hall took you into a corridor, to the left of which was the entrance to the ballroom. This, as the name suggests, was a very large room set out with tables and chairs; together with a raised platform on which was set up an electric organ and a drum kit. In the mornings the ballroom was used as the breakfast area where the guests and students would be served a good quality fry up; bacon, eggs, tomatoes etc. At the weekends the ballroom was used in the evening by the social club. The organ was warmed up and the drum-kit dusted down, then the party started. Pop songs from the fifties through to the hits of the day were belted out with gusto; whilst the members of the club went backwards and forwards with trays of drink from the bar to quench their thirst, and to give them the energy for the dancing that went on to the “wee small hours”. The favourite song of the “band” was the Birdie Song, to this day whenever I hear that “classic” I think back with fondness to my time at the Mansion House.
- Moving from the ballroom, further down the corridor, took you to the ground floor annex to the main house. This had been added on during the war to accommodate part of the Polish army. Indeed the house had a connection with one of the main events of the war, namely the signing of the surrender of the German troops occupying Norway took place there; I have no idea why! This annex acted as a motel, and held (sorry echoes of the war there) I mean accommodated the students and itinerant salesmen who would pass through on their lonely journeys; as they plied their wares and services throughout Scotland. We each had a room, that by student standards was pretty decent; each had a double bed, an ensuite bathroom (one of my friend’s bathroom had a mural of a South sea island, palm trees and parrot wearing spectacles painted on the wall), a desk, a chair, ample cupboards and two doors one into the corridor and the other to the car park outside. Absolutely splendid for us! The walls were a little thin though, and my neighbour, a student from Heriott Watt used to “bang” his girlfriend in there to the hit “Gold” by Spandau Ballet; another song that now brings back memories! On good nights, for him anyway, he would play this song six or more times.

- The motel annex also contained a tiny kitchen with a two ring stove. My friends and I can attest to the fact that although it may not have looked much, and indeed there were frequent visitations by one of the numerous field mice who inhabited the woodland and countryside outside, I prepared on occasions some culinary miracles there involving the stove and a friend's sandwich toaster improvised as a steak griddle.
- The main part of the house also contained a large, professional, kitchen where the breakfasts were prepared. The owner very kindly allowed us to use this on occasions when we were hosting parties for a few of our friends. Given our limited funds, and the number of people who would come, I tended to prepare vast batches of stuffed baked potatoes as the main staple (see pages 251, 270). On one occasion we ended up with a surplus, so I distributed them to the customers in the bar; a gesture that was appreciated.

The first year there was such a success, that myself and friends stayed on for the remainder of our time as students; indeed such was the fame of the place that a few others joined us in the remaining years.

A few years after leaving Edinburgh I returned to look the place up again, but was saddened to see that it had been sold and developed into apartments; plus ca change!

Sleep Driving

During my first two years at university commuting between London and Edinburgh was accomplished by train, which would take about six hours from London Kings Cross. These trips were usually rather jolly affairs. A group of us would block book our seats so that we could sit together, exchange banter and, more importantly, share the bottles of gin and other refreshments that we took on board with us. Gin certainly is one way to get you through a train journey of that length. Indeed given the deterioration in the railway network, and service provided, that has occurred over the last twenty years; I would suggest that it is now de rigour on even "short" journeys, to partake of the odd "tincture" or two when contemplating rail travel.

However, after two years of train travel I decided that it would be a good idea to drive there. This would give me use of my car whilst in Edinburgh, a status symbol for any student. Therefore a couple of the Mansion House gang and myself duly set out one morning in my pride and joy, a dark blue Ford Escort. We decided to split the journey over two days, and stop over at a rather pleasant hotel in Boroughbridge (a village in Northern England) called The Three Arrows.

I would point out that although I had been driving since I was seventeen, I had never driven long distances; ie made a non stop journey of more than two hours. I didn't think that this would be a problem, what nineteen year old male with his own car ever thinks that his driving skills and abilities are less than perfect?

The journey started well, we crossed London and were soon heading North. The atmosphere in the car was jolly, and the radio was playing the hits of the day. We were making good time, and stopped off briefly for a refreshment break at one of the service stations on the way. I decided, with the full agreement of my friends I would like to point out, that we could make the next leg of the journey to the hotel without any further stops. Big mistake, as the police and road organisations always advise you; when driving long distances always take breaks every couple of hours to make sure that you are mentally alert at the wheel. We thundered down the road, exceeding the speed limit of 70mph by a “tad”. The road was free of traffic and the weather was fine; how very relaxing! My friends had dozed off, I changed channels on the radio and tuned into one of the UK’s longest running radio soaps. The next thing of course was that I too dozed off. Now picture the scene, a car travelling I excess of 70mph containing three occupants all fast asleep; sounds good doesn’t it? At this stage the car, we surmise, began to veer off course. One of my friends, who was sitting in the back, woke up at this stage and prodded me; just in time for me to see that we were now driving at full throttle, on the grass verge, towards a signpost. I pulled the wheel sharply to the right, the car swung out back into the road, but the speed of the manoeuvre caused the rear of the car to collide with the signpost. This was far better for our health and safety than had I driven into it headlong.

I pulled the car into the verge, and got out to inspect the damage. The rear bumper had been wrenched asunder, the rear left hand tail lights were smashed in and not surprisingly there was a large dent in the side of my car. The sign post still stood, albeit now doing its own impersonation of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It is fair to say that we were slightly shocked, and surprised, by the this accident. However, with stiff upper lips and a resolve to get to the hotel we continued our journey. The car was functioning, albeit without the rear left hand indicator; hand signals were the order of the day.

The Hiccup Attack from Hell

We arrived, much like James Bond’s martini’s, shaken not stirred at the hotel. A restored country house with good comfortable bedrooms, a large pleasant lounge and good quality restaurant and bar. I forget which one of us first used the classic phrase “I need a drink”, but it is fair to say that we were all thinking the same.

We dropped our bags into our rooms, and converged on the bar to discuss the day’s events. It was agreed that, much like a third world dictatorship, there would be a news blackout about this. Most especially as we did not want our respective parents to find out about it. After all, apart from nearly writing the car off, three of Edinburgh’s’ finest almost shuffled off their mortal coils a few years earlier than planned!

We had a few more drinks then decided a good meal would be the order of the day. We ambled into the restaurant and ordered. The restaurant had a particular speciality, namely Yorkshire pudding and onion gravy, served as an appetiser; it was excellent. Now at this point I would say that shock manifests itself in many forms; some people start to cry, others laugh or faint it depends on the person and the level of shock. My shock set in during the meal, at this point I developed the world’s most aggressive and noisy attack of hiccups. This went on for the remainder of the meal; nothing and believe me I tried, water, holding my breath a brown paper bag etc etc, would staunch the attack. They were in fact so loud that everyone else in the restaurant could not but help to hear them In fact various diners even started to imitate them. My humiliation for the day was complete, my driving skills were proven wanting and my dining “karma” ruined. We finished our meal, and I went to bed. The hiccups reused to abate; I slept fitfully and, at about 2.00am, had to get up to throw up. That did at least cure the hiccups.

I told my friends about this the next morning, it seems that their night's sleep was no better. One of them kept waking up, and the other was so restless that he got up at 4.00am and wandered around the village.

By the way, I finally plucked up the courage to tell my parents about this some ten years later; they took it quite well, considering.

The Big Eat

Whilst studying at Edinburgh I and my compatriots were of an age, between 17 and 21, when our appetites were at their peak. It is fair to say that if I were to eat the quantities now, that I ate then, I would resemble a large barrage balloon. Given the fact that we were constantly replenishing our energy levels with bulk supplies of carbohydrates, proteins and sugars; we were always on the look out for places that supplied these in ample quantities and, being students, at reasonable (ie cheap) prices.

A good starting point were the numerous cafeterias, bars and restaurants located in the various Union buildings of the university. My particular favourites were:

- Teviot Row, a Victorian gothic building which resembled a small castle. This had a number of facilities designed to sate the appetite of the ravenous body of students that piled through its doors every day:
 - A large cafeteria, we rather cruelly nicknamed this the “vomitorium”, which served a variety of dishes each day such as; chicken, bacon, chips, curries, pies, stews etc. My favourite bulk repast from the cafeteria was roasted chicken served with fried eggs, carrots and chips; don't turn your nose up at this combination, the egg after all is related to the chicken, try it out it is actually very good!
 - The Park Room, nicknamed the dark room, which was a dimly lit black painted disco bar where at lunchtime you could indulge in the very healthy house speciality of chip butties; chips placed between two heavily buttered slices of bread, oozing fat and goodness! Should you feel that this sounds unhealthy; I would remind you that Scotland is the home of the deep fried Mars bar. Whilst enjoying this fine repast (chip butty that is) you would be entertained by a selection of musical hits, old and new, played by the resident DJ.
 - The Sportsman's Bar, so called because it had a pool table and several pin ball and video games in it. This served pies and pints, a marvellous way to idle away an afternoon.
 - The Teviot Bar, a beautiful old fashioned bar that resembled a Victorian pub. At lunchtimes they would set up a salad bar that had a full array of cold meats, salads and pate. In the evening a roast joint, vegetables and soup would be on offer. This being student land, all food was at a subsidised price; therefore the roast was affordable. There was a particularly “student” type incident involving this joint one evening, when a student from Dundee attempted to steal it by picking it up and running out the bar with it. Well it was very hot, and so his grasp was not altogether that firm. One quick witted member of staff did a particularly fine rugby tackle which brought the Dundee joint thief to the ground, the joint having its own momentum slipped out of his hands and shot across the marble floor. No problem it was picked up, dusted down and put in the next day's curry. No food was ever wasted at Teviot!

- The waitress service dining room, this was open lunchtimes during the week; and was set up as a professional restaurant with tables covered in starched linen cloths and inhabited by waitresses, ladies of certain age who had retired from the many tea rooms of Edinburgh, wearing old fashioned black uniforms with white aprons. One dear lady, who was a very charming souls, had (due to age) a hand tremor. This was no handicap to her job when dealing with the majority of tasks. However, you as a customer tended to take your life in your hands if you ordered soup and bread (bread came at 5p extra). She would bring both together, it was generally a toss up as to whether the soup or the bread tipped over. One day the bread went on the floor, no problem it was deftly picked up dusted on her apron and put back on the plate. Food was never wasted in Teviot! The dining room offered a good a la carte menu with dishes ranging from Cambridge steak (hash browns to you and I) to entrecote steak with herb butter. They even had a wine list, where else could you get half a bottle of wine for £1.25?
- The middle reading room, this was a room annexed to the waitress service restaurant which was available for private dinners and lunches. The Conservative Association, of which I was a member, held regular lunches there every Monday. In addition, we would hold a dinner in there once a term.

Teviot came into its own on the night of the annual Presidents' Ball, which was held each November and was the highpoint of the student calendar. The entire building was given over to accommodating 400 students, and dignitaries including on occasions the Duke of Edinburgh, in black tie. The ball started at 8:00pm and finished at around 4:00am. During this time the guests would be entertained in the function rooms and dining rooms of Teviot by a variety of acts ranging from; discos, jazz bands, ceilidh bands, rock groups, hypnotists and magicians. The kitchens excelled themselves on these occasions and offered a sumptuous all night buffet, served in the ornately decorated cafeteria, consisting of amongst others; pate, duck breasts, glazed lamb, roast beef, gigot of pork, eggs mayonnaise, Waldorf salad, green salad, croquette potatoes, sandwiches, sherry trifle and gateaux (hungry?).

Basically, Teviot served good quality food which covered all tastes. Additionally, everyone who worked in the building had a real pride and affinity for the place. To us students it felt more like a home than a commercial enterprise.

- The Potterow, now named the Nelson Mandela centre (not that I am aware that this noble gentleman ever visited it). This was a modern complex of buildings housing, under a glass dome; a café, bar, social centre and various administrative offices of the students' Union. The café with its wooden slatted booths served omelettes, chips, scotch pies (minced lamb in a thin water based pastry, very greasy and very good) and baked potatoes. I would like to note, for the record, that on one particularly cold evening I consumed six scotch pies and chips. I would have had a seventh but the stocks had run out. The lady in charge of the café, Betty, was duly impressed with my trencherman approach to her cooking.

However, our dining experiences were not confined to the university, we often ventured to the many restaurants and eateries that Edinburgh had to offer. Bearing in mind our search for bulk and value; we concentrated on the local carveries located in the main hotels such as the George and Carlton, the numerous chip shops and a Stakis steak house. The latter offered a good value three course meal, including steak, which would satiate our appetites.

However, with regard to the chip shops, three deserve special mention:

- The City Restaurant, which offered a full mixed grill which could be devoured in their seating area.
- Risi's, known by all as "greasy Risi's", which offered the full range of chip shop fayre ranging from; fish, haggis, pizza, scotch pies to Mars bars. All these delicacies could be served with, or without, batter. Should you opt for the latter, the item would be dropped into a large bucket of Risi's finest home-made batter (a flour and water mixture) that was kept on the floor. The battered article would then be fished out and dropped into the hot oil to be cooked for a few minutes until crisp and greasy. I would venture to remind you that Scotland has one of the highest rates of cardiac disease in the Western world. That being said this was a most excellent place to visit on a cold night after a few pints.
- The Dundas Street Golden Sea, should you wish to experience the haute cuisine of chip shops; then this was the place to visit. My chums and I who lived in Duddingston, a village – pub and two shops actually- situated at the base of Arthur's Seat (the volcanic mound that dominated the Edinburgh skyline), would make a regular Sunday evening journey there to pick up our Sunday suppers. This establishment offered far more than just the normal fish and pizza combinations. Delicacies such as deep fried mushrooms, cauliflower, squid, shark and spicy chicken (see 151) were all in abundance; all freshly cooked, in my opinion the best you could find anywhere. We returned home, and washed the feast down with a few pints; what better way to gird our loins for the coming week ahead?

I had a particular fondness for the carveries. After all where else could you for a set price, in those days of less than £5, be offered a three course meal; the main course being a roast joint, of which you could eat as much of as you wanted? The head waiter of the Carlton (this fine hotel has now sadly gone decidedly up market, and no longer offers carveries) once affectionately remarked to us that he would often tell his staff:

"You have to see these people eat to believe it"

My personal "best" for carvery consumption came after taking one of my finals in 1984. The finals, on which my degree depended, consisted of seven or so three hour papers spread over three weeks. My chums and I therefore took the opportunity after each paper to visit, alternatively, the carveries in the George (which still operates) and in the Carlton; in order to restock our energy levels, so depleted after the mental stresses of the exam, before setting out to revise for the next paper in the coming days. It was one evening in the George that I managed to eat seven, yes ladies and gentlemen seven, helpings of the main course. I alternated between beef, pork and lamb; I was of course careful to keep the vegetable input relatively low so as not to bloat myself. I remember that the chef carving the joint, after my sixth visit to the carving table, whispered a few words to the head waiter and pointed a few times in our direction. However, to give the George credit, they did not make any comment to us or hinder my seventh and final visit to the carving table. Now that's eating! Please don't be alarmed I do not, and most certainly cannot, repeat this feat now. Youth brings with it special powers that unfortunately age saps! By the way, for the record, I did actually get a degree (an upper second in economics and accounting).

Ken Fell Down and Broke His Crown

One rainy evening three of us were in a local chip shop (The City Restaurant) enjoying a “blow out” fry up, eggs, bacon, sausages, steak, beans, black pudding, lamb chop and chips; it makes my mouth water just writing this down. Stomachs filled we were returning to Teviot across a car park (at quite some speed to get out of the rain) for a pint when I, for reasons that escape me, managed to trip over a chain link fence which was less than one foot off the ground. I have never had any discernible athletic skills, and therefore have never been surprised at my inability to leap hurdles or the high jump. However, one foot off the ground I think even I should have been able to clear without a problem. At this point, since everyone asked me later about it, I should point out I had not been drinking and therefore cannot offer that as an excuse for my appalling co-ordination. Such was my speed at approaching the fence, that when my foot got tangled in it the top part of my body carried forward and went from 90 degrees perpendicular to 0 degrees horizontal in a matter of seconds. Fortunately the force of the impact on the pavement was broken by my head, which hit the ground first; thereby preventing the rest of my body getting bruised or damaged!

“Bloody hell!, who put the lights out?”

Dazed and confused I decided to lay on the ground for a bit, my friends rushed to my aid and picked me up. I was, by all accounts, insisting that I would prefer to lay on the ground for a bit; very wisely my friends dragged my damaged corpse back to the sanctuary of Teviot. We were met in the entrance by a very concerned member of staff who knew us well. She took us into the office and arranged for someone to take me to hospital, you see blood was pouring from an open wound on my forehead. Meanwhile she offered my friends a very large sherry each for their stress, I was offered a cup of tea (apparently it was thought that given the general loss of blood etc it may not be wise feeding me alcohol).

Transportation duly arrived, and very kindly I was driven to hospital by one of the university servitors (ex service men who acted as caretakers, bouncers and policemen all rolled into one). I had the usual round of x rays and hand eye co-ordination tests. I was given a few stitches and asked how the accident happened, of course no one believed it and so an incident sheet was filled in (just in case I had been involved in a fight or other misdeeds). As a final precaution, it was decided that I should be given a tetanus jab; I was given the choice of having it in the arm or in my rump. Having a total needle phobia, the guarantee that I could never become a drug addict, I opted for the rump; out of sight out of mind. The nurse went away to get the needle and I prepared myself. At this point I should say that the knock on the head had produced the same effect as having a few drinks, ie I was not “firing on all cylinders”. You and I both know that an injection in the rump requires just a small amount of flesh to be exposed for a couple of seconds. However, that evening my reasoning had deserted me and I decided it was necessary to provide an ample target area for the needle. Therefore, all clothes were removed; naked as nature intended! The nurse returned to see the Ken Frost in all his glory; she looked a little surprised for a nano second then burst out laughing. I would like to say at this point that I had suffered a form of shock, and that it was a very cold evening!

Don't Be Silly Be a Smarty, Come and Join the Tory Party

During my time at university I held, for a couple of years, the noble office of Social Secretary of the University Conservative Association. This meant I organised parties, and dinners; the most rational reason for anyone of the age of 18 to belong to a political association. The parties would generally take place in one of Edinburgh's numerous bars/discos which (if you brought enough people) would waive the hire charge. Catering would be provided on site and be standard buffet fayre eg: baked potatoes, chicken, ham salads etc; filling, cheerful and cheap. The dinners, by their very nature, would require more attention. The choice of venue would either be one of the City hotels' function rooms, or a function room within Teviot Row.

No Rubber Chickens

When acting as Social Secretary, having decided on whether a guest speaker would be invited and roughly when the event would be, I would tour the hotels meeting the various catering managers and review their menus and facilities. The key issue being price per ticket; I knew that the market (the students to whom we would be "flogging" the tickets) would not pay more than £10 per ticket. This price therefore had to cover all costs; dinner, venue, guest's meal, publicity and also have a profit element. Our choices of menu were therefore quite limited. Variations on the following tended to be the order of the day: chicken supreme, pork in a mushroom sauce or beef bourguignon. However, dinners would usually consist of either chicken in cream sauce (see page 160) or the rather more adventurous Tournedos Rossini (see pepper sauce page 322). In effect the food costs were kept down, as bulk purchasing and the use of liberal quantities of sauce kept the unit costs down. MP's tend to refer to these events, rather aptly in my opinion, as the "rubber chicken circuit". However, we did what we could to make the dinners as memorable and successful as possible, within the budget constraints, often selling between 40-60 tickets.

One particular dinner our guest, who is no longer an MP, clearly got into the spirit of things and gave quite a rousing speech praising our university association as having far more life than others he had been to (thunderous applause!). He went on to say that he wanted to see more women involved in politics at a senior level (this was after all the era of Prime Minister Thatcher). This he said involved the grass routes, and that he wanted to "see more women on the streets". I am not sure as to whether that phrase had been carefully scripted or was just off the cuff, but at this point one of our more inebriated guests very loudly shouted "hear, hear" thumping the table; people "fell about" and a prolonged period of vigorous table thumping then occurred. I would personally say that was one of the best dinners, certainly in terms of atmosphere, that we had organised. The partying went on long after dinner and a group of us, including our guest MP, went back to a friend's house for more drinks. I recall staggering back home in the wee small hours of dawn (7.00 am I think) on a bus in my dinner suit, getting some very strange looks from the people on the bus. In fact, for reasons that escape me, I believe that I slept on the kitchen floor for a couple of hours during that evening. I repeat, I did get a degree!

Flying Melba

The mixture of people attending the Association dinners always ensured that they were lively and enjoyable affairs. Some came to listen earnestly to the speeches, whilst others came to have a bloody good dinner (and the odd drink or two!). I would make it clear from the outset that I fell firmly into the latter.

With regard to these events they could turn out to be boisterous, when the dinner had no guest speaker people tended to let their hair down a little further. These non speaker events included the obligatory bread roll throwing. Yes, I know, totally juvenile and reprehensible. But so long as no collateral damage was done relatively harmless. I did witness one event where having run out of bread rolls a peach melba winged its way past me generously covering the dinner suit of a fellow diner, definitely a “no no”! In fact at that particular dinner one of my friends had had “an elegant sufficiency”, he briefly left the room to find the gents’. On his return I noticed, as it was indeed difficult not to, that he was limping rather heavily. I asked what was wrong, he said he had attempted to jump the last few stairs and of course had lost his footing. He left early that evening as the leg was rather painful. We saw him the next day hobbling around on crutches, with his foot in plaster. It turned out that he had succeeded in breaking his foot. I recommend that for all you attending such events in the future you take out sufficient insurance cover.

London UK

London, the capital of the United Kingdom, was established in 43AD by the Romans and is now the largest city in Europe; with a population of seven million inhabiting over 600 square miles. The city is divided into 32 distinctive boroughs such as; Westminster home to parliament, Soho renowned for its night-clubs restaurants and bars and the East End home of Jack The Ripper and The Krays.

Despite being blitzed by the Nazis during the Second World War, London is “stuffed to the gunnels” with historical buildings and architecture ranging from; Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, The Tower of London, Tower Bridge, St Paul’s Cathedral to The London Eye. Culture vultures can find stimulation in the numerous art galleries, museums and theatres such as; Covent Garden, Drury Lane, The National gallery and the British Museum to name but a few. Should the surfeit of culture wear you down there are numerous parks, pubs and restaurants to reinvigorate the flagging spirit.

The restaurant review section of my website www.kenfrost.com contains reviews of some of our favourite London restaurants.

An Orgy at the Coconut Grove

My four years studying at University, whilst giving me the self discipline to study in an unstructured (ie not the set routine of my school days) environment; did not prepare me for the sheer drudgery, tedium and grind of studying to be a Chartered Accountant whilst working for KPMG London. The contrast between university life and working life could not be more apparent; I found working life to be a reversion to my school days. Namely, getting up each day at the same time in order to attend the rigid “nine to five” sweatshop took the freedom which I had enjoyed at university away; by removing my control over my day. Although, when you were auditing a company’s books at their year end you would end up working long after five. Coupled with the day job was the requirement to study, long into the evening; cramming my head with uninteresting technical details about debits, credits and financial reporting requirements. I fully understood why people thought that accountants were boring, the subject matter is as dry as the Martian landscape.

I was not alone in feeling this way and, in the hot house atmosphere of work and studying, friendships and bonds were made with like minded individuals who desired to escape the tedium. We did what any other twenty something’s living in London would do, we partied hard. London in the early eighties was a fun place to be; transport still worked reasonably effectively and new restaurants, night-clubs and trendy bars were regularly opening up. It did not take myself and my friends long to find a few places that would become our regular haunts over the coming few years of indentured servitude.

One of our favourite restaurants, that we would often go to after work, was the Coconut Grove (now sadly closed) located just off Bond Street. This was a lively, trendy restaurant and bar; decorated in the manner of a set from the then popular TV detective series Miami Vice. The restaurant was set on two floors, the ground and the basement. The best area was the basement where the music was loud, and the atmosphere buzzing. We tended to go there in groups of ten or so, this gave us the opportunity to indulge in the house speciality “The Orgy”. This consisted of a large platter of roasted cuts of pork, beef and lamb with a fresh pineapple, served on a bed of succulently roasted potatoes (see page 263). I really would recommend this dish, should anyone reading this know of a restaurant where this dish is served please let me know.

Needless to say the partying did not mix so well with the studying, something had to give; not surprisingly our exam results were not a spectacular success. I found myself paying frequent visits to our Director of Studies, a lady who despite never having taken exams beyond her sixteenth birthday was under the impression that she understood studying and exam techniques. She came out with an interesting quote during one of her regular lectures to us:

“I want you all to be above average”

An arithmetic impossibility!

She, for reasons that escape me, decided that I was the ring leader of the reprobates; and never ceased to lecture me about how I was misusing my leadership skills by leading the others astray instead of into the path of righteousness. Despite the lectures, and the mind numbing tedium of the studying, I finally qualified in 1989 and was able to resume a more balanced lifestyle in terms of work and play.

Whilst I no doubt seem to have painted a very negative picture about the life of a trainee accountant, I would say that during my time with KPMG I made some good friends. Some of whom I still keep in touch with. Additionally, I attained my professional qualification; which gave me the opportunity to work, travel and live internationally thereby increasing the richness of my life.

Lobster Bashing in Aylesbury

Whilst many of my external audit assignments, when working for KPMG, were confined to London and the surrounding suburbs; there were occasions when myself and members of the audit team were despatched further afield. One regular “out of town” was based in Aylesbury; where we would spend a fortnight, or so, reviewing the accounts of a major unit trust.

Aylesbury is a medium sized market town with a handful of pubs, a few restaurants and two hotels. The size of the audit team, eight or more people, often precluded us all staying in the same hotel; so we tended to split between the two. However, we always made sure that in the evening we gathered together for the important end of day wind down ritual of eating and drinking. The dining choices consisted of the hotel restaurants, a Chinese restaurant, a steak house, a carvery and a few bistros dotted in and around the town. Once you had been on this audit a number of times, these options tended to feel less and less appealing each visit; the menus seemed to be the same year in year out.

However, one time we were there coincided with Chinese New Year. The manager of the audit team very decently, in my opinion, decided that we should “push the boat out” on that evening; and booked us a table and special New Year’s meal in the local Chinese restaurant. This particular restaurant, I would say, was definitely a cut above the average “sweet and sour pork balls” establishment you tend to find in some places. The special New Year’s menu was a culinary masterpiece; combining all manner of dishes including, the high point, a whole lobster each. This naturally came in its shell, with the claws and other protuberances. The restaurant, to aid our extraction of the flesh from the shell, gave us the necessary tools; thin lobster picks, crackers and small hammers. We set to work with gusto. The lobster was absolutely scrumptious, tender and succulent. My own enthusiasm, and possibly the large quantity of champagne consumed before and during the meal, impaired my judgement of the force I needed to apply; I brought my lobster hammer down on the shell with a resounding “thwack”. Needless to say Newton’s law:

“for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”

was obeyed. The force of the blow shattered the shell, a large part of which together with one of the claws, absorbed the kinetic energy from my hammer blow and flew off the plate onto the table of the diners next door to us. They did not seem to mind, I apologised and asked if I could have my shell and claw back. I made sure that by the end of the meal every claw and crevice of the noble crustacean was scraped and sucked clean of its succulent flesh. I would say that this particular New Year's celebration, despite being held in February, outranked many of the more traditional ones I have attended each 31st of December.

The Club

I have, since leaving school, been a member of The East India Club; one of the few remaining London clubs. The club, set up in the nineteenth century, is housed in an ornate regency style building in St James. It offers members a home away from home by providing them with; accommodation, meeting rooms, a library, dining rooms (both public and private), a billiard room, a smoking room and two bars.

The main dining room offers a very special traditional dining experience, far removed from many of today's homogenous themed restaurants. You can dine at a table that is laid with a starched linen cloth, napkins and silver cutlery embossed with the club crest; in a spacious high ceilinged room surrounded by portraits of luminaires from British history, such as Churchill and Montgomery.

When I first went to the club I met the club secretary, who showed me around. We also discussed the menu, he explained that there was significant resistance to the introduction of a more innovative menu; as many of the members prefer food that reminds them of their school days. Therefore the menu offers a profoundly British selection of dishes such as; Cumberland sausage and mash, steak and kidney pudding (see page 238), lamb cutlets, savouries which are served between the main and dessert course (see page 276) and treacle pudding together with the special joint of the day served from the carving trolley. I dine there every so often with my friends, and we always have an enjoyable evening.

Nude Modelling

One summer in the mid nineties I was invited to be an usher at a friend's wedding, not too onerous a duty, as he put it I would effectively be acting as bouncer at the church door. In terms of celebration the bride and groom were doing "the full monty"; namely morning suits for the gentlemen, and a full church ritual followed by a fully catered champagne reception in a five star hotel by the Thames.

The day dawned and, booted and suited, in my dapper tailed morning suit complete with top hat, I boarded the train at Croydon station and made my way to the groom's house for a preliminary snifter of champagne; where the other usher and best man were also meeting. An hour or so of champagne drinking later we trooped off to the church. The ceremony went without a hitch, always a relief to participants and guests alike. Then in a fleet of taxis and limos, the contents of the church despatched themselves to the hotel for the reception.

Pre meal drinks lasted for forty minutes or so, this gave us a chance to study the seating plan for the meal, we then were invited to sit down. I found myself on a very jolly table, mainly inhabited by members of the artistic community. In particular I was stationed between two ladies; one a painter/sculptor the other, dressed in a lurid purple dress with a plunging neckline that gave a more than generous prominence to her ample cleavage, who professed at regular intervals, I guess so as to impress, to have close personal friendships with a number of artistic luminaries such as David Hockney. I feigned being impressed. As the meal progressed, and the wine flowed, it became clear that there seemed to be some form of female rivalry developing between my two dining neighbours as to gaining my attention; they had both eked out from me that I was at that time a bachelor and, they being themselves single, decided I was for the taking. I suspected that my friend the groom had set me up. It is an interesting feature of weddings that as much as nature abhors a vacuum, so do couples who are getting married abhor seeing single people; and do their level best to conjoin the most unlikely of people. I decided to sit back and think of England, I made sure that both ladies were apportioned equal time spans of my attention.

I was not alone in noticing the set up, a friend of mine stationed at a neighbouring table had also observed this; and had been happily nudging his girlfriend, and winking at me at regular intervals as the entertainment continued. Indeed he was so entertained that he sent over a couple of hand written notes, containing “caustically witty” observations as to my situation; the clear implication being that I was to be someone’s sweetmeat after the meal. The meal was followed by liqueurs and the customary speeches, I wonder if anyone really needs or wants these at a wedding? We were then free to shift tables and move around, barely ten seconds elapsed before my chum had rushed over, grinning like a Cheshire cat, to stir things up; a skill which he has mastered in full over the years. I would say though, that I was thoroughly enjoying it; far better attend a lively good humoured event than sit through something, which lasts for several hours, that is as entertaining as watching a rerun of a tired unloved soap opera.

My dining companions were, though, becoming a little catty towards each other; one describing the other, in a stage whisper that was not meant to be audible for anyone other than myself, as “a real bitch”. The other describing the male friends of her rival as all being gay. Flattered as I was to gain the attention I began to plan my exit strategy, this became more necessary when the sculptress suggested to me that she would like me to sit for her; as she felt that I had a good physique (I would hasten to add that those of who see me now should remember this was the mid nineties, I was younger then!). She went on to say that I could sit nude for the best results, an image flashed through my mind of vast quantities of nude statues of me being produced and mass marketed, rather like garden gnomes, to people for their gardens. A truly horrifying thought isn’t it? My friend at this stage came to my rescue by suggesting, that as he and his girlfriend were thinking of leaving soon, would I be interested in a lift home. I would say that this gesture was not entirely as altruistic as it may have seemed; for you see he had almost found himself in a fight with an off duty policeman, who was also a guest at the wedding. Whatever the reason, yes I was interested, I managed to dodge giving a direct negative to the modelling offer and made my farewells escaping, I suspect, by the skin of my teeth.

However, it was an absolutely splendid day, and in the event that I fall on hard times maybe I should see if the offer of modelling is still open; there might be a market for these works of art.

Ten Breakfasts for One

In 1995 one of my good friends from university, who now lives in Korea, was over in London on a business trip for a few days. This being a rare event, I organised a gathering of the troops to meet up with him for drinks and dinner. About six of us met up in a bar off Bond Street for the traditional pre dinner beverages. We then trotted off around the corner to the Kurzensturbel; an Austrian restaurant run by a couple of ex pat Austrians, Herbert and Ilse. This was one of my favourite restaurants in London, offering authentic Austrian food in a cosy traditional setting. The staff would dress in traditional Austrian costumes, including lederhosen. There was live accordion music, and Ilse would during the course of the evening sing; and encourage the more inebriated diners to sing along, by passing the microphone around. The wine would be served from large glass dispensers, that resembled fish bowls, which were positioned on each table and were filled by the waiter with the wine of your choice; you then put your glass underneath it, and pressed it upwards to release the wine. I think it is fair to say that an enjoyable evening was had by all, I indulged in my favourite dish the noble Eisbein (see page 180) with dumplings and sauerkraut.

The restaurant shut at about 1.00am, however we were not ready to give up on the evening. My chum suggested we all go back to his hotel for a night-cap. We stationed ourselves in the lobby and put the staff to work by ordering several large whiskies, then a few more etc. Time moved on, and it was evident that by 3:00am the staff were subtly suggesting we should move ourselves elsewhere. Sensible people would have called it a night, but we were not sensible people. We adjourned to my friend's room, and arranged for room service to send up a few bottles of champagne. One of us attempted to get the hotel porno channel working, without any success; we decided that it was clearly malfunctioning and so requested that it be fixed. Ten minutes later a maintenance man arrived and checked out the equipment; he grinned at the assembled company, and very politely pointed out that the channel only broadcast at set times and that we had to wait.

Never mind, 6:00am and someone thought it would be a good idea for breakfast; so a selection of breakfasts was ordered, and room service duly despatched two trolleys heavily laden with vast quantities of sausages, eggs, bacon, tomatoes and the like. All good things must come to an end, it was 8:00am the sprits were flagging and my friend had to go to the airport in four hours to meet his wife. He politely suggested that we should now "F**** Off". We knew when to take a hint, and staggered out into the daylight towards our various homes.

Two hours later, when I was back in Croydon contemplating how I might survive the day and the monumental hangover that was approaching, my friend rang up to let me know room service had arrived again; this time bearing ten breakfasts. Evidently one of us, no it was not me, felt that a little extra protein would do him some good. He said he wasn't quite sure that he could manage this, quite!

Ken "Theseus" Frost and the Labyrinth

A few years ago I used to work with the ICAEW (the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales) marking the scripts of the candidates who aspired to join my noble profession. Some of my contemporaries have, rather incorrectly in my opinion, suggested that I did this to exorcise the demons of my own "student accountant" days. Exam and script marking season would come round twice a year, myself and fellow markers would kick off the "season" by meeting in the ICAEW members hall in Moorgate; to be briefed on the exam and to run through it with the examiner. These briefings took place in the evening, after work, and to fortify us the Institute kindly served sandwiches and a good supply of wine. One particular briefing session went a little off plan for me.

We had our briefing as usual, and were having a decent time with the sandwiches and wine (of which there were a few more bottles than normal). My fellow markers gradually drifted away back home, and all that remained were myself and the marking co-ordinator. We decided that the hospitality of the Institute should not be wasted, so we set about opening and finishing the last of the wine.

Well all good things come to an end, and we decided that it was time to get on our separate ways. I, being prudent, detoured to the gents in the basement; the marking co-ordinator left directly. A few minutes later I emerged from the basement and made to leave by the main door. Problem, the door was locked and there was no sign of a caretaker. I tried the door a few times to check I was not mistaken, no mistake; the door was a fine example of Victorian Gothic very thick, heavy and ornate it would not budge. I shouted a few times for a caretaker, no sign. So pondering my predicament for a few minutes I remembered what my mother always did in such situations, she had the habit of locking herself out of her house on a regular basis. Call the fire brigade, there was a phone on the desk by the door so 999 and fire brigade summoned. A few minutes later, the City of London's finest turned up outside and a head appeared in the semi circled window above the door. I explained my situation and they came up with two options:

- They would break the door down, not advisable, it would have taken some considerable force and would have destroyed a fine and expensive antique door.
- I should find my way through the labyrinth in the basement, and make my way out of the emergency exit. The fire brigade would take care of the alarm.

I embarked on my labyrinthine journey, finally success, the door was found I found myself outside below street level. No problem in getting up some steps to an iron gate. However, this proved to be another obstacle, as it was locked. Fortunately I was agile enough, despite wearing a suit, carrying a briefcase and a large black bag of exam scripts to climb above onto the pavement.

This was done without any injury to myself. However, at the very moment I alighted from the railings onto the pavement a policeman turned the corner. Is suspect I may have looked a little suspicious (what with the bags and all!). I explained the situation, and we went round the corner to see two large fire engines and a large number of firemen.

I apologised profusely to all, offering them a drink if they wished. No problem they saw the funny side and were not going to press any charges. At this point the disappearing caretaker reappeared, the policeman took him to one side and reminded him of the principle of always checking a building is empty before locking it up.

Dublin Ireland

Dublin the capital of Eire (the fast growing Celtic Tiger economy) and erstwhile home of James Joyce and Oscar Wilde, has undergone a transformation over the last decade; and is home to a myriad of elegant restaurants, bars and shops. It has a population of just under one million, of which 40% are under 25.

Dublin traverses the river Liffey, which divides the city into North and South. The city has a large architectural and cultural heritage including; Christchurch Cathedral (Dublin's oldest building), the cobbled streets of Temple Bar, Phoenix Park and the National Museum of Ireland. Like many other cities Dublin is home to its own university, Trinity College, which is Ireland's oldest university.

However, let us not forget the most important fact of all; this is the best place on the planet to sample a pint of Guinness.

The Black Velvet

I paid many visits to the Philips offices in Dublin during the early nineties. I always enjoyed these trips, as there was always plenty to do in the evenings:

- My colleagues there were hospitable, friendly, and very sociable. Indeed we often shared a pint or two after work. One of them, who I have to say bore an uncanny resemblance to Gerry Adams, made a magnificent effort to obtain a bottle of poteen for me to take back home. This is the illegal hooch brewed in the countryside from potatoes, bad batches of which have been known to make people blind. Sadly his contacts were unable to come up with the magic brew, so I never risked my eyesight.
- I usually stayed at the Burlington hotel which had well equipped comfortable rooms, an excellent choice of bars, a very good restaurant and was ideally located for both reaching the office and going out and about central in Dublin.
- Dublin had (and I assume still has) many good quality restaurants and bars, which catered to all tastes. One of my favourite dining venues in Dublin was The Goat, this was situated a few minutes walk from our offices and doubled up as a pub and restaurant. I was taken there for lunch and dinner on a number of occasions, all of which were highly enjoyable. Lunchtimes in the bar would consist of a pint of Guinness and a hot roast beef sandwich, this really was really first class; the generous slices of beef were succulent, tender and were served in fresh crusty bread. Absolutely mouth-watering! The restaurant served a good selection of meat, poultry and fish; my particular favourite was the duck. This consisted of half a roasted duck served with sage and onion stuffing (see page 218), a jug of orange sauce and roasted potatoes. The next time I am in Dublin I will definitely pay a return visit.
- I have a cousin (Cora) living there, I am half Irish as my mother was born in Waterville County Kerry, who I met up with on a few occasions when I was over there.

- Dublin is really the best place in the world to drink Guinness, the black velvet; believe me I have tried it in many countries and there is something about the way it is kept and poured in Dublin that gives it that edge over the Guinness served elsewhere. With regard to the pouring, it is an slow process that requires the thirsty drinker to exercise much patience. The glass is half filled, then allowed to rest before being gradually topped up. The drinker must then allow the Guinness to rest for five minutes, before taking the first sip.

There Was an Englishman, an Irishwoman, a Dutchman and the Pope

One of the occasions I was visiting Dublin was at the time of the 1990 World Cup, this was proving particularly popular in Dublin; as Ireland were doing well in the tournament. The Irish supporters song of the time went something like this:

“Oh yeh, oh yeh, oh yeh, oh yeh” (pause)

“Oh yeh” (pause)

“Oh yeh!” etc.

This fine ballad could be heard throughout the bars and clubs during the time I was there. The contest was being taken so seriously, that the Pope had granted a special dispensation to the pubs so that they could open early on Sunday.

The reason for this particular visit to Dublin was to perform a joint review of our operations with a colleague from Holland. We met up in the hotel bar on the first evening and got on very well; he was a good natured chap, pleasant and very sociable.

As I said I had a cousin living in Dublin, and so had made an earlier arrangement to meet her on the Wednesday of that week. This coincided with a special party that our office was laying on for that evening, when Holland would be playing Ireland. Well normally I don't miss a party, but the arrangement with my cousin had already been made so I had to bow out of the football. My colleague though was able to go, and act as the sole Dutch representative for the fixture.

That evening Cora had suggested that she show me a little bit of the countryside outside of Dublin, so she had booked a table at a restaurant in Dunloraigh; a village located by the sea and home to Chris de Burgh. We met in the bar of the Burlington and, after the traditional pint of the black velvet, drove off to the restaurant. Dunloraigh was, as the tourist brochures would say, a truly picturesque seaside village endowed with clean, sandy beaches; ideal for getting away from it all. Maybe I should ask the Irish Tourist Board to pay me for that last sentence? Anyway, we went into the restaurant and were shown to our table. Who do you think was sitting at the table next to us, enjoying his birthday party? Why none other than Chris de Burgh, I only dine at the top places (now that is an exaggeration!). The menu was imaginative and the food was very good. However, the restaurant was judging by the presentation and portions of food enamoured by the accursed nouvelle cuisine fad (which was all the rage with certain places those days); the potato portions that Cora and I were given were absolutely minuscule. Poor Cora was so ashamed, not because she had chosen the restaurant, but because she was Irish and this was Ireland; a small potato portion was as bad as if a local bar had served a bad pint of Guinness, a source of national shame. I told mum about this when I returned to the UK, she couldn't believe it either.

Never mind, the meal was fun and the alcohol flowed, mainly in my direction as Cora was driving. We went back to my hotel and popped into one of the bars for a night-cap. There we encountered my Dutch colleague, looking distinctly the worse for wear, for reasons that were not clear he was not wearing any socks. He beetled over to our table and offered us a drink. Evidently our colleagues in our Dublin office had liberally entertained him during the football match, by the way Holland lost. He then started to chat up my cousin, the usual subtle compliments about her eyes etc etc. He was particularly enamoured by the fact that she was a nurse. He suggested that they should forget about me and go to a night-club. Cora decided, very wisely, that it was more appropriate to stay where she was. Nature intervened at this stage, and my colleague went a rather pale colour and started to sweat, he then made his excuses and left. The evils of alcohol!

At this point a gentleman sitting on another table launched into a fine rendition of Danny Boy, much to everyone's amusement except for the barman's. He rushed over and suggested that he should stop, nothing doing; Danny Boy continued. So security was called and the our man was offered an escort, willingly or not, from the premises. He stayed long enough to finish the final verse, and received a standing ovation as he was frog marched from the bar and hotel. Cora decided that it was time to go but I stayed on for one more whisky. What a splendid evening!

The Morning After

The next morning I met up with my colleague in our offices, he was looking decidedly pale and shaky. I gently reminded him of our meeting the night before, he buried his head in his hands and said:

“Oh God, I don't remember anything; I just want to go back home to my wife and sleep”

I took pity on him, and arranged through one of our secretaries for a full Irish breakfast to be served in our audit room. Twenty minutes later a magnificent tray of sausages, eggs, black pudding, bacon, tomatoes, toast and coffee was wheeled in on a trolley. Gingerly he tried a morsel, then more boldly the pace quickened; soon the plate was empty. Within the hour my chum announced that he was feeling distinctly better. Now that's how to cure a hangover!

It being our last Friday we departed early that day, for the airport and our respective homelands. We saluted this marvellous country with one final pint of Guinness in the airport bar. My personal recommendation to you all is, if you have never been to Dublin then go; I am sure you will not be disappointed (and no, I have not been paid to say this!).

There's an Englishman at the Door

During my many visits to our offices in Dublin I got to know the team over there quite well. Enough for them to show me the more local sites and sounds of Dublin, rather than just the mainstream restaurants and bars that catered for tourists and visiting businessmen.

One evening I went out for dinner with one of the accountants, the plan being dinner first then a drink or two in one of his local bars. We went to a good quality restaurant which was round the corner from the bar. The meal was excellent, I recall having roast duck in a calvados based sauce. However, as is the way with some restaurants the service was a little “relaxed”; and by the time the desserts were on their way my colleague was becoming agitated about getting to the bar before they closed. Desserts finished, I ordered a liqueur; my colleague's face fell. I took pity on him and suggested that he could go on ahead whilst I paid the bill, then I would join him. His face lit up *“good idea Ken”*; he quickly explained where the bar was then bolted, like a bat out of hell, for the door.

Approximately fifteen minutes later I had managed to extract the bill from the staff, and had paid it. I put my coat on and stepped out into this unfamiliar part of town. However, my dining chum's directions were good; I turned the corner and spotted what I assumed to be the bar accessible via a dimly lit doorway. I pushed the door, a heavy wooden beast, with a small hinged spy door positioned behind a metal grill; one problem the door was firmly shut. I assumed, that as it was past closing time, that they did not want anymore customers. I knocked a few times on the door firmly with my fist, nothing happened, I knocked again. I began to wonder if I had found the right place and, if not, precisely how I was going to find my way back to my hotel from this unfamiliar part of town; there were no taxis to be seen. At this point the spy door flipped open, and a face pressed closely against it to ask me what I wanted. I explained that my friend was in there, and that I wanted a drink etc. I heard the face in the door shout out "*there's an Englishman outside, and he wants to come in!*". There was a moment or two of whispered discussion, then a bolt was drawn and the door opened. I had breached the gates of Troy (or at any rate the Irish equivalent). I thanked the man and entered, the bar was narrow and smoke filled, faces turned to look at me; reminiscent of those scenes in westerns where a stranger enters the saloon. I peered into the far corner of the bar, and was relieved to see my colleague patiently waiting for me. "*What kept you?*" he said. Entry formalities over; I settled down and enjoyed a few good, after closing time, whiskies. Ten out of ten for an excellent evening.

Berlin Germany

Berlin, capital of Germany, has a population of approximately 3.5 million. It was the capital of Prussia until 1945, and the capital of Germany initially between 1871 and 1945 and then again since 1990 after reunification. It provided the backdrop for Hitler's last stand against the Allies in the Spring of 1945; culminating in his suicide in a bunker deep beneath the war torn rubble of what remained of the city.

Between 1949 and 1990 Berlin was divided between the Western and Eastern blocks; this division was emphasised by the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, subsequently torn down after reunification.

A Bratwurst for Breakfast in Berlin

Over the years I have made several trips to Berlin for some very self indulgent holidays. The bars, restaurants and nightlife of Berlin, when the wall was still up was something to experience.

The streets of Berlin abound with sausage stalls, many of which have a few tables and chairs for the weary to rest their limbs. They sell all manner of German sausages from the noble bratwurst to the more exotic, often to be found on stalls run by Turks, currywurst. The sausages can be ordered au natural, or with bread (brotchen) and chips. These stalls, very sensibly, are allowed to serve beer as well as the normal soft drinks. This means that for a few Marks (Euros now) you can have a quite a filling meal. Ideal for getting over the night before, or for setting you up for an evening on the town. Should require a more substantial meal then Berlin offers an excellent selection of good quality, reasonably priced, restaurants serving good German fayre. My particular favourite dishes are Eisbein both boiled and roast (see page 180) and Schnitzels (see page 193). These fine meals should be accompanied by a good quality German Riesling or Weisbier, followed by an ice cold schnapps (such as blackcurrant) down in one. On the subject of schnapps, I also have a great fondness for a particular brand that is not so easy to find, which an Austrian restaurant The Twin Brothers (now sadly gone) in London used to serve; namely Danzig Goldwasser (this actually contains flakes of gold leaf) very special!

One particular restaurant just off the Kurfurstendam (K'dam) is noted for its authentic traditional German cuisine, needless to say age and alcohol have dimmed my memory cells; and unfortunately I have forgotten the name of this fine establishment. The waiters are from Bavaria and of a particularly stout build; well suited for the traditional lederhosen uniforms that they wear. I would describe the service as efficient, but not necessarily warm. The waiters are apt to treat the customers, both German and foreign, as an annoyance that has to be tolerated. One evening I was there with my parents, who had stopped by for a few days in Berlin on their way back from visiting relatives in another part of Germany. My father and I had the robust Eisbein, whilst my mother had a rather more modest soup and salad. We were on our dessert course, when our waiter decided it was time for his cigarette break; so, as you do, he stood by the bar lit up and decided to pull his shirt out of his trousers and give his most ample of stomachs a good scratch. You could see the genuine look of palpable satisfaction on his face; clearly this was a part of the evening that he had been looking forward to, and was relishing it. However, our fellow diners were not so sure about the merits of this public display of Bavarian flesh. My own thoughts were that all was forgiven, as the food was excellent.

Start the Day With a Carbonara

I made a number of trips to Berlin in the late eighties and early nineties, with a good chum of mine from university, the prime aim to overindulge in the many bars and restaurants that Berlin had to offer. One particular bar that became our regular after dinner haunt, formed part of a collection of bars located in the equivalent of a shopping mall called Starlings Way; which itself was situated in an area surrounded by night clubs. This particular bar was run by an energetic couple, Gudrun and Robert, who practised the principle of never shutting until the last customer left. This meant, more often than not, that the bar would be open all night. We would spend a few hours in there at the end of an evening, partaking of the local schnapps and talking with the other customers.

One evening, having pushed our endurance levels to the maximum, we found to our surprise that it was 6:00am; we had managed an “all nighter”. Our hosts suggested that it was time that they shut shop. However, as it was the end of their working day they were going on for something to eat; and asked whether we would like to join them. We were facing what should have been breakfast, so naturally we readily agreed. We shut up shop, and walked around the corner to an establishment with a door that had a hinged spy door; always a sign of quality in my opinion. Gudrun knocked, the spy door sprang open and a few words of explanation proffered. The main door was opened and we went inside, to what was evidently a drinking club; easy to spot as people were drinking. We sat down at a table and Gudrun explained that the club was run by the local Mafia, but they served good food and were friends of theirs. The other guests were an assortment of prostitutes, thieves and other colourful local characters. When in Rome!

The menus were brought round and we ordered a selection of food; Wiener Schnitzels, cheeses for everyone else and a spaghetti carbonara for myself (see page 234). As dawn had clearly broken, and the sun was shining brightly; we decided to sit outside to eat. We decamped to the fresh air, dawn can be a very harsh experience if you have not had any sleep. However, with squinting eyes and pallid faces we maintained a British stiff upper lip. Our food arrived and we tucked in, I would say that the carbonara was excellent, rich, creamy and cheesy; ideal for staunching the hangover that was likely to follow. My friend managed to eat his cheese selection, but the evening had begun to take its toll; he temporarily dozed off, fortunately waking up just in time to stop himself falling off his chair. It was clearly time to call it an evening.

The Winds of History Blow Through the Brandenburg Gate

In between the serious business of visiting Berlin’s myriad of bars and restaurants, we managed to find time to visit an historical area. We were fortunate in the fact that at the time of our visit East Berlin had become accessible to the West; and the Wall was being “chipped down” by the “Woody Woodpeckers”, as they were called by the locals. Bearing in mind that this was an opportunity to be part of history we trekked from the West to the Brandenburg Gate and the site of the old Reichstag. The gate was constructed in 1788, and in recognition of the events that have occurred in Germany since then the locals have a saying “*the winds of history blow through the Brandenburg Gate*”.

This time history was in the making, Russian forces were in the process of pulling out; and as with any army in retreat, the principle of “*if it’s not nailed down it’s yours for the taking*” was being applied. However, the Russians applied this in their own unique way; instead of decamping back to Moscow with souvenirs from Berlin, they merely raided their own stores and sold on the contents to local “businessmen”. Who in turn proceeded to sell these on to members of the public. The scene around the Gate resembled a “farmers’ market” whereby a collection of “farmers”, in this case itinerant street traders, gathered around the Gate and set up a vast emporium of impromptu stalls to sell their produce, namely military paraphernalia.

We wandered through the bustling market and looked at what was on offer, seemingly everything; full dress uniforms, badges, medals, knives, boots, hats, ration books and I imagine guns had you looked hard enough. In short enough to equip your own militia. I made a modest purchase of a Russian officer's hat for only 10 Marks, a bargain. I even saw a stall selling chippings from the wall for "only" 5 Marks; to me they looked like ordinary pieces of concrete. However, it proves the point that with clever marketing you can create a market for anything, no matter how useless or suspect.

The Honourary Rabbi

All good things come to an end, and the day dawned for our departure from Berlin and return to the UK. As expected, the departure day was a day of recovery from the excesses of the previous days. Fortunately our return flight was set for late afternoon. We met in the hotel bar at lunchtime for one final beer, then commandeered a taxi to take us to the airport. The airport was busy and extensive security checks, that more resembled a medical examination, were slowing down the queues through customs. The customs officer snorted with mild amusement, and shook his head, when he came across my Russian hat bought at the Brandenburg Gate. Finally arriving in the departure area we found a place to sit, the surfeit of food and drink was beginning to catch up with us. It is fair to say that we both looked pale, drawn and sweaty. The plane, of course, was delayed; I slumped into a chair with my fedora hat pulled down over my eyes to shade them from the bright airport lights. I wished that I had access to a blender and the ingredients for my Detox Emulsion (see 335). I decided to take action and purchased a carton of milk, gingerly sipping at its contents. Gradually life began to return to the brain and body. The journey began to look less daunting. I looked around at our fellow travellers, and noted that there was large group of Rabbis travelling with us. I commented to my chum that they were wearing identical hats to mine; then launched into a discourse on the delay to our flight, the volume of this discourse gradually ratcheted up a few notches. I exchanged a few pleasantries with the ladies sitting next to me, about the extent of the body search that we all had endured. Finally, the boarding call "ping ponged" over the tannoy and we shuffled on board.

I was feeling distinctly better, and so made the most of the in flight food and drink. The flight was a jolly affair, and we exchanged lively banter with the cabin crew. By the time we got to London we were back to full energy levels. We disembarked and wandered over to the carousel, patiently awaiting the return of the luggage. At this point one of the Rabbis came up to me with a mischievous grin and pointed at my hat, saying "*you have given us a bad reputation, people think that you are with us*". He grinned and wished me a pleasant and safe onward journey.

New York USA

New York, with a population of over seven million, is a city that is constantly changing; that which is trendy and fashionable one day becomes “old hat” the next. However, change is stimulating and this is reflected in the high paced energy that is exuded by the inhabitants and establishments of New York.

New York’s location on the Hudson River, Long Island and the Atlantic Ocean made it a primary disembarkation point for immigrants to the USA. The first European settlement on Manhattan was by the Dutch, in the early seventeenth century, they named it New Amsterdam. In 1664, the British acquired it and renamed it New York.

New York is, in my opinion, like no other city on earth. It is the centre of world trade and finance, and is renowned for its contribution to the worlds of art, entertainment, and fashion. It is a cultural melting pot, almost every language on the planet is spoken there; no other city offers quite such ethnic, social and cultural diversity. New York has over 18000 restaurants, 150 museums and more than 10000 stores; it is impossible to become bored.

Even though the diversity, at times, causes stresses and strains; when faced with serious challenges, such as the “white out” of January 1996 and the terrorist attack of 9/11, New Yorkers pull together.

Although renowned for its skyscrapers New York also offers open spaces, such as Central Park and Bryant Park, that act as lungs to the city. Districts such as Little Italy and China Town offer a veritable cornucopia of regional sights, tastes and smells.

Close Encounters with a Hooker

One evening, in the early nineties, I was passing through New York for a few nights; having been on a business trip in Simi Valley and Salt Lake City. I “hooked up” with a good friend of mine who lives there, and we went out to a restaurant then a few bars with some of his friends for a good evening of camaraderie and table ice hockey (I would rate my performance as being 1 out of 10). All good things come to an end so we bade our farewells. I was kindly offered a lift back to my hotel. However, I declined as it was only a few blocks away; I had assumed there to be no “clear and present danger” to my personal well being, after all I did have my secret weapon (I refer you to my secret weapon of the projectile vomit - see page 111 for my detailed description of this process).

I was correct, in as much as, there was no danger of robbery or violence. However, I had neglected to take into account the risk factor of itinerant street trading (specifically prostitution); you should beware that this was New York in its pre Rudy zero tolerance days. I was walking back, minding my own business, when “out of the shadows” a lady in an artificial leopard spot fur coat (for it was winter) approached me and offered an evening (well half an hour for 50 bucks) of unbridled pleasure etc etc. I declined her kind offer, and continued on my way. However, those of you who have encountered American salespeople (whatever product, or service they may be selling) will be able to attest to the fact that they are, if nothing else, persistent. Needless to say, the lady did not intake no for an answer, she pursued me, and proceeded to give me a detailed verbal menu of her services and charges. I again politely declined her offer, and continued at a brisk pace.

Well I have to admire her persistence, clearly refusing to take no for an answer; she decided that a more forward gesture on her part would, shall we say, “clinch the deal”. At this point her hand firmly grasped me by the genitals (apparently this was meant to create within me a sense of uncontrollable lust, it didn’t, obviously my libido was flat that day!). The scene to any onlooker must have been quite striking; to see this Englishman in a long coat with velvet collar walking at a fast pace, with a lady in artificial fur firmly attached to his genitals alongside. My temper finally snapped and with great pomposity (well I had been drinking, and it was the first thing that came into my head) said “madam kindly unhand me”; to which the lady responded with hurt pride but with great dignity “hey I’m not a madam, I’m a hooker!”. At this point I managed to disengage myself, and within the next minute returned to the peace and safety of my hotel lobby.

Lingerie Buying at Harrods

There is much talk these days of identity theft, where your identity is stolen and used by the felon to acquire goods on credit. I can report an early incidence of this in my life. A few days after returning from my cross States business trip, I was called by one of my credit card companies and asked to confirm a purchase. Apparently, I had been to Harrods that day and purchased £1000 of Janet Reger lingerie; the card company felt that this was not representative of my normal purchasing pattern. They were right, I had most certainly not been to Harrods and bought lingerie. On further enquiry they also identified that I had also bought £500 of sports wear in another Oxford Street shop, again not so. I asked how this could have happened; they told me that when I had used my card in the USA, someone would have stolen the details and then sold them on to a criminal organisation in London. I was fortunate that the problem had been identified promptly, and that I suffered no financial loss as a result. I believe this demonstrates that it pays to be vigilant when checking your card statements. One of my friends suggested that it probably wasn’t the lingerie that caused the raised eyebrows at the card company, but the purchase of the sports wear; quite!

Wedding Party Upstate

During another business trip to The States I was fortunate enough to be able to combine both the business trip, which covered Simi Valley (on the West coast) and Salt Lake City (in Utah), with an invitation to a friend’s wedding in upstate New York. This was quite a celebration, kicking off in New York itself where various friends from university gathered for the pre wedding drinks a few days beforehand. Having mustered a posse of six; we decamped from New York a couple of days later, and took the Amtrak from Penn station north to the countryside. We arrived at the local station and took a taxi to a hire car firm where we picked up a vehicle which, rather boldly, one of our party had volunteered to drive to our guest house where we would be staying for the weekend’s nuptials. Needless to say all precautions were taken to ensure that the booze supply would not run out; we therefore stopped off at a liquor store and purchased a large quantity of beer and sundry spirits for the weekend.

Our guest house was set in the wooded countryside of upstate New York, a delightful wooden house (painted pink-and not surprisingly called the Pink House); with a large garden front and back, and the typical veranda and porch as seen in chocolate box episodes of The Waltons. The house and rooms were comfortable and welcoming, and the landlady relaxed about our coming and going. The weather was hot and humid, so during the days we sat on the veranda preparing for the evenings ahead.

The wedding ceremony was to be held in the splendid grounds of our friend’s house, which was situated by a lake. The day before, he held a barbecue for all the guests in the grounds of his house under a marquee by the lake. It is fair to say that a good time was had by all. We retired to the Pink House to gather strength for the ceremony and reception next day.

Awaking next morning, in the humid heat of an East coast summer, I was pleased to feel that the evening's last minute precautions of Alka Seltzer had produced the desired effect; namely no hangover. The late morning was spent dozing on the veranda, then time to put on the suit for the wedding. Duly "booted and suited" we were driven off to the main event. The *modus operandi* for which was as follows:

- Guests arrived and partook of drinks, whilst promenading in the gardens around the lake.
- Guests then seated themselves in on chairs set up in an area by the lake.
- A string piece orchestra played background music whilst the guests settle down.
- The groom and best man positioned themselves at the appropriate place by the minister taking the service.
- The bride was then rowed from the other side of the lake, and disembarked at the landing stage near the groom.
- A brief ceremony was then conducted.
- Drinks followed by dinner, dancing and the customary speeches into the "wee small hours".

We returned to New York the next day, then back our various homes in the UK over the following few days. All in all a splendid occasion which I have to say, as weddings go, has never been topped.

No Smoking, No Singing

Eva and I have made a number of trips together to New York. One of our favourite restaurants is San Martin (on E 49th the contact details are on my website www.kenfrost.com) a Mediterranean style bistro. We find both the staff, service, atmosphere and of course food there to be excellent. One feature that Eva particularly appreciates is that the staff "don't have cow" when she has a cigarette.

It is sadly the feature of many restaurants in New York that the paranoia about smoking has reached unfeasible proportions. I understand from discussions with staff at many a restaurant, that whilst they don't care whether you smoke or not, the other customers (should they feel particularly litigious, something Americans in particular New Yorkers excel at) do. They will slap a law suit on the restaurant sooner than you can say "Yankee doodle dandy", for exposing a third party to a potential carcinogenic substance. There is, to my opinion, no such thing as a risk free environment and those who hide behind the law trying to pretend that it can be achieved are either very naïve or just plain greedy. I leave it to you to decide which is the more likely.

However, I digress, some of the dishes that are particularly noteworthy in San Martin include spring chicken (see 212), black bean soup (see 131), chorizos cooked in red wine with peppers and a hearty paella (see page 208). Should you be there on a Friday or Saturday they have a "strolling" singing guitarist. One particular Friday we were dining there and were offered a serenade by the resident stroller, we demurred at his offer to serenade us and allowed him to entertain the couple in the next booth. Rather wisely, as his version of bombalero was rendered with such enthusiasm and power that we had a little trouble hearing ourselves speak. I therefore doubt that the other couple could hear themselves at all.

The restaurant has both table and booths, we prefer the booths. A preference that proved to be wise one particular evening, when the air conditioning started to leak onto one of the centre tables. Initially just a few drips, then growing into more of a torrent. Buckets were summoned and Irish coffees (see 329) were served to all, a recompense for the unseasonable downpour.

Size is Everything

One aspect of New York cuisine that makes a lasting impression, is the size of the portions. I think these tend to be at their most excessive when ordering a sandwich from one of the numerous “deli’s” that abound on every street corner. Even something as basic as a humble ham and cheese sandwich, which in the UK would consist of a miserable slice of ham and a slice of rubber cheese placed between two pieces of dry under-buttered bread, is enough to feed several people. I do not exaggerate when saying that the standard portion for this sandwich consists of at least seven slices of ham, an equal proportion of cheese, and a more than generous dollop of mayonnaise. The bread can be anything you want: rye, bagel, white, brown; you name it. We saw a slogan on a billboard in Time Square one year, which read “too much is not enough”; very apt! I can well believe the article I read in a newspaper last year, which said that the average American has 5lbs of undigested meat in their intestine. Maybe a little more fibre, and a little more walking, would help relieve this unfortunate problem? I would recommend my detox emulsion (see 335), as a perfect means of cleansing the inner system.

Another favourite restaurant of ours is Gallaghers, a traditional privately owned steak house, which is recommended in the top ten steak house guide to America. Gallaghers is located off 52nd Street (contact details are on my website www.kenfrost.com), and so it is in the heart of the theatre district. On one side of the entrance to the restaurant is the cold room where the joints of prime USDA beef are hung to age for three weeks, this cold room has a large glass window so that customers on entering the restaurant can see the raw ingredients. Inside the restaurant is spacious and not at all pretentious, there is a bar in the centre surrounded by numerous tables (decorated with red and white check tablecloths). The walls are wood panelled, and decorated with pictures of sportsmen and sporting events from America’s past. Judging by the build of the waiters, the majority of them are ex sportsmen themselves. In addition to the meat cold room, there is a large tank containing lobsters from which you are invited to make your choice.

The menu, as you would expect, contains a variety of steak, chicken, pork and lobster dishes; all served with exceptionally generous portions of vegetables and potatoes. Should you have a very hearty appetite then I recommend the oxtail soup as starter; and should the meal get the better of you then do not be ashamed to ask for a doggy bag. Eva and I can attest to the fact that a leftover piece of steak or chop can make an ideal snack the next day.

On the subject of restaurants which display the joints of meat before preparation and cooking I would also like to recommend Les Halles (28th Street, the contact details are on my website www.kenfrost.com) a splendid French restaurant which Eva and I have been to on a number of occasions. Les Halles displays their meat in a refrigerated counter at the front of the restaurant and, offer a service that I wish more restaurants would emulate, act as a butchers offering the customers the opportunity to buy meat from them. The restaurant itself is laid out in relaxed manner, with benches covered in green leather along the walls and tables packed quite close (but not too close) together. Being a Brit. I am not normally inclined to enter into a conversation with my neighbours on the next table. However, given the ambience and general openness of New Yorkers it is difficult not to. I seem to recall one couple discussing wife swapping with us one evening, that conversation was easily shut down by Eva lighting a cigarette (“death sticks” do have their uses!).

Safety First

With regard to staying in New York, I can do no better than recommend the Barclay Intercontinental on East 48th Street. An elegant sanctuary harking back to a different age when people appreciated discrete elegance rather than opulent extravagance. I have stayed in this particular hotel on many occasions dating back to the early nineties, when it still had a ceiling high bird cage in the entrance lobby; a focal point for people to meet under. Sadly, I assume for health reasons, the bird cage is no more. However, the lobby is still an elegant place that is used by many native New Yorkers as a meeting point. On the left hand side of the lobby is the bar and lobby restaurant, where in the late afternoon and early evening a pianist or harpist is stationed to provide soothing background music. This is rather a pleasant change to the “musac” pumped out by other hotels. Unlike other large hotels I have always found that the staff and management try very hard to create a warm, friendly atmosphere attending to their individual guests’ requirements and eccentricities. Eva and I have always been given a very good quality rooms furnished in the traditional American style (deep sofas, plenty of scatter cushions and an extremely large bed), which were not overpriced (by New York standards).

One of the more quaint services offered by the hotel, for those of a more nervous disposition, is the personal bodyguard service. Apparently you can ask the front desk to send up a “heavy”, who will walk round the hotel with you. Unlike the hotel in Moscow, where Mafia shoot outs have occurred, I didn’t quite get the impression that there was a serious risk of attempted assassinations or robberies whilst walking in the hotel’s corridors. However, I am tempted one day to try this out just to see the effect it would have as I would stroll purposefully into the bar accompanied by a large gentleman in dark suit wearing the ubiquitous hearing aid beloved by security operatives the world over; maybe that would make one more of a target?

Italian Influences

I don’t think it would be possible to discuss restaurants in New York without mentioning a couple of Italian restaurants which we frequent. One being situated, of course, in Little Italy; try to go there during one of the Italian Street festivals. You will be overwhelmed by the displays of tempting gastronomic delicacies on offer, on the many stalls that line the streets of the Italian community; from wheels of spicy sausages to succulent wafer thin Parma ham. The area is naturally overflowing with Italian restaurants. Our favourite, in this part of town, is Angela’s (contact details are on my website www.kenfrost.com) which serves traditional Italian food such as meatballs (see 206). The restaurant is always full, and you should book; being New York make sure you are on time otherwise you will lose your table.

Another fine Italian restaurant is Giambelli’s, based on 52nd Street it is run by Mr Giambelli; whose photo of him proudly standing in front of a table, overflowing with delicacies, wearing a decoration from the Pope adorns the business card and souvenir postcards available for customers to take with them. The restaurant is opulently decorated, possibly a little excessively for some peoples’ tastes, the phrase brothel springs mischievously to mind. However, the service is excellent, no sooner are you seated then one of the many attentive waiters presents you with a plate of canapés and the traditional bread basket. The menu is extensive, and offers traditional Italian (pasta, veal etc) and main stream New York fayre (steaks, lamb cutlets etc).

Well Done Sir Richard

When Eva and I were flying out of New York one summer we had enough time to use the Virgin lounge in Newark. As with all of Virgin's lounges this had been decorated in a unique style; this one seemed to be a cross between nineties chic (with Simpson's chess boards) and retro seventies (with those rather improbable white circular plastic chairs). The lounge had the usual facilities; music room, TV, video, bar, library and kitchen. The latter offered a rather tempting selection of a la carte meals and snacks, ranging from sandwiches to steaks. I saw one thing that caught my eye, boiled eggs. This may seem rather a dull choice, but with the prospect of more food on a the six hours flight awaiting us I didn't see the need to "pig out" on the ground; especially as you cannot boil or fry eggs in the air (something to do with the air pressure by all accounts). However, there was a slight problem with my request for two boiled eggs; this was a breakfast dish and the appropriate mechanism (stove) for cooking it was not available, grills and microwaves no problem. Virgin though do try to look after their customers, and after some head scratching by the staff, a solution was found. The eggs were put into a bowl of water and a hand water heater was found to heat the water up. This took a little longer the statutory three minutes soft boiled approach, using a conventional cooker, but the results were worth it. My compliments to Sir Richard Branson for instilling initiative, and a "can do" attitude into his staff. Other airlines should take note!

Whilst on the subject of airline food I would like to give my personal vote of thanks to Virgin, no they are not paying me to write this!, for using their initiative and offering customers the chance to eat when they like what they like (eg breakfast for dinner) on the plane. I personally find that bacon, sausage and scrambled eggs are far better than the rubber chicken in a cream sauce so often served up by other airlines.

St Helier Jersey UK

Jersey is the largest of the channel islands and has a total population of 27000, its capital is St Helier. Jersey lies approximately 100 miles off the South coast of England, and 14 miles from the coast of Normandy in France. The island has over twenty bays, many small harbours and beaches. Despite having a number of castles dating back several hundred years, which withstood several invaders, the islands were occupied by the Nazis during World War Two. The former German Military Underground Hospital at St Lawrence contains exhibits of Jersey's occupation.

Don't Mention the War

Jersey's location in the Channel gives it a number of advantages:

- The proximity to France means that a trip to St Malo is but 30 minutes away on hydrofoil.
- The summer weather is usually hotter, and brighter, than that on the UK mainland.
- The island abounds with restaurants and bars. The local cuisine is heavily influenced by the proximity to France, and the pubs and restaurants all seem to offer La Fruits de la Mer (seafood combo to you and I) on the menu.
- The offshore nature of Jersey and its rather antiquated constitution, means that it has its own parliament and can set its own taxes. The result being that it does not have VAT (a sales tax), which means that prices are distinctly lower than on the UK mainland.

All in all the above are excellent reasons to pay Jersey a visit. The above points were possibly in the mind of Hitler when he chose to invade the Channel Islands during the Second World War. This represented the only part of the UK that the Nazis set foot on; Hitler feeling so "chuffed with himself" made the most of it, and set about fortifying the islands with massive concrete bunkers and defences (all built using slave labour). The occupation ended after the fighting on the Continent ceased when the local commander (finally seeing good sense) surrendered.

However, for some people the war seemingly never ends. Whilst in countries, such as France, Germany or the mainland of the UK there are memorials and exhibits to the war; Jersey displays its war experiences in the manner of a theme park. No bunker, command post or building associated with the occupation goes without the obligatory fee charging tourist display. I don't think that per square metre you could see more Nazi uniforms than if you were in Berlin in the thirties. In my opinion, the statement that "we were the only part of the UK to be occupied" is oversold. I visited the main field hospital, a vast underground complex of bunkers constructed to treat the German wounded in the expectation of an Allied invasion, and a command post in St Helier itself; but after that avoided the war entirely. My advice to the tourist bureau is the same as Basil Fawlty's, "don't mention the war".

Prostrate in the Ladies'

One summer during the mid nineties I went over to Jersey to spend a week, relaxing, visiting friends having a few drinkies etc. The summer was a particularly good one that year. I therefore treated the good citizens of Jersey to the sight of me in my swimming kit on the beach for a few hours. However, the sun was rather fierce around that beach; I got a little burnt (or so I thought). I returned to my hotel room freshened and wandered into town, for a drink then to meet a friend at an office barbecue.

No problem in the pub, I felt a little red but what the hell! However, the barbecue was on the roof of the office. The sun was still high in the sky and the office roof, being made of concrete, had absorbed the heat all day. It was baking! After an hour, and a few drinks, I felt like I imagined a lobster must do as he spends his final seconds on earth in the boiling water. Feeling dizzy I decided to take shelter inside, I opted for the peace and coolness of the gents toilets. However, for some unknown annoying reason they were locked (from the outside). Desperate times call for desperate measures, I repaired to the Ladies. Sanctuary, they were unlocked. Well I was feeling pretty bad by this stage, I desperately needed to cool down. Instinct and warped logic, that only sunstroke and alcohol can induce, then took over. The floor of the ladies was tiled in marble, cool inviting marble. No hesitation, straight down to my Jockey Y fronts; I lay prostrate in a cross like position. Half an hour later I felt more human, and was able to return to the fray; looking like the lobster I had felt like earlier. Remarkably, and fortunately, not a soul came into the ladies during my marble cooling time. I told my tale to the remaining group of people who thought it was very amusing; they took pity on me, and we went onto a few bars in St Hellier to cool my hot blood.

Some years later, you would think that I had learnt my lesson, I was in South Africa in October. That is when their summer is beginning. One Saturday I thought that it would be an ideal time to take advantage of some sun. The hotel had a beautiful roof garden and pool, what could be more inviting? The heat did not seem so very great, so I staked myself out for a couple of hours or so. No problem until an hour after putting my clothes back on. Burning, BURNING, **BURNING!** I had neglected a very basic law of physics. Johannesburg is 20,000 feet higher than London, ie it is much nearer the sun. Even though it may not feel too hot, more of the ultra violet rays penetrate the sky. Baked again, this time though no dash to the ladies, I swamped myself in copious quantities of after sun cream and put the air-conditioner in my room onto full blast. When I arrived at the office on Monday morning my colleagues asked me why I had turned a funny colour.

Simi Valley USA

Simi Valley, home to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, is situated on the West coast of the USA and is 40 miles away from Los Angeles. It was originally inhabited by the Chumash Indians, and is now home to approximately 100000 people. Despite its proximity to LA, it is still very rural in comparison; housing some 27 parks, camping and picnic areas as well as having a 39 mile equestrian trail. Since it is located in California, the weather is absolutely splendid.

“I Almost Pissed My Pants”

My visit to Philips broadcast television operations in Simi Valley was a lively affair. The majority of the staff at the site were under forty, and so still had some life in them. Additionally, the CEO was an exuberant American of unlimited energy who resembled, in my opinion anyway, a caricature of a Hollywood film producer, all smiles, backslapping and hyperactivity; rather than the CEO of a company that sold TV cameras and mixing boards.

My primary point of contact was with the CFO, an expatriate German, doing the usual career boosting step of spending a few years abroad in another part of the organisation. He was a nice chap, a little serious, but had a high level of integrity and had a dormant sense of humour. When visiting an organisation, I was usually assigned an ordinary office or given access to a meeting room; where I could work, review my papers and meet with members of the management team. On this particular occasion I was stationed in the board room, which was ideal; plenty of table space, twenty chairs, well lit etc etc. I settled in, and began one of my many meetings with the CFO. I have a tendency as a review progresses to immerse myself in the minutiae of detail, not a bad habit (auditors of Enron and WorldCom could have done worse than follow this example); this tends to bring out the focussed side of my personality, which manifests itself in a number of ways viz:

- Tenaciously re asking the same question until I understand the answer. It is my experience that if you don't understand an answer given to you then it either means that the person giving it; has expressed themselves poorly, doesn't understand it themselves or is lying.
- Working from morning through to afternoon, with only the occasional break for a sandwich. I don't drink coffee or tea, so I tend to advise my interviewees to take their breaks whenever they want; otherwise I would keep talking with them for three or more hours. I have done this before, as one poor project manager, who gradually turned a deathly white during the meeting, can attest to.
- Experiencing increasing surges of adrenaline, that stimulate my enthusiasm and energetic sense of humour for the task in hand.

During our meeting we were not able to identify the cause of a particular cost overrun, so we asked one of the purchasing managers to join us. She was then joined by another, who then asked someone else to come in. Eventually I found that I had the entire management team in the room with me, grappling with the question that I had posed an hour and a half ago. Needless to say the CEO, not wishing to be left out, also joined us. The discussion was very lively, but good humoured. We still were not getting to the answer I needed. At this stage the CEO, referring to the CFO, said in a good natured way:

“These Germans, you never win with them”

At this point my adrenaline, having been surging ever upwards for the last hour, kicked my brain and then my mouth into making the following involuntary retort:

“Yes you can, we beat them twice at their national sport”

Oh my God!, I couldn't believe that I had just said that. The room collapsed into gales of laughter, I rapidly apologised for what was in essence a dreadful thing to say; the CFO, to his credit, did not take offence. The CEO couldn't stop laughing, and had to leave the room for a few minutes.

Order was restored and we continued. The CEO then returned and said that he had just rung his wife to tell her what had happened and said:

“Ken, I almost pissed my pants; you're quite a guy!”

Those of you considering a move into the profession of internal auditing, be advised I was lucky that time; comments like that should not be made, people can very easily take offence.

Pink Elephants

On a Friday evening during my visit, the team invited me out for a few drinks after work in a most excellent local establishment called The Elephant Bar. The bar had both an indoor area where there were video games, a pool table, cable sports TV and an outdoor area with ample numbers of tables and chairs. This being California I needed no persuasion to sit outside and enjoy the sunshine, clear blue skies and colourful local scenery; punctuated by the ubiquitous man sized cacti that formed part of the local flora and fauna.

The Elephant Bar (or “E Bar” as it was colloquially known) offered a friendly, relaxed genuine American (to my English eyes) atmosphere in which to relax. Friday evening was buffet evening, where a very decent spread of hot dogs, burgers, buns, salads and relish were laid on gratis for the benefit of the patrons. Drinks were served by waitresses wearing the house T shirt; emblazoned with the caption “preserve the wildlife” printed over a cartoon elephant wearing a walkman, shades, sneakers and drinking a cocktail. I naturally purchased one of these fine garments and, although it is somewhat faded, still wear it today.

We kicked off with a few beers and chatted about work, life, the universe etc. Having had our fill of beer, one of the group suggested that we should go for the house speciality the “Pink Elephant”. This was a purple coloured concoction containing liberal amounts of, what I believe to be, vodka and tequila; “bring it on!” We downed a few of these fine cocktails and watched the sun set over the Valley. This was quite a change from the London apres work tradition, of drinking as many pints as you could in a crowded pub; before trying to find a Chinese or Indian restaurant that was able, and willing, to accommodate you.

Gunfight at the Simi Valley Trattoria

On my last evening in the Valley the CEO invited me out to dinner, with his wife, to a local Italian restaurant. He picked me up from The E Bar, where I was having a farewell drink (Pink Elephants all round, of course!) with the team.

We had a very jolly evening, to say the least this man's natural exuberance and my own adrenaline high provided a natural spark to the banter and dinner conversation. This was of course significantly aided by the liberal quantities of alcohol that we consumed. His wife was a very jolly individual, who shared an interest in cooking, we discussed some of our favourite recipes. As is the way with such discussions she insisted that when they had moved to the UK, which was going to happen in the next six months, then I must come over for dinner; needless to say this dinner invitation has long since been forgotten shrouded in the mists of time and the haze of alcohol.

We came to the dessert course and I, following custom and practice, ordered an Irish coffee. Here I found a local quirk in the licensing laws, the restaurant whilst it had a licence to serve wine and beers could not serve spirits. My host was a little embarrassed by this eccentricity of local law; therefore he did what any self respecting American businessman would do, under those circumstances, he bribed the waiter. Problem solved, and Irish coffee was produced. I was asked by the waiter to say it was non alcoholic, in the event the police should unexpectedly raid the place. I wondered at the time why he would think that was a likely event, read on and find out!

Sated and exalted, we left the restaurant and my host ushered me into his car to drive me to my hotel. We started on our way, but then took a detour; turning off the road into the carpark of a 24 hour hypermarket. The CEO and his wife got out and said that I should come along. Midnight shopping? a little odd I thought, but I was certainly "up for it". We grabbed a trolley and trundled through the countless aisles of produce; our target, I was to discover, was the liquor area. My host, still feeling embarrassed by the Irish coffee issue, wanted to buy me a bottle of whisky as a souvenir and to show that this was a civilised part of the world. I thought this to be a very decent gesture. In case anyone thinks that this could be construed as some form of bribe, that I should not have accepted, I would point out the basic rule of accepting gifts I was told when I first joined KPMG:

"If you can eat it, or drink it, and it is not overtly extravagant then you can accept it."

We continued on our journey, and I was dropped off at my hotel; I bade them farewell.

When I arrived at our office at Salt Lake City, two days later, I received a call from the CEO at Simi Valley; he wanted to tell me what had happened at the restaurant fifteen minutes after we left. Apparently, a jealous boyfriend of one of the waitresses, whom he suspected of having an affair with another member of staff, turned up at the restaurant; kitted out for "full and frank discussions" with a semi automatic rifle and handgun. Shots were fired, no one was hurt, but needless to say the police turned up in force and spent some time interviewing all and sundry; lucky they didn't find me with my illicit Irish coffee!

Salt Lake City USA

Salt Lake City, with a population of 170000, is situated between the Wasatch Mountains on the East and the Great Salt Lake on the West. The city was founded in the nineteenth century, by the Mormon leader Brigham Young. He, so the story goes, designed the streets to be wide enough so that a wagon team of four oxen could make a U turn.

The city is the spiritual headquarters of the Mormon church, and home to the renowned Mormon Tabernacle Choir. However, the city is also renowned for the stunning views afforded of the surrounding mountains, and the quality of the skiing (it hosted the 2002 Winter Olympics) and outdoor recreation facilities.

I have been to Salt Lake City in Utah on a couple of occasions whilst working for Philips, as part of a world-wide review that I was performing of one of our division's cost cutting programmes.

Drinking, the Mormon Way

During my visits there, I stayed in a Best Western hotel called The Suites. This is a truly exceptionally well designed hotel. The rooms, as the name implies, were suites consisting of a large bedroom, separate lounge and kitchen area. There were TV's in both the lounge and bedroom. The kitchen area had cutlery and plates etc, as the hotel was perfectly happy for you to bring food in and cook it (quite a refreshing change from those places where you have to smuggle your Kentucky bargain bucket in under a long coat!). The suites were arranged in circular stories, with communal balconies on each story around a central atrium; which had a very decent Italian restaurant, bar and central lift shaft. Each suite had a door bell, and indeed window facing into the atrium (as well as facing the outside) so each suite more resembled the ground floor of a small house rather than a hotel room.

Notwithstanding the influence of the modern world, and the tourist industry, there are still local by-laws relating to bar licences that are based on Mormon religious beliefs. I encountered these in several different forms whilst I was there.

Restaurants, open to the general public cannot serve hard liquor. Therefore to overcome this, those wishing to serve hard liquor set themselves up as private clubs; where members and their guests can obtain a drop of the hard stuff with their meal. My host, the CFO of the company I was visiting, quite naturally had "club membership" to a number of the city's finest eateries. One particular evening he was unable to entertain me himself, but signed me in to one very decent place (steaks you could die for) and the staff looked after my liquor need with great professionalism.

It goes without saying that similar rules apply to public/hotel bars, namely you have to be a member or staying in the hotel in order to acquire your G&T. Having finished my meal in the above mentioned restaurant, I asked the waiter if there was any decent bar in walking distance. He gave me some directions and I trotted off. Naturally getting there was not going to be the difficult thing, getting in would be the issue. I arrived and was greeted by a large gentleman in a dark suit, wearing the obligatory hearing aid of his profession (it never ceases to amaze me as to how many bouncers are aurally challenged!). As the old routine goes "sorry sir your name's not down you can't come in". My problem was resolved by the arrival of two ladies who were members, as is the case with all Americans, they were very hospitable and (appreciating the eccentricity of the drinking laws) signed me in on their behalf. The bar was very well decorated but the customers appeared to be a cross between the regulars of Cheers, and Moe's bar in the Simpsons; in other words an Englishman in a suit fitted in very well. My thanks to the kind ladies who signed me in.

I encountered the most bizarre aspect of this drinking law whilst having a beer, for my last night in Salt Lake City, with my host in my hotel bar; which was run by a very lively/sassy lady from New York. We were drinking Guinness that evening and my host, who had never had it before, thought it would be great to take a bottle home. No problem, I thought, all that was required was for me to order a bottle and that would be that. No sir, I was informed by our kind hostess that the rules did not permit her to sell a bottle that would be consumed offsite. She agreed with my comment, that given the fact that we only wanted one it would be highly unlikely that we would do anything to outrage public decency and that the law was a bit daft. However, being a good New Yorker she offered me a way around this. All I had to do was go to my room, then phone the bar and order a bottle. The bottle would then be sent up by a member of staff. I would then put it in a brown paper bag, which had provided by the bar maid, and bring it back down. Brilliant, worked like a dream, the room service lady was a little puzzled as to why I didn't want it opened though.

A Quick Pint in the Mountains

As I have noted Salt Lake City is surrounded by stunning, snow covered mountains; popular with skiers and tourists alike. One day whilst reviewing our business operations there with the CFO, he suggested that at the end of the day we take a short trip by road into the mountains for a beer. Great idea, normally our factories and administrative buildings around the world were located in the centre of towns or on industrial estates with nothing other than office blocks, or bleak landscapes on the horizon for miles around. We finished our tasks for the day, and set off in his four wheel drive. The journey took about 45 minutes, as we progressed by road higher and higher into the mountains. The weather was crisp and clear, the snow pure white and the sky a sharp blue; oh the contrast to the drab, dreary skies of England!

We arrived at our destination, a large timber constructed restaurant and bar; resembling the sort of Tyrol house you would find in Austria or Bavaria, perched on top of a mountain. We entered and were warmly greeted by a young German, who was the owner come manager; we ordered two large glasses of his finest Weisbier served, quite properly, with a slice of lemon. Even though the weather was a little chilly, it would have been a crime to sit inside; so we took our beers to the outside viewing platform, situated at the top of the house, and sat down at one of the tables. The view was stunning, and provided a truly exceptional backdrop to our beer drinking. I toyed with an insane idea (brought on by the high altitude I suspect) of asking the landlord of my "local" in Croydon as to whether he could construct a few mountains nearby, and move his pub a few thousand feet skywards; I suspected though that this would be a bit of a non starter. Needless to say one beer was not enough, we had another. Sadly all good things come to an end, and my host had to get back home to see his wife (family life should take precedence over drinking with the internal auditor!).

Darmstadt Germany

Darmstadt, situated near to Frankfurt, is home to 141000 people. It was founded in 600, Kaiser Josef II stated that it was where “Germany strives to be Italy”. However, in 1944 78% of it was destroyed by the Allies. It was reconstructed to become a large modern city, and was declared a Town of Europe in 1978. It is located in the wine growing region of Bergstrasse.

The Stooping Shower

I went to Darmstadt on a couple of occasions, in the mid nineties; as part of a cost control review I was performing for the CFO of one of our divisions which had its headquarters there. Darmstadt had a number of hotels; including a 5 star one complete with champagne bar, and a more modest traditional country house complete with an authentic German beer cellar and garden. In the spirit of economy I was assigned accommodation in the country house. I was happy enough with this, the beer cellar and restaurant were jolly and the food was good. My room had the basics; a TV, minibar, double bed and bathroom. However, the latter was a little eccentric in terms of its design. My room was in the corner of the top floor of the accommodation annex, and was directly underneath the slope of the roof. As such the interior of my room, to be specific the shower room also sloped. The result was that I had to stoop in order to be able to take a shower, this rather diminished the effectiveness and comfort of the shower.

The senior accountant, who had been assigned as my “wing man” during my visit, was sympathetic and said that everyone staying there had the same difficulties. He suggested that we dine out one evening and by way of recompense for the shower we could go to the champagne bar of the other hotel for a few glasses of champagne. I readily agreed with this most excellent suggestion, and following a meal in a good local Italian restaurant we wandered off for a couple of glasses of champagne.

Was the Eisbein Shaved?

During my visits to Darmstadt my colleagues there very kindly took it in turns to take me out, and made me feel very welcome. One evening one of the secretaries volunteered to look after me, now there’s a brave lady. She decided, and I happily agreed, that we should go to a local beer hall where traditional German food such as (yes you’ve guessed it) Eisbein (see page 180) was served. I pointed out that this was a favourite dish of mine, and she decided it would be wise to ring ahead to reserve one.

We arrived there after work and were shown to our table, the waiter explained to us that we had been very wise to ring ahead; as this was the last Eisbein in the house. I was honoured, and not disappointed, a truly large steaming juicy joint was placed before me; with the traditional accompaniments of sauerkraut and boiled potatoes. A dish fit for a king, in my view. Whilst I indulged my appetite I could not help but notice that some of the other diners were repeatedly glancing in our direction. I asked my companion why, she said that they were curious that an Englishman would be prepared to eat this dish, and more especially that the last one in the house had been reserved for this Englishman.

The next evening I was entertained by half a dozen members of the account’s department, we went to a local pub and tucked into a hearty meal; washed down with copious quantities of Weisbier. I told them the story of the previous evening and they grimaced. One of them said incredulously:

“You ate an Eisbein, and you actually enjoyed it?”

“Yes” I said, “I am very fond of it”

“But” one of them interjected “that’s a very old peasant dish, was it shaved?”

I replied *“no, the hairs are a good source of fibre”*

We hooted with laughter, schnapps was ordered and toasts made. It is fair say that a good evening was had by all.

“Now I Know Why You Enjoy Auditing”

It was the final evening of my visit, and the CFO asked me to dine with him and his senior accountant. We met in the CFO’s office after work, and had a quick schnapps before heading off to one of the numerous beer halls that populated Darmstadt.

We went to a very bustling establishment, which was overflowing with people. We pushed our way through the throng and found a table. Although the place was heaving, there was an ample supply of waitresses all wearing the traditional bodice and long pleated skirt that you associate with this part of the world. Our menus, and beers arrived very promptly. I opted for a salami soup (see 141), that was so stuffed with solid ingredients you could walk on it, followed by a selection of bratwurst and bierwurst accompanied by mashed potatoes. An excellent and hearty meal, ideal to fortify the inner man.

We talked about how my current review had been going, and the outcome of my first review that I had performed some months earlier. The CFO remarked, with a wry smile, that he had held a meeting with the management team to discuss the results of the first review; and that he was so passionate about the findings of that review he had managed to break his pointing stick on a flip chart whilst emphasising one of the report’s recommendations. I was amused by the fact that an audit report could raise such passions, not really the norm.

We chatted about the nature of my work, and the places that I had visited. The CFO said:

“Ken, I have to say that I have been wondering why someone like you wants to remain in internal audit.”

I think it is a sad reflection on the role of internal audit that so many people have such a negative view about it. He continued:

“However, talking to you now I can see why you enjoy it; you like to travel, and what other role offers you such an opportunity?”

We partook of a few glasses of schnapps. My host then suggested that as it was my last night I should make a trip to Frankfurt and see a few “shows” (ie go to one of the numerous strip clubs). He offered to cover any reasonable expense incurred in the expedition. I declined, after all the purpose of the review was to identify potential cost savings. I decided that going back to my hotel, and taking a full eight hours sleep, was a better plan than a night time expedition to Frankfurt.

Seoul Korea

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, houses some ten million people and is a mixture of modern and ancient architecture. Parts of the city were destroyed by the Japanese and Manchu invasions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this destruction was compounded by the Korean War in the 1950's. However, a large number of temples, palaces, pagodas and pleasure gardens still managed to survive. Seoul spans the Han River, and is divided into a number of districts including; Jung-gu the central district, Jongno-gu (with many hotels and sights) to the north, and Itaewon (known for its shopping, bars and nightlife) south of the city centre.

Seoul is in the Northwest of South Korea, and is only 25 miles away from the border with North Korea. The USO offers a guided tour of the Demilitarised zone (DMZ) by the border, which is well worth going on.

Seoul was proclaimed the nation's capital in 1392, and was surrounded by a wall until the early twentieth century. Some of the gates, such as the Great South Gate, remain albeit located on a traffic roundabout.

In the North of the city is The National Folklore Museum, which is located within Kyongbok Palace built in 1395 and renovated in the 19th century. Nearby is the National Museum of Korea. The city has a number of gardens and parks, such as the Secret Garden in the Changdok Palace complex (built in 1406) which has pavilions and landscaped grounds.

Slumming it in the Hilton

I went to Korea on business in 1995 for a month. During this time I stayed at the Seoul Hilton. A splendid establishment, everything you would expect a 5 star hotel to offer was on offer. Situated in the centre of Seoul, my room on one of the top floors gave me quite a view of the city. Particularly interesting was the giant TV screen (the size of a wall), that was on the building opposite. The hotel had some very good facilities amongst which I note:

- An Italian restaurant, Il Ponte, which served excellent spaghetti carbonara (see 234), one of the best I have ever had.
- A lounge bar, The Oak Room, decorated in the style of an English club/pub. They served roast beef for lunch on Sundays and snacks, such as sausages, in the evenings. I made this my pre dinner meeting place whenever I had the opportunity. It was clear that I was becoming a fixture as the "maitre d" would reserve my "usual" sofa for me; indeed a good friend of mine, who had turned up a little early one evening to meet me, was advised that I had not yet come down but he could sit on my sofa at my table whilst he waited. Having lived there for some eight years or so he was a little miffed that he wasn't still recognised as a regular himself. I must be a very "annoying" customer!
- A night club decorated in the style of ancient Egypt called, yes you've guessed, Pharaoh's. Many an evening was rounded off in there.

- A full size Olympic swimming pool. The very largest I have encountered in any hotel, with the exception of the SAS hotel in Riga. My first visit to the pool caused a minor fracas with one of the lifeguards. I was happily swimming, minding my own business, when the guard started gesturing to me. Clearly he wanted something so I swam over. He kept gesturing and pointing to my head. Finally the penny dropped, he wanted me to put a cloth bathing cap on. The Koreans are very fastidious about cleanliness, and regard body hair floating in a public pool as quite unhygienic. Hence they limit the risk of clumps of hair falling out of peoples' heads into the water, by making all swimmers wear bathing caps. Quite what they would make of the hygiene of some of the people who use public pools in the UK I have no idea.

Meeting Dr No

When I arrived at our offices in Korea, as is normal when starting an audit assignment, I held an opening meeting with the CEO. A man whose demeanour bore an uncanny resemblance to Dr No from the James Bond film; I half expected a large Persian cat to appear. Normally at these meetings one could expect an overview as to the general business conditions, specific issues relating to the operations and risks/opportunities pertinent to the business. However, before these were discussed the CEO pressed a button on his desk; the shutters on the windows closed, the lights dimmed and a computer projector whirled into life. He then proceeded to give me a potted history of Korea from the days of the Shilla empire, through the Japanese occupation, the Korean war and up the present day. Very useful and indeed interesting, it is important to understand the nature of the people and the country in which you are doing business if you are then to help/advise and offer practical suggestions for improvement in risk management and controls improvements. However, I was a little taken aback by the additional information given to me regarding what the future of Korea was to be, in the eyes of the CEO. Specifically:

- Korea will reunify within 10 years (the date of this meeting was 1995, so there is still time for this to meet its deadline).
- Korea will continue to upgrade and increase the size of their battlefleet and then take on the Japanese.

This gave me useful insight; this time not so much into the character/nature of Korea but the more into the CEO himself.

A Quiet Dinner for Myself and Six Hundred

After my first day on site I was invited to attend a "customer dinner" hosted by the management of Philips Korea for their most important customers, in the Hyatt Hotel. The nature of these corporate events usually follows a similar pattern. The guests are treated to dinner and drinks, during which time there is a corporate advertising video or show put on to boost the brand image. I have to say that this was one of the more lavish events.

I was picked up from the Hilton, by the CEO's chauffeur, and driven to the Hyatt. I was greeted by the "guest liaison hostess", and escorted to my seat in the main dining room. This was no small scale operation, there were over 600 people there. We were sitting on tables of 10 and I had been placed on the CEO's table. One of the other guests at the table was the Dutch Ambassador who I was introduced to, rather to my amusement the event was being filmed (for corporate marketing purposes); and I have this vivid recollection of a video recorder being shoved in my face as I and the ambassador shook hands. I suspect this historic moment never quite made it beyond the cutting room floor, corporate videos like to show the senior people (rather the senior people like to see themselves in corporate videos). When the editor realised I was merely an internal auditor I suspect I was chopped out very promptly!

The dinner was highly enjoyable, the show both live and video was spectacular. However, I was a little surprised at the food being served. Given that fact that 95% of the people in the room were Korean, I expected to be served Korean food. Instead we were served soup followed by steak with creamed potatoes. No problem with that, although I noticed that many of the guests had trouble with the knives and forks (chopsticks and spoons being the order of the day in normal circumstances). However, filled with my natural auditor's curiosity I couldn't but help enquire as to why we weren't eating Korean. I asked the CEO's wife, who was seated next to me, she replied (rather splendidly I thought):

"Mr Frost, Korean food is very delicate and subtle; with so many guests it would not be possible to serve it in a manner that would do it justice. Therefore, we have opted for Western style food."

I couldn't argue with that!

Dr No's Birthday Party

My visit coincided with Dr No's birthday, normally not an event that would cross an internal auditor's horizon; after all he was not 100 or anything like that. However, things were a little different in this part of the world. Two days beforehand a memo was circulated throughout the offices in Seoul, advising staff that there would be a birthday reception at 11:00am for Dr No; to be attended by the senior management. Very interesting I thought, but of no consequence to me.

The day duly dawned, and I happily continued discussing with the CEO of one of our divisions the risk map of his particular part of the business. The appointed hour approached and he asked what I wanted to do about the birthday, I said we should continue with our meeting; no problem as far as he was concerned. However, we were not to be given any choice in the matter. The phone rang a few minutes later, it was Dr No's secretary asking to know why we were not in the conference room; we had, by all accounts no choice. The CEO I was with looked annoyed, and said we had better go along. So work stopped, and we trotted off to pay homage.

I was expecting at most, a few drinks and a polite birthday speech. How wrong I was, the scene that greeted me in the conference room made my eyes pop wide open (rather akin to a chameleon). All senior management were gathered and standing, a little uncomfortably, around the room; as close to the walls as they could possibly manage (as though they were to be placed in front of a firing squad). At one end of the room a table had been laid with a starched white tablecloth, and plates for all the guests; in the centre was a large multi tiered iced cake, resembling a wedding cake. This apparently was a gift from the Hilton Hotel (Dr No apparently did a lot of business with them!). There were three waiters dressed in dinner suits, with white gloves, offering people champagne and orange juice. In another corner of the room was a ladies string quartet, who played soothing background music. Indeed this was a little more than the traditional “pint down the pub” at lunchtime that may be on offer in the UK.

I partook of a glass of champagne and pondered how much more bizarre this could become. Dr No made his entrance, at which point there was a perfunctory round of applause from the assembled guests. One of the guests then made a speech (in English, I would note that I was the only native English speaker there); congratulating the good Dr on his birthday and offering best wishes etc. Dr No then made a gracious speech of thanks, punctuated with references to “building the brand” and “improving on targets” etc. At this point the quartet struck up “Happy Birthday” which all guests, to my extreme embarrassment, had to sing along to. I whispered to the CEO, I was working with, “is this normal in Korea?” he hissed “No, this is not Korean at all”. It was clear he felt discomforted and annoyed by this self indulgent spectacle. Singing duly over, a large silver sword was produced (maybe used in annual personnel appraisals to encourage under-performers?) and offered to Dr No; he made a ceremonial slicing of the cake. The waiters then cut up the rest, and offered it around. Utterly bizarre!

The England vs Korea Drinking Competition

My work in Korea required me to review the business controls and risks of the main product divisions units of our operations in Seoul. I had planned my time to allow me a few days with the management of each product division. To bore you for a few minutes, but it will set the scene, the review process required me to:

- Gain an understanding of the business, how it operates in the context of the local market.
- Identify the main competition and customers.
- Identify the key risks and opportunities.
- Review the adequacy of the business controls.
- Review the organisational structure
- Go through the results in comparison with the budget.
- Discuss any other issues that management felt were relevant.

Having taken all of this in I would then, based on my experience and with the benefit of “fresh eyes”, put forward recommendations and suggestions as to how to mitigate risks and improve the operations of the business. These recommendations would initially be presented orally, then formally in the form of a written report which would be distributed to the directors back in Europe.

The meetings, would be quite formal (in line with local custom and practice), I would sit on one side of a table and the CEO of the product division would sit directly opposite me; flanked on either side by at least two other members of staff one of whom would be his CFO. The meetings would last all day, aside from a half hour break for lunch, so focus and efficiency from both auditor and auditee were required.

One of the issues I raised with one of the divisions was the fact that for over 6 months the position of Sales Director had been vacant, and sales had not been meeting budget. I asked why the post was vacant, and was told that the job market in Korea was very tight (from a recruitment point of view); ie there was full employment, and people with the requisite skills were simply not available. I ventured to suggest that maybe they should consider recruiting an expatriate as Philips had an extensive and well run expatriate programme. The CEO smiled benignly at me, rather like a teacher smiling at the new pupil who has asked a well meant but rather silly question, and said:

“Mr Frost no foreigner can drink like a Korean”.

Business in Korea requires you to be able to entertain your customers long into the “wee small hours”. Subject closed and suggestion, at least in the minds of my Korean hosts, rejected.

Regarding the drinking challenge I felt that as a decent Brit. I should not let such a slur on our national character go without impunity. That evening I dined in a Swiss restaurant with the CFO and two others from that division. During the liqueur course of the dinner I taught, with the aid of hastily written flashcards (improvised on the backs of menus), my dining companions some choice British words to be used when emphasising discussions. They seemed quite pleased with the mini lesson on “how to improve your word power”.

The evening, no surprise here, went on to the “wee small hours”. I seem to recall we ended up in the disco of the Hilton hotel. However, I am pleased to report that the honour of both Korea and Britain remained intact, both parties held their liqueur well and we decided to call it a draw.

Ask a Policeman

Seoul was very difficult to navigate without a detailed map, there were virtually no street signs and most business cards had maps printed on the back. I got lost one Saturday afternoon, and resorted to trying to ask two policemen how to get back to my hotel. They looked as baffled as I was, mainly because I spoke no Korean and they spoke no English. At this stage an old lady joined the multi lingual discussion; offering me a piece of paper with several numbers written on it. After much hand gesturing and pointing we all gave up, I bowed very politely and went on my way; as lost as I was before. I eventually found my hotel, an hour later. I puzzled about the numbers that the old lady had given me; eventually the penny dropped, these were bus routes. I think had I tried to take a bus, I would have become even more lost.

The Most Dangerous Place in the World

When I was in Korea I went to see the demilitarised zone (the DMZ as it is known locally) at Panmunjom one Saturday. The US Army, for I think \$25, run guided tours there; picking you up by coach from one of their barracks in Seoul transporting you there, then taking you back after a couple of hours.

I would thoroughly recommend this tour should you have the time. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to visit a strip of land that is neutral territory, acting as a buffer zone, dividing North and South Korea; two parts of what before the Korean war was one country. They have an armistice but the tension between the two can run high. Both sides have a very heavy military presence on either side of the DMZ, one misunderstanding could lead to war.

The tour is very popular and has to be booked a few days beforehand. The ticket comes with a leaflet which explains what you should not wear. North Korea uses the DMZ as a chance to spy on decadent Westerners and so jeans, T shirts, shorts, flip flops, tight knit tops, mini skirts and a few other “decadent” items of apparel are banned on the tour. Should you be arrogant enough to ignore the leaflet, then tough luck you won’t be allowed on the coach and you have wasted your \$25.

The journey, from memory, takes about two hours. Korea has an exceptionally beautiful countryside and once the coach has negotiated the urban sprawl of Seoul you will be treated to a very scenic journey. In many respect the countryside reminded me of the Highlands of Scotland.

I would warn you that the coach trip sets off at about 6:00am, so don’t overdo it the night before. I tried on the way back to take a nap, but the coach tour guide was a very enthusiastic Korean student who, despite having lectured us for 2 hours on the way up managed to find even more to say on the way back!

With regard to the actual DMZ, when we arrived we were escorted into a US army briefing room (Ballinger Hall) where a sergeant explained, in US military “double quick speak”, the history of the base and the rules regarding the use of cameras. Specifically there are only certain areas where you are allowed to take pictures, as he barked “when we tell you to stop taking pictures, you will stop taking pictures!”

The American base is called Camp Bonifas, whose motto is “In Front of The All” (they are the first line of defence in the event of hostilities resuming with the North), there is rather a sad story as to how it got its name. I apologise to the US Army if the details are not entirely accurate, please let me know if there are significant inaccuracies I will correct them.

The sergeant, from memory, told us this. Back in the 1976 the US decided that there was a line of trees in the DMZ that were obstructing their view of the Northern part of Panmunjom. Therefore they put together a small body of troops to cut the trees down. When they attempted this the North Koreans sent some troops in, and clashed with the tree cutters. The result was tragic, US Army Sergeant Bonifas lost his life. The US decided that this would not go unanswered. Therefore, as our sergeant put it, “the most expensive tree cutting operation I history” began. The local US battlefleet was put on alert. US jets were scrambled, the entire garrison was put on alert; and an armed party of US Army and South Korean special forces went to cut the trees down. As the Sergeant said “the North Koreans did not, on this occasion attempt to hinder our operation”.

The tour takes you through sites such as; the Pagoda at Freedom House and Checkpoint 3 (where you can see the Bridge of No Return, and the North Korean propaganda village). Part of the tour takes in the Military Armistice Commission Building; essentially a negotiation hut where, from time to time, the North Koreans, South Koreans and the US hold talks. The hut straddles the border so that half of the negotiation table rests in North Korea, the other half rests in South. Apparently when each side meets they bring “table flags”, showing their country’s colours, with them. We were told that during one tense period even these flags caused problems. The North Koreans brought a flag that was a little larger than the South Koreans, the next meeting the South brought a larger one etc etc. Eventually one side brought a flag that was so large it would not fit in the door. In the finest art of diplomacy a solution was found. The North now has a flag that has a longer flag pole than the South, the South though has a flag pole that has a wider base than the North. Simple eh? It is wise to remember that in this part of the world “saving face” means everything.

During the tour of the hut the North Korean soldiers stared through the window at us. We were told not to make any gestures, or act in a “decadent way”, as this could be photographed and used for anti Western propaganda.

Effective Haggling, the Frost Technique

Seoul, like many cities, never sleeps; and you can find shops, bars, restaurants open at all hours. At every street corner there are small stalls selling hot snacks, soups, rice; all manner of temptations for the palate. One evening, after dinner, I was experiencing this street life and exploring the shops. I wandered into one particular shop that sold ties, all grouped according to price. I had been advised that it never hurt to try to haggle the price down, of course it is not normally within the experience of the average Westerner (who is used to the prices stated as being the only amount that the shop will accept for the merchandise) to haggle. However, having been duly fortified by a good dinner and acceptable bottle of wine I decided to put my haggling skills to the test. Finding a few ties in one particular section that took my eye I called the assistant over; who very kindly said that I would look very handsome wearing the ties I had selected. I informed him that I felt the price of 2000 Won to be too high and that I would pay 1500 Won. He looked at me, smiled and said “that is very generous of you sir. However, you will find that those ties are in fact only 1000 Won”. I had of course been reading the price from the other section of ties. Oh well I paid the 1000 Won, and decided that my days of haggling were prematurely over. I beat a hasty, but dignified, retreat from the store.

The Korea House

Should you wish to experience a genuine Korean evening of food and culture, then I recommend that you book an evening at the Korea House in Seoul; which my hosts very kindly took me to. The Korea house is far more than a restaurant; it comprises a traditional Korean garden, and theatre which puts on a traditional Korean play consisting of music and acting (you won’t understand it, but since it only lasts half an hour it is worth the visit).

My hosts collected me early in the evening as we needed some time to walk around the garden. I would say that I tend to take little interest in nature, but would say that the gardens were worth a visit, similar to the Japanese style (at least to my limited Western experience). We moved into the restaurant, which being Korean required us to remove our shoes and then sit on cushions on the floor (Koreans will make allowance for Westerners who are reluctant, or too elderly, to sit on the floor and provide western style table and chairs). Unlike the Chinese or Japanese, the Koreans use metal chopsticks and spoons rather than bamboo or ivory. Another interesting variation in eating habits is that whereas in Japan or China the chopsticks are used to eat rice, the Koreans (rather sensibly to my simple Western mind) use the spoon; the chopsticks are used to pick up pieces of meat or kimchi. By the way don't stick your chopsticks or spoon straight up or down in your rice bowl, as this is a ritual only performed during a memorial service for the dead. The meal consisted of a selection of Korean delicacies including bulgogi (see page 197), kimchi (see page 259) and cabbage soup; washed down with a large porcelain carafe of soju. I thoroughly recommend it. We then took our seats in the theatre and saw the show, the story was explained to me but for the life of me I can't remember it. There was a lot of banging of drums, cymbals and blowing of horns. Make sure you book for the whole experience.

There was an Englishman and Irishman, Frenchman, Dutchman and Korean

One evening I was invited to dinner in the French restaurant of the Hyatt. This restaurant had a particularly good reputation for food and service; which I have to say was well deserved. Our table was particularly cosmopolitan that evening consisting of.

- Myself (a Brit.)
- The CFO (a Frenchman)
- The Chief Accountant (a Korean)
- The Chief Accountant's assistant (a Korean)
- The manager of one of our factories (a Korean)
- Two representatives from the Product Division (both Dutch)

The meal, as I have already indicated, was excellent. The only "fly in the ointment" was a rather unfortunate disagreement (not so much heated, but shall we say determined) between the above persons (myself excluded). The disagreement concerned various issues relating to one of our factories in Pusan (a town in South Korea), the usual macho posturing about who was really in charge, I was seemingly made to witness this in order to support the local management. Nothing doing, the role of audit is to remain independent; management have to fight their internal political battles on their own. The argument was nothing earth shattering, but enough to raise peoples' blood pressures. It did not detract from my enjoyment of the duck breast with Kir soaked cherries that I had that evening. After dinner I took the Dutchmen out for a few drinks in the Hilton, they soon relaxed.

The Dog Did It

Whilst on assignment in Seoul, I spent many jolly evenings with an old friend from university and his wife who live there. One particular Saturday evening they invited me over to their home for a dinner party, that they were holding for me and a couple of their friends. My friend arranged to meet me in Oak Room bar of my hotel, his driver would then pick us up thirty minutes later to take us to where he lived. We therefore had a jolly couple of pre journey cocktails, in what had effectively become my "local". The staff were by now familiar with the proportions of my Bloody Mary, and ensured that adequate supplies of nuts and crisps were on hand.

Cocktails duly despatched we commenced on our journey, not exactly a long trek, twenty minutes by car at that time of day. We arrived, and I was introduced to the other guests and the family dog, my friend then mixed a batch of his special Bloody Mary which included a few prawns. I would recommend that you try it some time (see 326). We settled down to dinner which was a splendid feast of baked ham (see 155) and roast chicken. It is fair to say much wine, and spirits, were quaffed that evening. Tales of the old days at university, duly exaggerated for the benefit of the ladies, were told; and gales of laughter swept through the house.

Well by 1:00am the two lady guests decided that they really should depart, being a party animal I decided to stay for “one for the road”. The road of course could be very long and so one could turn into two or three, as indeed it did. At this stage my friend put on an album of traditional Russian folk music, to accompany the neat vodka that we thought would be a good idea to finish the evening off with. Fuelled by vodka and the rhythmic beat of the music we, the men that is, decided to try our hand at Cossack style dancing. Ten out of ten for effort and energy expended; there was a lot of jumping up and down, exaltations of “Hey!” and noble attempts at the traditional Cossack style of dancing (that is trying to kick each leg out alternately, whilst squatting with your arms folded). Zero out of ten for co-ordination and artistic interpretation. My friend’s wife was in hysterics at the spectacle.

We were duly exhausted, and quite sensibly, it was decided that I would be better off sleeping on the sofa rather than trying to get a taxi back to the hotel (my friend’s driver having long since retired to his own home and bed). I set up camp on the sofa, and bade goodnight to my hosts. Half an hour later the dog started sniffing around the room, and wandered over to where I was semi comatose. Shortly after he arrived at the sofa, I became aware of the sound of trickling water; I checked, no it was not me, the dog had decided that the side of the sofa was a suitable place to relieve itself. Maybe he didn’t appreciate our dancing earlier, and was making his own statement about it. I attempted to find something in the kitchen to mop it up with, but without success. I gave up and returned to the sofa, and made the best of the remaining hours of darkness.

Dawn broke with a resounding clatter, that is at least what my throbbing head was telling me, my hosts came downstairs bleary eyed. They mumbled a greeting towards me, and acknowledged the morning, in an equally delicate fashion. I pointed out the wet patch and emphasised that the dog was responsible, not me. I think I was believed, but the dog feigned remarkably stoney faced innocence. We tended to our hangovers by taking liberal quantities of water, alka seltzer and having a splendid breakfast of slices of cold ham and fried eggs. The day began to look a little brighter.

Tokyo Japan

Tokyo, originally called Edo, the capital of Japan houses 30 million people within a thirty mile radius. The city, like many others is divided into a number of districts each with its own characteristics. Ginza is one of the shopping districts, Roppongi is the entertainment district and the business district is located in Marunouchi.

Tokyo has experienced many hardships during its four centuries as Japan's capital city. In 1923 the Great Tokyo Earthquake caused enormous damage, twenty years later the city was being demolished by air raids. However, the city has survived and prospered.

Why Me God?

At the end of my time in Korea I decided to stop off for one day and night in Tokyo, as you do. This little detour was not without a logistical problem with regard to my very over-packed suitcase. The distance of Narita airport from Tokyo city centre negates the use of taxis. So I used the Narita express (a technologically superior, customer orientated train service) that most definitely puts to shame the British train service. The latter would be regarded as our national joke if it were not so dreadfully; dirty, badly run and intermittently prone to tragic accidents. I duly arrived, on time, at Tokyo central station; quite possibly the busiest place on earth I have ever been to. I had uncannily picked a time when, so it seemed to me anyway, the entire population of Tokyo had decided that this was the time they should go to the station to catch a train; I was walking one way and everyone else appeared to be going in exactly the opposite direction. It was at this point that my over burdened suitcase, that had offered many years faithful service, decided to "give up the ghost" and cross the river Styx. The handle parted company from the bag, and the sides started to split. Not the best place in the world for this to happen! I let forth a few Anglo Saxon "blessings" on my situation; which most people around me would probably not have been able to understand and collected myself ready for the struggle ahead. Therefore with briefcase in one hand and a firm grip on one of the security straps of my suitcase in the other, I dragged the suitcase and myself through the swarming masses of commuters. I would also point out that Tokyo central station is very large and, to the uninitiated traveller, confusing. I spent quite some time trying to find the exit (the as yet "undiscovered country").

Joy!, the exit found at last and a taxi queue as well. My, white gloved, taxi driver was very helpful and put my sorry excuse for a suitcase into the boot. It was at this stage that I realised my driver did not speak English. Under normal circumstances this would not have been a problem as I had the address of the hotel on their letterhead which I showed him. However, the complicating factor here was that the hotel (The Intercontinental Tokyo Bay, which as the guide book would say offered breathtaking views of Tokyo Bay) was newly built, and from the gesticulations of my driver not in an area that he knew how to get to; even though he waved his map of Tokyo under my nose as though to gain a mystical insight into the direction that we should take. We spent a few minutes fruitlessly talking to each other in Japanese and English, very good for stress relief but of little practical value. Then after some exceptionally fluent hand gestures on my part I managed to persuade my driver to ring the hotel and ask for directions. He went to a nearby phone booth, and returned a few minutes later beaming with a thumbs up gesture. We were on our way, and duly arrived within half an hour.

A Quick trip to Ginza

The hotel, as I have noted, was newly built and in fact had only opened a couple of weeks before. Consequently when making the booking I had been able to negotiate a business class room at a decent rate. I will say one thing for the quality of reception that the hotel offered, I have not found one that has beaten it. I initially went to the front reception desk and having given my name was escorted to an upper floor where business class travellers had their own check in. The remains of my baggage were “escorted” separately to my room by a rather worried looking bellhop. This was a dedicated lounge and office where a very charming lady, Miss Wantanabe, introduced herself. I was invited to sit down and sign in; a glass of something was proffered, which I readily accepted. The formalities having been dispensed with, I explained to Miss Wantanabe the incident with the suitcase and asked for directions to the nearest department store where I could buy a new one. No problem, a map would be prepared so that I could find my way to Ginza district where the main stores were located. Miss Wantanabe then showed me around the business class lounge. She advised me that very evening, at 6:00pm, complimentary drinks and snacks were served for their VIPs (which they seem to have mistaken me for). What a civilised arrangement!

She then escorted me to my room on the 25th floor and showed me around. I can confirm at that height the room, which faced the harbour, offered a really spectacular view. The room was very well equipped, the usual fittings (TV, minibar, trouser press etc) were all there together with an extra phone and TV in the bathroom. The bathroom was very luxurious offering a double hand basin and a double shower, with wall to wall adjustable power jets designed to cover you in all directions (shame I was alone!). My compliments to the designer.

My suitcase arrived, and I unpacked what I needed for my stopover. Miss Wantanabe returned with a map and very detailed directions on how to get to Ginza and back, so off into Tokyo I went. Needless to say, Tokyo being one of the most expensive cities on the planet is not necessarily the best place to find a reasonably priced article of hand luggage. I found a well stocked department store, and ended up paying a small fortune for something that would have been less than half the price had I bought it in the UK. That being said, I know of no store in the UK that employs people to open each door for you followed up by a very polite bow (usually reserved for members of the Royal family in the UK); that made it worthwhile (well not really).

I left the store and found a taxi to take me and my empty luggage back to the hotel. I was pleased that this taxi driver knew where the hotel was so no need for frantic hand gestures.

The Meal Cost How Much?!!

As I was feeling a little “bushed” after my unexpected shopping expedition, and knowing that I had a morning flight back to the UK to face the next day; I decided that taking another taxi back into town (where I didn’t really know where I would go) for dinner was not on the cards. I decided to test out the facilities of the hotel instead. Needless to say the bar was the first point of call. Rather a nice bar, unfortunately because the hotel was new there were no customers apart from myself. No problem, at least it meant I would have no difficulty in being served. The barman was quite a character, dressed in the standard uniform of hotel barmen across the world (dinner suit), he sported an exaggerated Elvis Presley hairstyle which looked slightly out of place on a Japanese gentleman. However, he was cheerful and pleasant; so a little eccentricity just added some atmosphere.

After a couple of “tinctures” I made my way to one of the hotel restaurants. I rather fancied a straightforward steak so I went to their “American restaurant”. My comments regarding the cost of living in Tokyo apply equally well to the cost of a meal. The price for a simple meal of steak and baked potato, washed down with a Chianti, was over three times that I would have paid in London; and that is not a cheap place to eat by any means. I have to say the portions were half the size one would expect, the steak barely mustering 6oz and the potato microscopic. I politely pointed out to the waiter that for the price I was paying I could have bought the entire cow, and suggested that at the very least they should give me an extra potato. He obliged, and I was given a liqueur on the house; honour was satisfied!

I retired to my room and spent a while drinking in the view of the harbour by night. Truly spectacular, if you are lucky enough to be on the 25th floor that is!

I checked out the next morning, and was more than surprised when the manager appeared. He had apparently asked to be notified when I was leaving. This either meant that he was keen to meet me and present himself, or that he was keen to see that I was off the premises. It was the former, clearly (as I noted when Miss Wantanabe greeted me) the hotel seemed to be under the impression I was someone of considerable influence and prestige; or maybe they just saw my future potential! Whatever the reason I would say that in terms of making their guests feel welcome the Intercontinental Tokyo Bay scores 10 out of 10 on my score card. I will, should I next pass through Tokyo, definitely stay there again.

Massage at 30,000 Feet

My return flight to the UK was highly entertaining. Fourteen hours or so in Virgin Upper Class can be a real temptation to overindulge with music, videos, drinks, food, massage, manicures (apparently I have really nice cuticles) etc. I had the works! Midway through the flight I even popped into the cockpit to see the view and chat to the crew; something, sadly, we cannot do these days. I also wandered to the bar and had a few drinks and sushi with a very drunken Japanese gentleman who held somewhat fixed views on the risks of doing business in Korea, old prejudices take generations to die away!

Eindhoven The Netherlands

Eindhoven, the fifth largest city in the Netherlands with a population of approximately 200000 people, is situated in the south of the country close to Belgium and Germany. Eindhoven was a small village until the middle of the nineteenth century when Philips was established. It is now home to the football team PSV Eindhoven. It is a modern city, with a range of shopping and entertainment facilities. Eindhoven has good railway access to places such as; Utrecht, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.

Centre of the Universe

During my eleven years in Philips I had cause to visit, on quite a few occasions, our corporate headquarters which were based in Eindhoven. When travelling there from the UK you had two options, either fly to Amsterdam then take the “City Hopper”, a cramped propeller driven craft that took you on the remaining fifteen minutes of your journey; or fly direct using a similarly cramped craft that bounced you around during the two hour flight, like one of those numbered balls in a lottery machine. This may give you the idea that Eindhoven, geographically at least, was not the centre of the universe. However, it was there in the nineteenth century that the Philips brothers began manufacturing lamps in their bicycle shed; thus spawning the multi billion dollar corporate empire that you see today.

Bearing this in mind, Eindhoven is somewhat dominated by the presence of Philips. They have offices and factories everywhere; should they ever shut these down the local hotels, restaurants, bars, brothels and economy would be dealt a crippling blow. Although my hosts were always hospitable, I would say that Eindhoven does not have that much to offer in terms of atmosphere; if you had a house there then the chances are that out of one window you would see a Philips building, and out of the other you would see a cow in a field.

One peculiarity about my trips to Eindhoven were that they would always seem to coincide with asparagus season. This is when, as the name suggests, the widely planted asparagus reaches maturity into its best. Needless to say with vast quantities of this vegetable in abundance, the local restaurants are keen to offload it in large quantities to their guests. Much like the Monty Python sketch involving Spam, asparagus was offered in every conceivable form and combination. I had my fill of asparagus during my visits there; those familiar with the side effects of a surfeit of this vegetable can attest to the biochemical effects it has on urine, producing quite a noxious odour, I will not go into details but suffice to say it usually took me a day or two after a sojourn there before all traces of this had been expunged from my system. However, it would be churlish of me not to include a basic recipe for asparagus, and have done so (see page 126).

Indigestion

All cultures have different customs and practices in relation to their cuisine. I have no intention of ranking one culture’s cuisine above another’s. However, I would suggest that the lunch offered to me in the Philips canteen one Friday certainly constituted the most indigestible combination of ingredients I have encountered. I was visiting the Eindhoven Corporate Internal Audit “bunker” (I nicknamed it this because the building in which it was housed was constructed in the 1930’s with the same soulless grey architectural style of the buildings put up by the Third Reich, I often wondered if Philips in the 30’s had subcontracted Albert Speer as architectural adviser), and one of my colleagues offered to take me to one of the many Philips canteens for lunch. Normally you would be given a choice of food. However, in this particular establishment there was no choice; merely a set three course meal, which was brought to your table by one of the ladies from the kitchen.

When we entered the canteen, we went over to a serving hatch in the wall and rang a small hand bell. A friendly face popped into view, and my colleague let her know that we had arrived so that we could be shown where we were sitting. She gave us two small sherry glasses, which contained a transparent orange coloured liquid. My colleague explained that this was a non alcoholic liqueur, which was traditionally drunk before a meal. We sat down and I sipped the mysterious potion. It was sweet and syrupy, not unpleasant; but I do not have a particularly sweet tooth, and it was not something that I would have chosen myself. The starter was brought across, tomato soup, hot and creamy; very enjoyable. Then the main course, hard boiled eggs and cold fish on a bed of onion salad. This strange, to my palette anyway, combination was washed down with a large glass of milk. The dessert, a plate of cheeses. Individually none of the ingredients were unusual. However, the combination presented a confusion of tastes and a challenge to the digestive system. My system was than more challenged as I was flying back to Sweden later that afternoon and, as airlines always advise you, it is unwise to eat a fat rich indigestible meal beforehand. I snacked on Rennie that afternoon.

A Small Divergence

I am sorry to interrupt the flow of my tales, but as I have been writing this book there have been a myriad of financial upsets in the world economy that I feel I must comment upon.

Over the two years the world's stock markets have been tumbling and investor confidence is at a low point. Scandals, frauds and mismanagement occurring in organisations as diverse as Enron, AIB, WorldCom, Marconi and Arthur Andersen have severely tested the credibility of companies reported figures and profit forecasts.

I would like to place in the public domain my views on how we found ourselves in this situation, and how companies may win back confidence. These opinions are derived from my experiences and observations whilst working for "blue chip" organisations, in the UK and internationally, both as an external auditor and internal auditor (holding positions ranging from junior trainee to Head of Internal Audit). Should you wish to debate these with me feel free to do so by visiting my website www.kenfrost.com and posting your views in the public arena of The Forum or emailing me privately.

The meltdown in confidence arose for a number of reasons, I highlight the following as my personal top ten "chart busting" favourites:

- The Gordon Gekko mentality of "greed is good", all credit to that most insightful film "Wall Street"; which has beguiled senior executives, investors and external auditors. Whilst the Western economies were growing and shares in both the US and London were enjoying an unparalleled bull market investors and others, such as non executive directors (who should have known better), did not question too publicly, if at all:
 - the remuneration packages of senior executives
 - the growth and investment strategies, most notably within the "tech sector" (Marconi's cash burn and insane level of gearing being a prime example of senior executives' egos overriding common sense and good business practice)
 - the corporate governance arrangements (such as the composition and "independent pro activity" of the audit committee)

of the companies they were involved with. To me this Gekko beguilement is best summed up by a quote from Bernie Ebbers (ex CEO of WorldCom) when asked about low investor returns on capital. He replied "investors do not care if a company's return is 6 or 60 percent. They only care if the share price goes up" (source FT 27/6/2002).

His comment insightfully highlights the short term vision of investors, and unwittingly highlights many a senior executive's contempt for them.

- Much like the emperor who was sold the invisible suit, once the magic spell is shown to be a sham the illusion cannot be recreated. Specifically, the emperor needs some real clothes! These will take time and genuine effort, measured by hard work not "sophisticated financial solutions" (such as complex off balance sheet arrangements whereby, for example, assets are held in the Cayman Islands and liabilities in Bermuda), to weave.

- Companies need to re-evaluate their method of remunerating senior executives. The practice of offering large levels of share options is all very well, in theory. However, it places a significant pressure on the executive to always talk the stock up; and in the case of the less honest to arrange for transactions and off balance sheet schemes that give a misleading picture as to the earnings and gearing of the company (Maxwell, Enron and WorldCom all being text book examples of this).
- Even the very act of awarding share options is suspect; as the remuneration committee, whose job it is to review the level of senior executive remuneration and determine if it is fair and reasonable, are not in a position of complete impartiality. After all, they are hired by the same executives (even if the appointments of the non executives, who make up the remuneration committees, are asked to be approved or rather “nodded through” by the shareholders) for whom they are reviewing the pay awards.

Sometimes investors start to “rattle the cage”, and complain about the level of remuneration. However, even if they are successful in delaying or preventing a change; such as in the case of Marconi (in early 2001), by then it may be too late. Marconi is now consigned to penny share status, with the probability of shareholders losing all in a bond for equity swap.

- The external auditors do not escape unscathed from the stench of cronyism, and greed, that contaminates many board rooms. Following the mega mergers of the eighties, there are effectively four main players in the market (allowing for the implosion of Andersens). These firms audit the majority of the quoted companies in the US and UK. The freedom of choice is therefore limited, even if companies wished to shop around.

That is in itself wishful thinking on my part, many of the audit firms have held the same client for years, some for fifty years or more. The “comfort blanket” of familiarity, complacency and dislike of change has in effect lead to a stagnant audit market. The only area seen as offering growth potential by the big four is in the area of consultancy and “added value services”; sold by the big four with an almost evangelical fervour.

I spent a few weeks in Andersens’ spiritual home in St Charles (near Chicago), at the beginning of 2000, observing one of their audit courses. I even have a certificate to prove it! This was indeed an eye opening experience. The key objective of a client review, it would seem, was not to do a good audit but to sell in extra services. Now the spiritual centre acts as an outplacement centre for all those Andersens’ employees looking to sell themselves to a new employer.

In my view, a stagnant audit market is not good for the companies, investors or auditors.

- The relationship between the external auditor and client could, in my opinion, even be termed incestuous; many quoted companies hire staff and senior executives that were trained by their audit firms. This, to my view, creates the following risks:
 - The arms length relationship between auditor and client is tarnished.

- Both auditor and client develop a blinkered approach to the operation of the business, and their attitude to the audit process itself. Namely, the auditor takes the point of view “this is the way the audit was done by the previous auditor who is now CFO, and so this is the way we do it now”. Whilst the business, having hired past auditors, have in effect taken in a pool of people who have not necessarily the optimum range of experience gained by working in other industries or companies required to stimulate new ideas.
- The “old boys’ club” exerts a powerful influence over both client and auditor not to rock the boat. Namely, the client will be reluctant to change auditor and the auditor may be reluctant to address concerns with respect to the business that he comes across during its review.
- Companies, in addition to using the services of external audit, more often than not have an internal audit department (even if this is just to pay lip service to Turnbull). The mission of which should be to provide the Board with independent objective assurance as to the quality of the business controls, and the adequacy of the risk management process. To enable the internal audit department to function independently its reporting line should be to an audit committee, which should comprise a majority of non-executive directors. Herein lies two problems:
 - Internal audit departments often do not report only to the audit committee, but have a dual line to a senior executive (usually the CFO). This severely limits the independence of the department. It is indeed interesting to note that Cynthia Cooper (Head of Internal Audit at WorldCom) had to bypass her boss (the CFO) and go directly to the audit committee to report the discovery of the capital expenditure fraud.
 - How independent, and competent, are the non-executive directors? The shareholders in Marconi may be forgiven for thinking that there were no non executives working at Marconi during the period of the cash burn.

The effectiveness, and indeed *raison d’être*, of the internal audit department is effectively nullified by a dual reporting line and a non independent audit committee which does not proactively question the status quo and actions of the senior executives.

- A non-executive, in my view, cannot exercise his or her fiduciary duty adequately if he or she has a string of similar non-executive positions (many hold half a dozen or more). How can an individual devote sufficient time to each company with such a spread of responsibilities?
- Even more disturbing, in my opinion, are those cases where non-executives hold positions on the boards of companies for which they worked for many years in an operational capacity. Companies offer these positions as a sinecure for years of loyal service. The thin veil of independence is exposed to be a sham. Whilst the non-executive may well understand the companies operations, he or she is in no position to think or act independently.
- At an even more basic level there are those non-executives who, because of their age, are simply not up to the job; they have become inflexible, they do not understand the changing environment and in some extremes fall asleep during the committee meetings (I have witnessed this).

The solution to these ills, in my opinion, is as follows (note that none of these points is earth shattering, they are simple common sense):

- Open up the auditing profession to more competition by enforced rotation of external auditors, every five years or so.
- Place an enforced period of suspension, of at least one year, between a senior manager or partner in an audit firm relinquishing a particular client and joining that self same client.
- Companies should limit share option schemes to only account for a maximum percentage (say ten percent) of an individual's total remuneration. This proposal invariably receives the curt riposte from companies (or rather their senior executives) that in order to attract the best you must pay "top dollar". Well my riposte to this goes as follows:
 - It has been my experience to observe the careers of quite a number of senior executives at close quarters. Their careers tend to follow similar paths. They arrive at the organisation and in keeping with their egos, and position, they identify a number of areas that need to be improved; otherwise the organisation may well as they put it "cease to exist". With much fanfare of corporate videos and "managed" change programmes the new mantra is disseminated to the employees. These change programmes/projects tend to be given a five year time span. However, one small problem; the executive tends only to stay in that position for two years (their ego and supercharged need to move on "to face new challenges" prevents them seeing the project through to completion). This scenario I call "two year managers for five year projects". The long suffering employees and organisation then endure the whole process over again with another executive; who decides to change the change programme. The result, an organisation constantly changing but going nowhere.
 - The concept that if you pay "top dollar" you will get the best always amuses me. To my view all that a super charged salary and benefit package does is attract those with the largest egos and greediest personalities. They move on after a short period of time to the next role which offers even more money; having no thought, or loyalty, for the people or organisation they leave behind.
 - Regarding the quality of management attracted by these packages; ask the shareholders of Marconi or Enron if they feel they were well served by the senior executives they were told were the best money could buy!

In short, if a senior executive starts to complain about his level of remuneration; then show him the door and help him on with his coat.

- The cost of the share option schemes should be taken immediately to the profit and loss account. "An expense is an expense, is an expense!", no prevarication. This way it is clear to all the world exactly how expensive the senior executives are.
- Non-executive directors should only be recruited from outside of the organisation.
- The remuneration of non-executive directors should be increased, and the number of posts which they hold reduced (maximum three); to allow them to devote a more appropriate amount of their time to the company.

- Internal audit should report directly to the audit committee. The committee should consist of a majority of non-executive directors who should be appointed in terms of the above. There should be no dotted line to other directors. Dual reporting lines, in my experience, weaken the independence and effectiveness of the internal audit function.
- The chairman of the audit committee should, like the senior partner from the external auditors, attend the AGM and be prepared to answer questions from the investors.
- The chairman of the audit committee should be given the formal right to address the AGM without hindrance from the Board.
- The annual report should contain a statement from the audit committee signed by the chairman of the audit committee.
- External auditors should not provide add on consultancy services to their audit clients.
- Companies should adopt a code of conduct outlining their attitude to ethical principles, covering core values such as:
 - Honesty
 - Trust
 - Respect
 - Fairness

The code should state the company's commitment to:

- Society (eg environmental issues, quality of service and products etc.)
- Shareholders (eg providing a decent return on equity)
- Employees (eg covering issues such as harassment, discrimination and quality of work)

The code should give clear guidelines as to the company's attitude to, eg:

- Integrity of records.
- Bribes and commission payments.
- Interests outside the company leading to potential conflicts of interest.
- Respecting national and international law (eg obeying tax laws; viz complex off balance sheet schemes to evade tax should be disassembled immediately).

The code should be distributed to all employees, shareholders and be freely available to other interested parties. Compliance with the code should be audited annually, and a report to this effect placed within the annual report (what gets measured gets done!).

Mark my words these changes will come eventually, so why not stop delaying and just let's get on and implement them now!

Stockholm Sweden

Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, is home to 1.6 million people. It is situated on an archipelago which stretches to the Baltic Sea. Over 60% of the city area consists of waterways, parks and green spaces.

The city abounds with bridges, towers, steeples, cobbled squares and beautiful parks. There is a plethora of bars, clubs, restaurants and caf  s. In the summer months the pleasure boats are crammed with tourists travelling between the various islands that are dotted around the archipelago.

Known as “the Venice of the North”, Stockholm was founded by Birger Jarl in 1252. It became the capital in 1634, during the Thirty Years War. The Old Town (Gamla Stan) encompasses architecture from medieval times and the city contains over 150 museums and galleries. However, Stockholm is associated with the most innovative/modern organisations and brands such as; IKEA, Abba, the Nobel Prize and Ericsson.

In 1996 Philips Corporate Audit asked me to move to Stockholm to set up a Nordic audit department, which would be responsible for audit coverage in the Scandinavian and Baltic region.

The Swedish Approach to Customer Service

In keeping with my tried and tested practice, as demonstrated in my early years of scientific experimentation, of not reading or following instructions. I moved to Stockholm to set up a Nordic audit department for my company, and did not read in detail the corporate guide to living in Sweden. Had I done so I maybe would have been a little better prepared for the, shock is too strong a word, shall we say surprise that greeted me when I went to my local supermarket. I had, and this I suspect is a widely held view by non Swedes, a preconceived view of Swedish culture. Namely; a clean, well organised, tolerant, efficient society. I had expected to see supermarkets akin to the large chains in the UK, well stocked with all manner of produce. The reality was somewhat different. The supermarkets in central Stockholm are not as large as those found in the towns of the UK. Consequently the aisles are cramped, and passage with a trolley often impeded by an abundance of elderly people travelling at a snail’s pace. With regard to the variety of products offered, I was struck by small quantities held. Items as basic as potatoes, offered by the barrel load in Britain, were stored in one small hand basket which more often than not contained four or five rather sad specimens. Bottled water and toilet rolls seemed to be rather bizarrely rationed, some weeks there would be none at all in the shop. I very rapidly adopted the Russian technique of buying large quantities of “staples”, when the supermarket graciously consented to stock them, working on the principle that they may not be there the next week. I did venture on a few occasions to raise the issue with staff, but my enquiries just received a shrug of the shoulders and a comment that they did not know when the next shipment would be in.

Nanny Knows Best

Purchases of alcohol in Sweden caused even more problems, than ordinary purchases. The social democratic party, that governs by consensus in Sweden, had decided many years earlier that alcohol is a bad thing and that adults should not be allowed to gain access to this most evil of products; unless under strict government control. Needless to say taxes on alcohol are extortionately high. Its is therefore hardly surprising that in the North of Sweden, and in other rural areas, the inhabitants brew their own rather lethal concoctions. However, once you have overcome the shock of the cost of alcohol actually obtaining it requires inconvenience beyond merely excessive pecuniary outlay.

Alcohol, anything over 2% that is, can only be purchased for home consumption from government run shops called System Bolegat, the supermarkets do sell a group of beers with the Orwellian title of “the peoples beer” running at 2% or less. These, by definition, have no pleasurable effect and taste disgusting; it goes without saying I would not drink or cook with these. System Bolegat, enforcing the government ethos of maximum inconvenience for the consumers, only opened Monday to Friday 9:00-5:00 (when I left Sweden in 2000 they had started a very bold experiment in Stockholm to open certain selected Bolegats on Saturday morning). These stores rather reminded me of the old Green Shield stamp shops, the products neatly arranged behind glass cabinets and listed in a large catalogue. Customers, would write down the code numbers of the products they wanted; then take a ticket from a ticket dispenser and wait for their number to come up going to the appropriate counter and placing their order. Whilst I naturally had to put up with this “nanny knows best” approach for my 5 years there, I am nonetheless convinced that by treating adults as children merely encourages them to act as such. I saw just as many, if not more, drunks there as one would encounter in any other European city; and the limited opening times of the government shops merely encouraged people to buy more than they needed when they were in there. Additionally, the duty free and illegal smuggling trade (two sides of the same coin) was booming, and consequently depriving the government of revenue.

Stängt i Sommar

Swedish people live for the summer, the winters are long, dark (daylight lasts only a few hours) and cold (sometimes 20 below!). I understand that the winter season sees a steep rise in the number of suicides. Indeed, during my first week in Stockholm when I was meeting local management one member of the Board was telling me about the winters, and how bad they were. As he put it:

“Ken each winter gets more difficult to bare. I sit in my home with my bottle of whisky, but I don’t know how many more I can take”.

Not necessarily the most positive view on life. However, I would like to point out that 5 years later when I left Stockholm, he was still there and had managed to survive 5 more winters!

The summer is a total contrast to winter, temperatures reach a very pleasant 25 degrees, the sun rises at 3:00 am and sets after midnight (rather disconcerting to those of us who come from places a little closer to the equator). It is during this period that the average Swede feels to urge to go to the countryside, and live in his/her cabin for the summer months. You will find that all Swedish offices gear the holiday period to this time of year, and encourage their staff to take at least 4 of their 6 week holiday allowance during this time. That is fine if the rest of the world takes a similar holiday, but not so fine if it doesn’t (which of course it doesn’t). I found myself often one of the only members of senior management in the office during this period. No problem, as I used this period of relative quiet to prepare the audit plans, and budgets for the coming year.

With regard to one’s daily life, outside of work, this summer vacation proved to be a little more than inconvenient. Many of Stockholm’s best restaurants and bars would actually shut for 4-6 weeks, my local dry cleaners and laundry would not open at the weekend. The most bizarre closure relates to what I would say is an industry that is highly seasonal, and geared most definitely to the summer months. That industry being ice cream, and the particular enterprise in question being the Swedish Ice Cream Shop; which claimed to sell genuine, old fashioned home made Swedish ice cream. Needless to say come the nice hot summer this particular enterprise shut for the summer, in Swedish the sign you will see on the doors is:

“Stängt i sommar”

When you visit Stockholm in summer you will see large groups of confused Japanese and American tourists walking the streets, peering hopefully into the darkened windows of the bars and restaurants wondering when they will open.

Saluhallen

Disregarding the above eccentricities, Stockholm offers a most excellent indoor food market namely the Saluhallen (literally translated this means greetings hall); which is situated in the centre of Stockholm on Östermalmstorg. This domed building houses a variety of independently owned establishments, that proudly display all manner of fresh produce including; vegetables, meat, poultry, game, sausages, hams, pies and fish. As you wander around this horn of plenty should you begin to feel a little peckish, as we always did, then there are also a number of bars and cafes in Saluhallen that can sate your hunger and slate your thirst.

When we had guests for dinner we would buy our meat from here, it was not cheap; but it was definitely superior, in terms of quality and choice, to the meagre plastic wrapped offerings sweating in the supermarkets' chilled cabinets.

The staff in the shops of Saluhallen were always very helpful; when I was looking for a piece of sirloin on the bone, not the normal choice of the average Swede, they dug deep into their chiller room and found a magnificent 10lb piece that had been properly hung and possessed a good layer of fat. A friend of ours was visiting Stockholm that weekend, and so I roasted this noble joint a couple of days later with Yorkshire pudding (see page 175) in honour of his visit.

You can also pre order your meat should you require something special. One Christmas we ordered a splendid 12lb turkey which I stuffed and roasted (see page 218) for a pre Christmas dinner we were holding for friends. We combined Swedish and British traditional Christmas food for that dinner; serving both turkey and Julskinka, a Swedish version of baked ham, which made an ideal compliment to the turkey (see page 195).

The Little Frogs

Midsommar (or mid summer) in Sweden is the high point of the year, more so than Christmas. Swedes celebrate this by picnicking in the countryside, or by the water, dancing around the Summer Pole (a large pole covered in grass placed at 90 degrees to the ground, at the top of the pole two grass covered hoops are hung; this in case you haven't guessed it represents fertility!). A special dance that you can do is "the little frogs", where you squat down and dance around the pole placing your hands on either side of your ears then behind your backside; this represents the frogs' lack of tail and ears. A typical picnic consists of copious quantities of aquavit (Swedish schnapps), ham, quiche (see 181) and pickled herring (not by any means my favourite dish I must admit), accompanied by singing and accordion music.

Language Skills I ain't Got

With regard to learning the Swedish language it is fair for you, the reader, to assume that with the advantages that I had, viz:

- Living in Sweden for over four years.
- Having a Swedish girlfriend, who in fact thought Swedish to immigrants.

- Having a taped teach yourself Swedish course.

Then I would be at least reasonably proficient. Alas dear reader my Swedish extends in boundaries no further than the basics such as hello, goodbye and requests for drink and food. With regard to the latter, my moment of supreme humiliation came in the Bull and Bear (a bar on Birgerjarlsagatan) one evening. I was in there with Eva and ordering, in my “best Swedish”, a sausage. I was given instead a large glass of beer. I queried this and was informed that that was what I had asked for.

Let the record show that the Swedish for sausage is “korv” and the for beer “ol”.

Evidently my pronunciation was that bad, the barman asked me to speak English in future as that would be far easier for both of us!

In defence of my lack of bilingual skills, I would make the following points:

- When Swedish people hear that you are English, they try to speak it with you in order to practice their skills.
- The TV programmes in Sweden consist of a large number of British and American imports, all of which are subtitled and not dubbed.
- I worked for a company whose corporate language was English.
- I spent a large amount of my working time in countries other than Sweden.
- The self learn tape was excessively dull, and acted more like a self hypnosis tape. I never got beyond lesson eight, an excessively dull piece about some lady buying six pork cutlets and worrying about the price.

Minus 20 Degrees, Time for an Irish Coffee

The winters in Sweden can get pretty cold, the North of the country can comfortably be in the grip of daily temperatures of minus 20 degrees lasting for quite some months. This is put to good use, as the innovative locals build “The Ice Hotel” which as the name suggests is constructed entirely out of ice; table, chairs, bar, glasses etc. The guests sleep in thermal sleeping bags on beds of straw. No I haven’t been there, and no I don’t intend to!

However, even Stockholm can get pretty cold in winter. In December 1996 a chum of mine came across for the weekend, and managed to arrive at the exact same time as the thermometer (which is attached to the outside window of every self respecting Swede’s house) showed minus 20.

On the Saturday afternoon we had to make a brief journey (literally no further than five minutes) to the local shop, to buy some cream for the dinner party I was holding that evening. My God, to say that my extremities were freezing off is an understatement. We made it to the shop, but getting back to the flat in one go was not an option. Fortunately there was a pub mid way (the Tudor Arms, Stockholm’s oldest traditional pub; all of 30 years old!). We made a dash for it and fortified ourselves with a couple of good malts, then for good measure a few Irish coffees (see page 329). This is a drink I highly recommend for the cold, bleak winter. We were then able to face the two minute walk back to the flat!

The Pig's Arse

One of our favourite bars in Stockholm is KB (just off Birgerjarlsgaten, the contact details for which can be found on my website www.kenfrost.com); this bar was founded in the 19th century by a group of artists as a place to meet, drink and exchange ideas. Indeed it is still used by the artistic, bohemian residents of Stockholm as a place to socialise and discuss ideas. On some occasions, when the artistic muse has been suitably stimulated by a liberal quality of alcohol, some of the customers will conduct an impromptu reading of their poetry. Which I am assured is very good.

When you go into KB you are greeted by a smartly dressed gentlemen (Teddy), who takes your coats. To the left of the entrance hall is the restaurant which serves traditional Swedish food, such as herring. On the right is the bar where Karen and Marie, wearing the traditional Swedish national costume (not too far removed from those costumes you would see in *The Sound of Music*), will greet you. The bar is decorated with murals, painted by the local artists, showing people quaffing vast quantities of alcohol. One particularly striking part of the mural is that of a drunken monk and donkey carrying a pig (the only part of which you see is the backside). I can only assume that the artists had imbibed a few whilst painting this tribute to Bacchus. Eva and I would spend many a Friday evening in KB, sipping champagne and unwinding after the week's toil. During the winter period we would indulge in a most excellent and warming drink known as Glögg (see page 328), this is a form of mulled wine and stimulates a most welcome feeling of inner warmth. Since KB served food we would sometimes have a light snack in the bar. My particular favourite was sausages, eggs and fried bread, not normally on the menu. These were local sausages, with 80% meat content and a delicate seasoning of herbs, and I must say they had a very special taste. The chef was always happy prepare this rather un-Swedish dish for me, it is after all a place for artists and non conformists.

On the subject of sausages when cooking a decent sausage which contains at least 80% meat I recommend the following:

- Place the sausages in boiling water and simmer for 5 minutes.
- Remove from the water, and fry in good quality lard over a medium heat until golden brown.

When we felt like something different to eat, then at the end of the evening we would walk back to a korv kiosk (sausage stall) opposite Dramaten (the theatre), which would be open until 4:00am. We had got to know the lady who ran it quite well, and she was happy to fry and egg for me and put it into a cheeseburger. Eva's favourite was Tunnbrödsrulle (a combination of prawns, hotdog and mash), I have enclosed the recipe (see page 290) as it is really very good.

A Smorgasbord of Culinary Delights

Stockholm offers a wealth of restaurants, that offer cuisine from many parts of the world. Eva and I dined out regularly when we were living there, here is a small selection of some of our favourites:

- **The Shilla** this was a small, only six tables, Korean restaurant that served authentic Korean dishes such as bulgogi (see page 197). The owner never seemed to wish to stay open beyond 10:00pm, and so you had to be there by 8:00pm if you did not want to rush your meal. One particular evening we were taking a little longer over our meal than our host appreciated. When I tried to order a final Irish coffee he shook his head and said “*no, we are closed now; you go now!*”. Oh well, a little local colour always makes things more interesting.
- **KB** as mentioned above, as well as being a bar also housed a traditional Swedish restaurant, which was ideal for entertaining friends or business colleagues. One particular evening I was there with a colleague, who had flown in from the Netherlands, we were having a particularly heavy night; but not as heavy as the diners on the table next to us. They were a group of Englishmen who, for reasons best known to themselves, attempted to start an impromptu game of cricket with a bread roll and bread basket. They were quietened down by the bemused staff.
- **Dolce Vita** a splendid Italian restaurant that served enormous home baked pizzas and unctuous entrecote steaks in pepper sauce (see page 322). The quality of the Italian food was all the more surprising, as it was owned by Turks.
- **Bohemia** this was one of our favourite restaurants, anyone visiting us in Stockholm would be taken here as a matter of course. The restaurant, situated near to where Olaf Palma (a Swedish Prime Minister) was shot, served an excellent selection of Central and East European food including; steak tartar, Holstein Schnitzel (see page 193), goulash and wild boar. The food and service was always excellent, we often dined there until the “wee small hours”. The contact details can be found on my website www.kenfrost.com.
- **Martini** this was a trendy, lively Italian restaurant that stayed open until 3:00am at the weekends. They offered a good range of meat, fish and pasta dishes that were prepared with imagination, flair and originality. I have written a full review about Martini, which you can read on my website www.kenfrost.com.
- **El Mexicano** as the name implies served Mexican food. This was rather a jolly establishment decorated with bunting, streamers and artefacts from Mexico. The place exuded a Mexican atmosphere. The menu offered many authentic dishes ranging from the traditional chilli (see page 170) to more exotic dishes such as chicken in chocolate. Eva tried the latter one evening, but found it to be a little too unique for her tastes.
- **Aubergine** a trendy Swedish bar and restaurant. This was my favourite port of call when I first moved to Sweden. The atmosphere was lively, the staff friendly and the food (such as the local sausages) tasty.
- **Riche** located in the centre of Stockholm was a very popular bar and restaurant. The restaurant offered international cuisine, as well as Swedish specialities such as; Skagens Toast (see page 145) a splendid prawn and dill appetiser, lobster, crab and good quality steaks. I went there many times, including for my farewell dinner with the CEO of Philips Nordic.

- **La Brochette** an excellent French restaurant that served a good selection of French food including mussels, poussin (see 212) lamb cutlets and numerous fish dishes. They had the rather novel idea of laying their tables with paper tablecloths, and providing the customers with a box of coloured crayons; so that you could doodle whatever artistic inspirations came into your head. Eva and I have particularly fond memories of this place, as this was where we had our first “date”.

A Foul Fowl

I had to move apartments three times whilst living in Stockholm, as the majority of rental apartments in Stockholm were only on short term leases. Each time I moved there was a gap, of usually a month to six weeks, between leaving one apartment and moving into the next. I would spend this time living in a variety of hotels, at the company’s expense. Some hotels were good, some not so good.

One hotel that very much fell into the latter category was the Amaranten. I had to stay there for three weeks; and so with the effluxion of time the little things that at first were only mildly annoying became extremely annoying. The lack of replenishment of my minibar became my daily gripe. Additionally I was particularly irritated by the air conditioning system that, despite the fact there was a temperature control panel in the room, simply would not shut off; instead cold air was being pumped into my room twenty four hours a day. I would point out that this was mid winter, and so I do not feel that I was being unreasonable in expecting the hotel to provide some heating to the room. Despite complaining about this regularly no action, that I could see, was taken. Eva came up with a solution, she took an old pair of her tights and stuffed them into the outlet; that served to block the cold air and muffle the rattle of the metal grate. We left them there after I finally checked out as a little memento for them to remember me by.

However, the worst disgrace of this establishment was their restaurant. I decided to dine there one evening, before I was to fly over to Amsterdam to meet the new head of Corporate Internal Audit. I opted for duck breast as my main course. Despite the fact that the restaurant was almost empty, not a good sign, the meal seemed to take forever to arrive. When it did arrive it is fair to say it was truly appalling; the breast was undercooked, very fashionable with some but not with me, I dislike seeing blood exude from the corpse of a fowl. Additionally, the meat was as tough as boot leather. I weighed the options of complaining and waiting still further for a replacement. Given the fact that I had to be up at 4.00am the next day, and that it was getting late, I very foolishly decided to try to eat this abomination. I gave up halfway through, I decided to sign my bill and retire to bed. I suggested to the waiter that in future they try to hire a chef who knows the difference between raw and cooked meat, I then stalked off to my room.

Some thirty minutes later the phone rang, it was Eva we chatted for a while and during the course of our discussion I began to feel a little unwell; two minutes more I felt very unwell. Eva was chatting away happily, and I suddenly felt that I had to make a dash to the bathroom. I Abruptly said I had to go, put the phone down and made it to the bathroom just in time. Thirty minutes of gut chucking later I felt duly recovered enough to call her back to apologise for cutting her off so abruptly; she said she thought I sounded a bit stressed. Needless to say I spent the next few hours revisiting the bathroom. I think I managed two hours sleep before having to get up to go to the airport. I was not in the best of conditions to meet my new boss. However, I managed to get through the day without any further revisitations by the duck.

The Memorial Plaque to Halcyon Days

Eva and I would frequent the cocktail bar on the first floor of the Diplomat hotel (Strandvägen), most Sunday evenings. Enjoying a bottle of champagne, as we garnered our mental and physical energy for the working week ahead. The bar was decorated much like a ship's cabin; and was a peaceful sanctuary from the more lively, trendy bars elsewhere in Stockholm. The walls had marvellous pen and ink drawings dating back to the early 1900's, taken from a Swedish satirical magazine of the day. The drawings lambasted the social norms of that period, and the captions were written in "old" Swedish.

We were such regulars that we were granted a few privileges by "mein host" Clas (Stockholm's most professional barman, so he said anyway). One being the serving of most excellent Swedish ham and toast as a canapé on the house. The ham had a mustard crust and truly melted in the mouth. We tended to sit in the same cosy corner of the bar, and Clas would ensure that if anyone had inadvertently occupied it they would be moved on to another area as soon as diplomatically (no pun intended) possible.

One particular evening we were in the bar, and the ex UK Chancellor of the Exchequer and his wife wandered in and sat down at another table. A perfectly nice couple, but Clas decided that they were not in keeping with the ambience of the place; and therefore very nicely suggested that they would find the view and the seating more comfortable in the lounge next to the bar. So off they went and sat in the lounge.

The Diplomat used to have a rather nice restaurant and tea house on the ground floor. The teahouse served, as the name suggested, a selection of teas, sandwiches and cocktails during the afternoon. This was a very popular venue for Stockholm's leisured classes, indeed even princess Lillian (a British member of Sweden's royal family) frequented it. The restaurant served rather good food, I was particularly fond of the pan fried calves liver (see page 229). However, all good things come to an end and the forces of modernisation overwhelmed the tea house and restaurant. The hotel "revamped" it into a trendy bar with chrome, glass and the usual fittings; "for shame". We were very kindly invited to the opening party which was attended by Stockholm's glitterati (I have no idea what we were doing there!), a good party with copious quantities of champagne and canapés. However, in my opinion the "T bar" as it is now called is no substitute for the old tea house.

When we told Clas that we were moving to the UK he commissioned a brass plaque commemorating our years of champagne drinking in his bar (I believe the plaque quotes in excess of 200 bottles quaffed). Should you visit the bar you will see the plaque placed above the corner where we used to sit.

Oslo Norway

Oslo, capital of Norway, and home to 475000 people was founded by Harald Hadråde in the eleventh century. It is surrounded by mountains and lies at the head of a 70 mile long fjord. Oslo became a major trading centre for Germany and Central Europe.

There are a number architectural styles in evidence; including the mediaeval Akershus Slott which is opposite the Rådhus, which was built in the 1930's. North Sea oil has provided an injection of capital. This has contributed to further developments such as; Aker Brygge, a glass fronted shopping centre built into the old warehouses along the quay, and the modern skyscrapers near the main railway station.

An Entire City, "Rat Faced"

My first visit to Oslo took place in May 1996, and coincided with their National Day. This is the day that Norwegians celebrate their liberation from their Scandinavian neighbours in 1905, and is an exceptionally jolly public holiday. I asked the receptionist at my hotel what the normal format for National Day was. She said that during the morning people would watch the parades, then promenade through the parks and along the harbour. The remainder of the day and evening would be spent in the numerous bars and restaurants.

I decided to take a stroll into the centre of town to watch the day unfold. It seemed to me that the entire population of Oslo had taken to the streets. Every building was festooned with the Norwegian flag, many citizens wore their national costume and parades accompanied by military bands wound their way through the main streets of the capital. In short, it was one enormous street party. The bars and restaurants were heaving, standing room only; if you were lucky enough to be able to get through the doors, getting to the bar to buy a drink was an even more daunting task. I decided to head towards the outskirts of town where it seemed a little quieter, and found a pleasant bar which was not too full. I partook of a few beers and vodkas, in order to fully participate in the day's events. I then decided to wander back into town to see if things had eased up. No way, the crowds, now fuelled by liberal quantities of schnapps were in a very jolly and lively mood. I have never seen the entire population of a town totally inebriated before; singing, dancing, sounding off compressed air horns and letting off rockets, with no particular thought as to the direction, or trajectory. The bars were even more crowded, if that was at all possible! I decided that as it would be clearly impossible to fight my way into the overflowing bars I would wander back to my hotel, and settle down in their restaurant.

The next day, Oslo resembled a ghost town; the flirtation with Bacchus had taken its toll. I will say one thing, the Norwegians certainly know how to party. One or two hardy souls braved the air, as they gently tried to ease themselves into the day. However, the remainder stayed "abed".

Norwegian Perversity

Whilst I may have found the attitude to drink in Sweden “daft”, that in Norway was positively perverse. My encounter with the rules relating to drink were confined to business trips, I did not venture into their government alcohol shops. When away on business I tend to have a few stiff Bloody Marys before sampling the local cuisine. On my first business visits to Oslo I was ensconced in the SAS Radisson, a decent 4 star hotel, that at over 30 stories is Oslo’s tallest building. The working day over, having had a swim in the hotel’s pool I repaired to the bar and ordered the traditional double Bloody Mary. I was told by a very helpful barman that it was against the law to serve doubles, he apologised and agreed with my view that that was idiotic. We came up with the next best option; two single vodkas, a glass of tomato juice and the requisite spices, I mixed my own (see recipe for the classic Bloody Mary page 326).

No Fried Eggs for You Sir

When I am away on business trips, I find that I use more energy than when working at home. In order to compensate for this increase in energy burn I indulge in meals that are high in protein and carbohydrates. One dish that I enjoy, and is a good source of protein, is the very simple combination of steak and eggs. Even though it may not be on every menu, most establishments manage to find an egg in their kitchen that their chef is then able to fry.

However, on one visit to Oslo whilst staying at the SAS Radisson I had a little difficulty in obtaining this dish. The menu proffered a selection of steaks and I so I ordered a sirloin with a couple of fried eggs. The waitress wrote down the order, then wandered off; a few minutes later she came back and said that as the menu did not contain eggs she could not take an order for eggs. I pointed out that since it was a hotel, they would have eggs in the kitchen and that if she asked the chef nicely I was sure that he would oblige. She trotted off, a few minutes later she came back and said the chef would not cook the eggs; I asked if that was because the chef was not capable of frying an egg or because he was just being stubborn. I also offered to fry the eggs myself. She gave up with me at this point, saying that she was new to the job and asked a colleague to take over. I resumed my quest for eggs with the more experienced member of staff. Finally, some twenty minutes or so after placing the order it was agreed by the chef, and the staff, that I may have the eggs. Good grief!

The Bleak Midwinter

Oslo, like the other Scandinavian countries can get rather cold in winter; minus 20 degrees is not unheard of. One particular winter I was there with a colleague, when it was only minus 10. We decided to brave the night air, and take a taxi to the harbour where there was good selection of restaurants and bars. Taking a taxi in the evening from the hotel was no problem, they were lined up outside waiting for custom; and so you just had to step out into the street and then into the taxi. This part of the journey was easy, we arrived at the harbour and found a jolly restaurant that had all the accoutrements necessary for a good evening namely; a bar, a diverse menu, good quality food and sassy waitresses. A splendid evening was had by all!

Now came the tricky bit, getting back to the hotel. The weather had changed, in addition to the temperature being minus 10 degrees; it had also started to snow. Naturally, not a taxi could be seen anywhere. Therefore the great trek back to the hotel began on foot. We walked for some thirty minutes, looking in vain for a taxi but to no avail; the nearest we came to stopping one was when I was almost knocked over by one as we crossed the road. We finally arrived at the hotel, and promptly made our way to the bar where several large malt whiskies were the order of the day.

The next morning, as we were both going to the same office in Oslo, we met in the lobby and went outside to find a taxi. Whilst finding one in the evening outside of the hotel was easy; finding one in the morning, when the snow was falling, proved to be a more arduous task. Seemingly every other resident of the hotel was seeking a taxi that morning, and the queue coiled around the hotel's taxi rank like a snake. The taxis dribbled through the rank like the sauce from a glass tomato ketchup bottle, slowly and in lumps. We shuffled forward inch by inch, time dragged on; ten minutes, twenty minutes, thirty minutes elapsed. It was absolutely freezing, other members of the queue were desperately phoning their respective offices to advise them of their delay. A group of Americans were becoming increasingly frustrated, and expressed vocal bewilderment as to why there were not more taxis. I found some respite from the cold, as we finally managed to shuffle ourselves over the top of an air vent that was spewing forth deliciously warm air; a warm blast of air up the trouser legs was exactly what I needed. Finally, one hour after starting to queue, we alighted into a taxi.

Baltics

When talking of the Baltics, people often make the mistake of referring to them as though they were one country or at the very least three homogenous countries. However, make no mistake they are three very different countries whose “life paths” have been intertwined by years of German and Russian occupation. They each have their own unique cultures and ambitions.

Estonia with a population of approximately 1.5 million (of whom approximately 65% are Estonian and 32% Russian), the capital of which is Tallinn, is located on the north-eastern shore of the Baltic; it has borders with Latvia and Russia. However, it is a short ferry ride to Helsinki and as such has a close affinity with its Nordic neighbour; indeed the Estonian language is close to Finnish. Tallinn is a mixture of medieval and modern architecture, the old town is quite something to see especially when understanding that the city has been occupied by a variety of different countries over the last 1000 years; ranging from the Swedes, Danes, Germans and Russians. Occupation always exposing the unfortunate occupied country to the risk of vandalism and looting by the occupier. Perversely the occupation by the Soviets probably contributed to the fact that much of the old town still exists today relatively intact. The lack of economic growth within the Soviet system meant that there was no money to invest in massive redevelopment.

During a brief period 1918-1940 Estonia was independent only to fall victim to first the Soviets, then the Germans then the Soviets again. Estonia finally regained its independence from the Soviets in 1991, with the collapse of communism.

Lithuania, whose capital is Vilnius, has a population of 3.7 million of whom 80% are Lithuanian and 10% Russian. Lithuania was a major power during medieval times occupying areas of the Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. During the 14th century Lithuania formed a union with Poland in order to keep the Germans out. As with most unions one party became the more dominant, in this case it was Poland. The union lasted until late in the 18th century when Lithuania was handed over to Russia. During the Russian revolution Lithuania declared independence, although Vilnius was occupied by Poland, and was free until 1940; when the Soviets, then the Nazis then again the Soviets occupied it. Full independence was achieved in 1991.

Latvia, whose capital is Riga, is sandwiched between Estonia, Lithuania and Russia. It has a population of approximately 2.5 million; of whom 57% speak Latvian, and 40% speak Russian. During the last 800 years or so Latvia has been occupied by the Swedes, Germans, Poles and Russians. During 1920-1940 Latvia enjoyed a brief respite of independence before (once again) being occupied by the Soviets, then the Nazis, then the Soviets again. Final independence from foreign domination was achieved in 1991.

The result of Latvia being occupied by both the Germans and the Russians (in the 19th century over 40% of Riga's inhabitants were German and over 25% were Russian) displays itself in the cuisine, there being a mixture of Latvian, German and Russian influences. With the collapse of the Soviet block in the latter part of the 20th Century, and the drive for western investment, the influence of western cuisine also evident. The SAS Daugava Hotel in Riga offers an American style brunch every Sunday with steaks and pasta dishes being served during the week.

Taxi!

Having said that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are three very different countries with their own unique culture and cuisine; I would venture to state one exception to this rule, that being the local taxi drivers. I believe it is fair to say that the taxi drivers of these three countries have possibly been trained in the same school of driving. Their technique is simple, namely get their passenger to their destination in the shortest time possible. A noble aspiration so long as the basic laws of Newton, and the road, are obeyed; specifically the faster you are travelling, the longer it will take you to stop and the greater the force of your impact should something come between you and your stopping point. My experiences of the local taxis can be summarised as generally a cross between being rather nerve racking and invigorating. I would summarise the key risk factors in a typical taxi journey as follows:

- The taxi driver was invariably psychotic. When it came to achieving his “shortest possible time” mission stated above, all other road users were an obstruction to his goal.
- The accelerator peddle must be fully depressed to the floor at all times.
- The brake peddle appeared to be an unknown/unnecessary addition to the car’s basic control systems.
- The passenger seat belts, when installed, invariably did not function.
- All other road users appeared to have been trained at the same psycho driving school.
- The roads in the three countries are pitted with potholes, providing a stimulating up and down motion to the general suspension of the taxi. I would like to point out that it was evident over my five years’ of visits to the Baltics that the number of potholes declined; I used that as an inverse index of the economic growth of the region.
- In winter the roads ice up, there is little evidence of gritting, and combined with the oil and general detritus left by other vehicles this conspires to turn the roads into a skating rink. Now you know why brakes are not necessary, they wouldn’t stop the car anyway under these conditions!

That being said, I never once had an accident in any one of the taxis and always managed to reach my destination on time; so I raise my glass to the taxi drivers of the Baltics life, will be very boring there if more rigorous road and taxi regulations are introduced.

A brief reality check here, as I am writing this, Eva has just joined me on the balcony with her healthy Swedish style breakfast; a bowl of crumbled Ryvita, apple sauce and milk. I am advised that it is very good for the bowels.

Tallinn Estonia

Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, has a population of approximately 430000. Tallinn has been ransacked by a multitude of nations over the centuries including; the Danes, the Teutonic Knights, the Swedes, the Russians, the Nazis, and the Soviets. However, Tallinn has retained much of its architectural heritage including the Old Town, which affords a stunning view over the harbour, complete with cobblestone street and medieval houses. Other areas reflect different time periods including; The Nõmme suburb built in the thirties, Kadriorg reflects the influence of the Russian Tsar and the Lasnamäe district brings back memories of the Soviet era. However, Tallinn is not wallowing in the past as its redevelopment projects continue apace.

The Zone of Comfort

Should I be forced to say which Baltic state I prefer I would find that to be a very difficult choice. That being said I particularly admire the Estonian drive to modernise, and take its part within Europe. The Estonians share a common trait with the Finns (with whom they have a very close relationship and language), both are a very determined and proud people who when they agree an objective don't look to prevaricate or find reasons for not being able to achieve that objective; they "roll up their sleeves and get on with the job".

During my first visit to my colleagues in Tallinn I was very impressed with the response from the CEO there to my recommendations for business and organisational improvements. Let me at this point say that as an internal auditor I have experienced the following scenario, on quite a few occasions, when presenting my recommendations:

- The local management agree with the facts of the report.
- The local management "recognise" the theoretical validity of the recommendations.
- The local management make excuses as to why the issues/risks highlighted in the report have not been addressed before.
- The local management attempt to pass responsibility for addressing the issues/risks to another organisation within the company (preferably overseas).
- The local management state that they will of course try to implement the recommendations, but they lack the resources.

The above may seem to be churlish behaviour on behalf of the management. However, it is merely a very human response to change. People prefer to remain within the "zone of comfort", as I like to call it, and resist being taken to the "zone of uncertainty/discomfort"; which is the natural effect of any change process. Hence my positive feeling towards the Estonian attitude, as embodied by the CEO. His response was simple: *"if that is what is needed to be done, then we will do it"*.

The Final Frontier

I will relate to you a small piece of history regarding Philips expansion into the Baltics, which I suspect mirrors the experiences of other companies. When the “evil empire” collapsed in the early nineties, there was an unseemly and ill thought out scramble by Western businesses to set up shop in the post Soviet block. Philips, already having a sizeable presence in the Nordic region, used Finland which was close in terms of language and geography as the launching pad to create a bridge head in Estonia; which in turn would become the launching pad for entry into the other two Baltic states.

A brave man was selected to head East and find an office. He duly found suitable accommodation and hired a couple of staff. Philips had made its first tentative steps Eastwards. However, as I am fond of remarking “nature abhors a vacuum”, when a rigid form of authoritarian control is removed something must fill the space. Estonia and the other Baltic states were fortunate in that they avoided political anarchy. However, they did not escape the scourge of organised crime. The Mafia soon established a very powerful presence in these countries, seeing easy “pickings” from the Western companies eager to establish themselves. Those companies and individuals that did not “play ball” were subjected to intimidation and attack. I am pleased to say the Philips did not countenance working with the Mob; and as such it felt that its offices at least in the first six months or so were a potential target. To minimise this threat additional security was hired, and our man in Tallinn took the brave step of sleeping in the office for quite a few evenings. Rather him than me!

I am pleased to say that by the time I had arrived on the scene in 1996 the situation had become a little more secure, and management were able to sleep in their own apartments.

Vodka for Breakfast

On the subject of cuisine, I was impressed with the range of room service breakfast offered by my hotel (The Olympia); aside from the normal ham, eggs, bacon etc you could have caviar, blinis and your choice of half a bottle of champagne or a quarter bottle of vodka (ice cold of course) per person. A rather splendid and bold way to start the day! However, it is custom and practice in that part of the world to conduct breakfast meetings (for example) with a few vodkas; then having concluded the business discussion retire to the sauna at around 10:00 am to sweat it out, whilst drinking a few beers to quench your thirst. Definitely more civilised, and fun, than the puritanical Western continental high fibre breakfast.

The Olympia was a relic from the days of communism, designed by a Soviet architect in the vain attempt to emulate (at a lower cost) the trappings of a 5 star Western hotel. That being said, I would say that it had a splendid sized swimming pool. Since tourism from the West was not encouraged in the dark days of occupation, its client base consisted mainly of the elite of the Communist party from Russia and other satellite states. The dining room was a cavernous affair, ideal if you were having 200-300 people sitting down at the same time. However, not so well suited to the individual business travellers and tourists who now pass through Tallinn; ie you tended to rattle around like a pea in a pod. That did not mean that you could not be entertained by the “goings on”.

A Spanking Time

One evening I was dining alone in the Olympia, and had been placed within hearing distance of a table occupied by an American businessman and a local lady, who I assume had only just made his acquaintance. Their conversation, despite my attempts to concentrate on my newspaper, was distinctly audible. The gentleman seemed most concerned that his companion had plenty to drink; but was not so concerned that she order anything other than a light quick meal, that could be consumed within a short period of time. I have to say that his companion seemed also to be “clock watching”, and was not particularly interested in the food (odd that!). Once the difficult process of ordering had been attended to, the conversation moved speedily on to the businessman’s “need” for her to come and have a private drink with him; and indulge in some spanking. He put it more eloquently than I ever could; “finish that up and we can go to my room and have some spanky”. His pleas became more insistent, evidently he felt that he had made some very bad business deals that day; and should be punished in a fashion that did not require him to lose his bonus. Maybe the ex directors of Enron would have performed in a more professional way had they been threatened with corporal punishment? My dining neighbours duly finished their meal and retied at breakneck speed to his room, I trust all was satisfactory.

Vilnius Lithuania

The capital of Lithuania is Vilnius, with a population of approximately 580000. Despite being a capital city, Vilnius is still to some extent rather rural; as approximately 40% of it is green space.

The Old Town is one of the largest in Eastern Europe, and contains approximately 1500 buildings constructed over the centuries reflecting the changes in the architectural style of the day. The architecture includes examples of gothic and renaissance, among the main sights are the Gediminas Castle and the Cathedral Square. Vilnius has been recorded by the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994.

Goulash in the Hawaiian Lounge

My first visit to Vilnius was rather a leap in the dark, accommodation wise. None of my colleagues in our Stockholm office had been over there, and so choosing a hotel was based on the limited information supplied by our travel bureau. At that stage none of the recognised Scandinavian hotel chains had set up there. Therefore, for reasons that now escape me, my secretary and I decided that the improbably named Victoria Hotel would be a good choice.

I arrived at Vilnius late morning, and had a lunchtime meeting with our external audit partner from KPMG. The primary purpose being to meet each other, and for me to explain the role of the audit department I was setting up. As is the nature of these lunchtime meetings it over ran. The partner was an English expat, who had been out there for almost two years. He was pleased to meet another Brit. and took the opportunity to show me around Vilnius, more specifically to take me to a few bars. I am reasonably sure that we did at least touch on the subject of business.

Well oiled, I finally bade him farewell at around 4:00pm. I took a taxi in search of my hotel. Not the usual multi storey 4 star but a simple terraced house, three storeys high. It reminded me more of a seaside bed and breakfast one might find at any English coastal resort.

I checked in and was shown to my room, it was small but functional. One feature that I was highly impressed with was the minibar, which proudly boasted a half litre bottle of vodka; no messing about with those overpriced miniature bottles of spirits so beloved by other hotels.

I settled in and decided to test the hotel's bar and dining facilities. So I broke into the bottle of vodka, and had a fortifying shot, before venturing downstairs into the bar. The bar, for reasons best known to the proprietors of the hotel, was called the Hawaiian Bar and was decorated in the style of a film set from that splendid TV detective series from the sixties, Hawaii Five O; namely with bamboo chairs, tables, ceiling fans, background Hawaiian music and murals on the walls depicting an island paradise. The only thing that would tell you were not in Hawaii, were the customers. Myself, the Brit. in pinstripe suit, and the other customers East European gentlemen with thick moustaches and gold chains around the necks and wrists.

I settled myself into one of the bamboo chairs, ordered a Bloody Mary and perused the menu. Goulash was featured as dish of the day, and so feeling in the mood to stretch the cultural boundaries I chose the goulash (see page 191). It was really very good, quite spicy and very filling. That being said I decided that the next time I visited Vilnius I would take a little more care with regard to choosing my hotel.

Ken Frost Gentleman Vandal

Philips rented offices in Lithuania in a shared office block. Whilst the actual rooms in which Philips conducted meetings, displayed products and staff worked were modern and functional; the shared parts of the building, especially the toilets, were not so salubrious. I suggest those of you with a delicate stomach skip this part...

The communal gents' toilets were accessed through a locked door, the key to which had to be borrowed from the photocopy room. Should toilet paper be required, this too had to be borrowed from the photocopy room, as the only paper in the gents consisted of cut out newspaper threaded through a piece of string. The gents had the sort of stale odour normally associated with a neglected lavatory in an old style British Railway's station. The light was dim, there was a very small grubby bar of pink soap; the need for which was entirely academic, as there was invariably no water in the taps attached to the chipped, equally grubby, hand basin. Should you be lucky enough to use it on the day when there was water then you would find that you would not be able to dry your hands, as the electric hand drier had long ago "given up the ghost". The urinals were flushed by hand operated taps, all of which needless to say had rusted up many years ago. Moving on to the cubical, should you be requiring the "full service", then this is where things began to get really grim. The door did have a lock, so long as you gave it some moral support with your foot. Toilet paper, I refer you to my comments earlier. The cubicle had a window which was clear glass, and which looked directly onto the courtyard below; a welcome distraction from the horrors within. However, in a parody of Newton's law ("*for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction*") it was fair to assume that if you could get such a panoramic view of the goings on in the outside world; then the same was true vice versa.

As professional accountants, such as myself, are fond of saying "*for every debit there is a corresponding and equal credit*"; ie what goes in goes out. The same applies to the natural bodily functions, as much as to the world of finance. One day I had need to venture into the gents for the "full service"; taking the key, and a requisition of Lithuania's equivalent to Andrex, I entered "Valhalla" and proceeded with the task in hand. Having finished the final stages of washing up, as best as one could, I then tried to exit through the main door into the corridor. The god's were not smiling favourably on me that day, someone had locked the door from the outside. No matter, I thought, I had the key; and the door lock could be undone from the inside. I inserted my key and turned, this is where things got a bit tricky; the rust that pervaded all parts metal within the gents had also attacked the lock. My key turned 90 degrees then stopped. I could turn it no further; neither, more worryingly, could I turn it back and remove it. The key had become stuck fast and the lock jammed, meaning that it could not be opened from the outside either. "Bugger!". I began to give the door a few hefty kicks and shoves, not much luck. I continued for some ten minutes, finally someone on the outside heard the commotion and entered into the fray. A further ten minutes later the door began to part company from its frame, and indeed the frame started to part company from the wall. Success, the door opened I was able to walk free. In a scene that might have looked rather surreal, the English gentleman emerged in an immaculate pin striped double breasted suit, with red silk handkerchief, to be greeted by the bewildered stare of a somewhat startled Lithuanian. I thanked him for his efforts, and went about my business.

The next time I visited our Lithuanian offices I was told by my hosts that the landlord of the building had asked who had vandalised the door; he was told that it was an English gentleman (with strong emphasis on the gentleman).

The Huntsman's Lodge

One evening I was taken by a colleague to a traditional Lithuanian restaurant, located on the outskirts of Vilnius. I was told it was modelled on a traditional rural hunting lodge. The building was constructed entirely of wood, in the entrance hall a large stuffed bear greeted us as we walked in. A stout bearded gentleman took our coats in exchange for small numbered carved animal horns, which acted as coat tickets. The inside of the restaurant was decorated with hunting rifles, stuffed animals and moose antlers; all the traditional paraphernalia that you would associate with hunting. As an added attraction the restaurant was showing a video of a bear hunt. We ordered a traditional Lithuanian meal of potato soup, dumplings (see page 284), pork and boiled potato; washed down with copious quantities of the local beer and wine. The meal was excellent; I would suggest that for those of you not so enthused by the concept of “nature red in blood and claw” this restaurant may be a little over the top and not the place to stop off for a lentil soup.

Hog's Ears at Rita's

Should you not wish to come so close to nature as the hunting lodge, but still wish to sample traditional Lithuanian fare in a traditional setting. Then I recommend the Ritos Smukle (Rita's Tavern) situated in Vilnius itself. This is a splendid restaurant which serves all manner of delicacies; succulent roast pork (see page 221), potato dumplings (see page 284), potato soup and indeed sliced hogs ears. The latter serve as a marvellous pre dinner snack; they are boiled and cut into long strips, which taste like fatty bacon. They should be accompanied by a large jug of the local beer, and eaten whilst reading the menu. Yes I did eat them, and yes I did enjoy them! I have not cooked them myself, nor do I have Rita's specific recipe. However, taking an educated guess I would say it is likely to be something like this:

- Take a quantity of pigs ears.
- Wash them, and shave them if you don't like too much hair.
- Use the fleshy flap part and slice it into strips say under ½ an inch wide.
- Plunge into boiling salty water.
- Simmer until cooked, I guess this would be 10-15 minutes or so.
- Drain and serve with dips of mustard and apple sauce.

Should anyone reading this have the recipe please drop me a line, and I will put it on the web site.

Riga Latvia

Riga, capital city of Latvia, with a population of 850000 is the largest of the Baltics capital cities. The medieval belief was that if you controlled Riga, you controlled the Baltics.

Despite a predominantly Russian population, Riga has been a multi-cultural city throughout its 800-year history; with influences from Germans, Jews and Russians all leaving their mark. This can be seen in the architecture of the buildings, for example one of the main covered markets is located within a building that was constructed by the Germans in the early part of the twentieth century to house their zeppelins.

Old Riga (Vecriga) contains a myriad of buildings and styles, which are located in labyrinth of winding streets and densely packed houses. Many of the streets in Old Riga were constructed in the sixteenth century. However, the oldest and narrowest street of Vecriga is a short street between Jauniela and Tirgonu streets, it has no pavements and is not wide enough for two vehicles to pass, and has been around since the thirteenth century.

Even the Philips offices there had a unique link with the past. I was impressed with the imposing architectural style of the outside of the building. Clearly someone had made a special effort when designing it as it did not fit in, architecturally, with the other buildings in Riga. I asked my colleagues in Riga what it had been used for before the fall of the Soviet Union; I was amused to hear that it had in fact been the headquarters of the KGB. It was assumed that there may well be old bugging devices still in the offices, walls have ears being the key watchword.

Frozen Condoms

When visiting Riga I always stayed in the SAS Daugava Hotel, Riga's best and most western orientated hotel. This was a modern skyscraper with comfortable rooms, good quality service, an olympic sized swimming pool and a decent restaurant and bar. As I have already mentioned the restaurant served a good selection of pastas and steaks during the week, and should you be staying the weekend offered an American style brunch on the Sunday. The hotel was located on the banks of the river Daugava, and five minutes walk across the bridge was the old town.

On my first visit to Riga I managed to get muddled over the exchange rate, and tipped the bell boy what I thought to be the equivalent of £1. On further reflection, ten minutes later I realised that I had put the decimal point in the wrong place when doing the calculation in my head; and had given him the equivalent of £10. This was quite a large sum in Latvia, and would have bought him a good night out. Needless to say on all of my future visits to the hotel he made a point of ensuring that he always dealt with my baggage.

As noted the rooms were comfortable, a good sized bed, sofa, desk, cable TV and very well stocked mini bar which seemed to cater for all eventualities. I was intrigued to see that it even included two condoms, stored in the ice compartment. I was impressed with the hotel's proactive stance on public health, but somewhat bemused by the fact that the condoms were chilled. I would have thought that should you be verging on a passionate encounter you would not really want to apply a contraceptive that was ice cold; that would, in my opinion, definitely dampen (or more accurately chill) your ardour.

The hotel, much like many four star hotels, had a selection of in house shops and boutiques. One shop adopted a pro active marketing campaign. Whenever I checked in to the hotel, I could always be sure that five minutes after arriving at my room an advert for this emporium would be pushed under my door. Oh I haven't told you what it sold have I? It was a lingerie shop; the advertisement, clearly aimed at the male business traveller, suggested that as you were away from home you should buy your girlfriend or wife a present of lingerie. Naturally the shop, according to the advertising literature, offered a full service; one of the young ladies would be happy to come to your room and model the lingerie so that you could get an idea as to how it would look on your wife. Quite!

Routine Keeps You Sane

I have some advice to those of you embarking on international business trips, based on my experiences garnered over the years of travelling hither and thither, set yourself a routine in the evenings that affords you the chance to switch off and relax. My routine in whatever country I visited, Riga being a good example, tended to follow a similar pattern. My routine when in Riga was:

- Return to the hotel at a sensible time. One afternoon, at around 4:00pm, after an evening out with the CFO the night before (when we had consumed and elegant sufficiency); we sat facing each other in the conference room. We were feeling somewhat drained, the usually quick fire repartee of audit question and management response had dried up. We decided to shut up shop earlier than normal that day.
- Go for a swim in the hotel pool. The pool in the Daugava was excellent, as noted it was olympic sized, and afforded me the chance to swim (at a snail's pace) a decent distance without bumping into others. However, Tuesday nights were not a good time for secluded swimming. Tuesdays were the evenings reserved for Ladies' water aerobics. This meant that one quarter of the pool was occupied by fifteen or so determined Latvian Ladies; who would go through their energetic workout of jumping, stretching and churning the water oblivious to any other occupants of the pool. This meant that the water was "choppy", to say the least.
- Return to my room, have shower, relax in my bath robe for half an hour watching cartoon network.
- Dress, have a drink from the minibar whilst watching more TV.
- Go downstairs to the bar and have a Bloody Mary. My colleagues would invariably join me, and we would then go to whatever restaurant was selected for the evening.
- Return to the hotel bar at the end of the evening for a night-cap with, or without, my colleagues.
- Go back to my room and drink half a litre of mineral water before going to sleep.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way Back from the Restaurant

When I first visited Riga my colleagues kindly took me to an authentic German bar and restaurant (The Jever Bistro). My numerous visits to Germany had already given me a taste for Germanic cuisine, and I was more than pleased to see that the restaurant offered roasted Eisbein (see page 180) and potato soup. We ate a hearty meal, and a good few schnapps, the evening came to close and my colleagues needed to depart. I stayed on for one more schnapps, then left for my hotel. I started to wander back when all of a sudden two large “heavy set gentleman” grabbed me from behind and, with my arm pushed fully up behind my back, marched me at a reasonably swift pace up the street. I was somewhat surprised, but maintained my dignity, and in the most affronted of British accents demanded that they unhand me as I was British citizen (yes I think I had probably had one schnapps too many!). I realised seconds later that for reasons, that were at that stage unclear, I was being taken back to the restaurant.

Duly deposited at the restaurant, one of the staff there informed me that part of the bill had not been paid; £10 apparently. I asked why my escorts had not just said that to me, I was told that they were by nature rude and that I should not worry about it. In case you should be worrying that the non payment had occurred because I had been trying to “do a runner” fear not; the system of payment in the restaurant was such that you place your credit card behind the bar when entering, and then whatever is eaten/drunk is charged up to your account. My colleagues had placed their company card behind the bar, and I had assumed that the final schnapps of the evening was in the total. My colleagues had, quite correctly, shut the account off when they left; mea culpa!

Summertime Mafia Spotting

In the summertime Riga metamorphosises into a continental street café society. Table, chairs and sun umbrellas adorn the pavements outside every café, restaurant, bistro and bar. The inhabitants of Riga, wearing designer sunglasses and the trappings of all that is considered to be designer chic, throng the squares, parks and pavement cafes. Cars, previously caked in the detritus of winter, are now washed and polished; and are driven around the city streets, windows open and stereos blasting. The objective of all is to see and be seen, in a ritualistic form of mutual admiration.

My colleagues introduced me to this summer ritual in 1996. We set off after work to one of the many squares in Riga, and commandeered a table outside of a bistro that afforded us a good view of the comings and goings of the square. We were suitably equipped with the de rigueur designer sunglasses, so that we too could look chic. Glasses of Latvia’s finest local beer were ordered and we settled down to watch the show. It was apparent that after the years of communist drudgery, the local inhabitants wished to make as clean a break from that period as they could; by embracing all the trappings of Western consumerism. The rapidly expanding economies of Central and Eastern Europe gave them the confidence to indulge in luxuries that the future would pay for. This concept of mortgaging the future, by the way, came to an abrupt halt with the economic downturn in 1998.

I watched the comings and goings and was particularly entertained to see the same cars driving past every few minutes again and again. These were not the Trabants or Skodas usually associated with Central and Eastern Europe, but shiny new Mercedes with blacked out windows. I was impressed that these expensive imports could be afforded, and commented on this to my colleagues; they told me that these cars were not owned by ordinary citizens, but by the Mafia. Seemingly the badge of honour of the local cosa nostra was to be found, not in the usual scars or tattoos associated with other criminal organisations but, in the ownership of a Mercedes. The CEO pointed out that when he arrived in Riga and was discussing what sort of company car he should have, he initially opted for a Mercedes; only to be told nervously by the local management that these cars were only driven by the Mafia, and that to own one would place him at risk of a Mafia hit. He therefore opted for a sensible Swedish Volvo, which of course does not draw any attention to itself or the occupant. I detected a tone of wistful disappointment as he related his story.

Helsinki Finland

Helsinki, capital of Finland, with a population of 560000 is home to Nokia one of the world's largest mobile company. Helsinki is prosperous and offers an array of cultural institutions, ranging from; a brand new opera house to a contemporary art museum. Additionally, it has an energetic nightlife served by the many bars and restaurants that cater for the cosmopolitan population. There is a heavy Swedish and Russian influence evidenced in the architecture, cuisine and language.

The centre is built around the main harbour, Eteläsatama. The kauppatori (market square) is on the waterfront by the ferry terminals. Away from the harbour are the main bus and train stations. The primary shopping street is Mannerheimintie which links into the two shopping avenues of Pohjoisesplanadi and Eteläesplanadi.

Helsinki was founded some 450 years ago by the Swedes, who held Finland as part of their empire, and is Finland's sixth oldest town. In 1809 the Russians invaded, seeing it to be a key power base in the region.

The influence of East and West can be seen in the architecture viz; the contrast between the Finlandia Hall and the onion dome of Uspenski Cathedral.

Respect is Due

I have great respect for the Finns they are, in my opinion, a very determined and "gutsy" people. When the Second World War broke out, the Soviets under Stalin attempted to invade Finland; they sent their troops in expecting a relatively swift victory. How very wrong they were; the Finnish troops although heavily outnumbered fought a dogged and ruthless battle, under the leadership of Field Marshall Mannerheim, and totally wrecked the Soviet invasion. Stalin had to take another "bite at the apple", with significantly greater numbers of troops, before he could unjustly claim victory. With regard to business, the Finns display an equal determination; when they set their mind on achieving an objective they do everything in their power to achieve that objective. Look at the success of Nokia which has the world's largest market share in mobile phones, in what is a very ruthless market.

Watch Out For the Gypsies

My father encountered many Finns during his days on the Atlantic convoys in the war. He warned me that when you go drinking with a Finn prepare for a long evening, the bottle of vodka once opened has to be finished. I was given even more "direct" advice from a Finn I met when flying back one Friday evening from Helsinki to Stockholm:

"...Never push a Finn too far, many of us carry knives in our boots....the most ruthless are the gypsies. When someone goes into a Finnish hospital with a knife wound, the doctor will always ask if it was gypsy who stabbed you. Should that be the case then they will not bother to try to save you as it is a lost cause. Finnish gypsies from childhood are taught to use a knife, and to aim directly for the heart..."

I would venture to point out that in the short one hour flight, he had consumed 5 vodkas and one quarter bottle of champagne.

You will doubtless be relieved to hear that during my any trips to Finland I never encountered a knife wielding gypsy, nor did I sufficiently antagonise the members of our Finnish Board with my reports for them to resort to removing their knives from their boots.

Baked Hedgehog

On the subject of gypsies, I would just like to mention a gypsy recipe that could be useful in an emergency. This recipe shows you the simple way to roast a hedgehog, and deal with those troublesome prickles that could impair the flavour. In summary the recipe is as follows:

- Obtain 1 fresh, dead, hedgehog.
- Encase the entire body in clay, making sure it is perfectly sealed so as to keep the flavour in.
- Place the clay package into the centre of an open fire.
- Allow it to roast until the clay is completely hardened.
- Remove it from the fire, and carefully pull away the hardened clay; the prickles will come away with the clay.
- Your hedgehog is now ready to eat, enjoy!

“We Always Land”

With regard to travelling to and from Finland, I always used the national airline Finnair. This airline, in my opinion, outranks many other national carriers for the following reasons:

- The planes operate according to schedule, and in general do not suffer from cancellations or delays.
- The service on board is efficient, polite and generous. I know of no other airline which so readily indulges their guests with the onboard drinks trolley. On one particular flight the hostess offered me a complimentary brandy (after a significant indulgence on my part with vodka and champagne), and was most concerned when I politely refused; she insisted that I take two bottles away with me in my pocket for later.
- The motto of Finnair is “we always land”, this may seem like a statement of the obvious. However, I would remind you that the airline operates in areas with ambient temperatures that are often well below zero; where you may well be landing on a sheet of ice. The pilots are trained to bring the plane down almost vertically, belly flopping it onto the runway; the less runaway used when landing the less likely you are to skid. Don’t worry, once you have flown with them a couple of times you get used to the belly flops.

One for the Road

In truth the determined, hard drinking image is counterbalanced by a reserved, polite almost shy nature that is to be respected in these brash “in your face” times. That being said, once a few vodkas have been downed an evening out can be very lively. One particular occasion did indeed push my physical endurance to its limits. Myself, the Financial Controller and CEO of one of our businesses in Helsinki made an early (5:30pm) start in the cellar bar of the hotel Marski, my favourite hotel in Helsinki.

To digress for a minute, the cellar of the Marski at that time had been decorated in rustic fashion; and offered a well equipped bar and excellent restaurant (Marskin Kellari) which served amongst other things Finnish lamb stew, a dish not entirely unlike the British Shepherd's pie (see page 230). It is regrettable that the hotel underwent a redecoration back in 2000, and the cellar bar and restaurant were taken away. However, on the positive side the Irish bar (Mulligan's, which was also within the hotel) was not removed. Should you ever be in the need of a pint of Guinness in Helsinki, at a late hour, then would recommend that bar as it is very large, lively and stays open until 4:00 am. In my opinion it is among the few bars that serve a really good pint of Guinness outside of Dublin.

Anyway, back to the plot, we had a few drinks in the bar, then moved onto dinner in Marskin Kellari. I knew that this was going to be a long evening when at 9:00pm the CEO said that, although he was originally going to go home early to his wife, he had decided to stay to see the night through! By 10:00 p.m. we had moved on to the post dinner vodkas and Irish coffees (see page 329). We decided to move to another bar for a few more drinks. What better way to set yourself up for the evening ahead than a swift Guinness in Mulligan's, well it seemed like a good idea at the time! Next time not maybe, anyway having dispatched a swift pint we then moved on to a night-club at the top of an office block; I cannot for the life of me remember the name. However, we entered the office block and a bouncer guided us to the express elevator. This took us to a splendid, and very lively, bar with an excellent view of the city. However, I have to say that by 1:00am my spirits were flagging; we had moved onto flavoured vodkas by this stage! I called it a day and went back to my hotel. I understand that my hosts stayed for a few more.

The next day was, to put it mildly, a bit of a write off for me. I woke up with one of the worst hangovers I have had in a long while. The "full monty"; headache, sweating, shakes and queasy. I had a meeting with the Logistics Manager booked for midday. This, I assumed, would be feasible if I took a few alka seltzer and copious quantities of water.

I began the self medication and purification process. Still feeling like death warmed up; I washed, shaved and got dressed. I then dragged my corpse through the hotel lobby and into the fresh air of Helsinki to commandeer a taxi.

I arrived at the office and settled myself into my audit room. I must confess I still felt like shit. However, stiff upper lip and all that. So I went off to the Logistics Manager to confirm that my meeting was still on, unfortunately it was. I then bumped into the CFO who, much to my annoyance, looked as fresh as a daisy; this is clearly another reason for respecting the Finns (they can certainly hold their booze).

Midday arrived and I went to talk to the Logistics Manager about issues as stimulating and wide ranging as lead time, customer satisfaction statistics and returns handling procedures. I managed to get through the two hour session, making copious notes which naturally the next day were totally illegible.

I struggled through the remainder of the day, went back to hotel and went to bed for three hours to sleep off the remains of the hangover. However, by eight in the evening I was my old self again and able to face a sirloin and Chianti in the hotel restaurant.

Copenhagen Denmark

Copenhagen, Denmark's capital city, is home to 2 million people and is one of Europe's oldest cities. It is famous for the Little Mermaid statue (which some feminists, for reasons best known to themselves, occasionally chop the bosoms off of), Lego, Hans Christian Anderson and Carlsberg beer.

The city has a relaxed atmosphere which is reflected in the ambience of the cafes, bars and restaurants. Copenhagen used to be a major Baltic port as evidenced by the canals, lakes and harbour.

The city was founded in 1167, by Bishop Absalon who built a fortification on the island of Slotsholmen; which now forms the site of Christiansborg Palace and the Danish parliament. The city became the capital of Denmark and parts of Sweden and Norway in 1417. Some buildings from the sixteenth century remain including; the Børsen (Stock Exchange), the Rundetårn (Round Tower) and the Palace of Rosenborg. However, many buildings were destroyed as a result of plague, fires and attacks by the Swedes in the seventeenth century and the British in the nineteenth.

Much of the city centre is reserved for pedestrians, and bikes outnumber cars. The city has a good proportion of green spaces such as Tivoli; and like other Scandinavian cities cafes, bars and restaurants overflow onto the pavements in the summer. The nightlife is lively and stimulating; shows, bars and restaurants cater for all tastes. The road bridge to Sweden, completed in 2000, makes Copenhagen an ideal "jump point" into the rest of Scandinavia.

Wonderful, Wonderful Copenhagen

Copenhagen is a lively city and I very much recommend a visit. It has numerous bars and restaurants catering for all tastes in the city centre; together with a harbour area (Nyhaven) with cafes, bars and restaurants that is most definitely worth a visit in the summer. However, I cannot recommend too enthusiastically a visit to Tivoli. This is an area in the city centre that is a cross between funfair, gardens and multi site restaurant/bar complex. Tivoli is open during the summer and partly during Christmas, when they hold a Christmas market (a very special time to visit). The entrance to Tivoli costs a few DKK, once inside you are spoilt for choice by the gardens, bandstand, lake, fairground amusements and numerous restaurants (over 25 by my count) and bars that are within the grounds. One particular favourite restaurant of mine, Balkonen, operates on a carving table principle; whereby they have a selection of joints (beef, lamb, gammon etc) which are carved for you by chefs who will offer you as many "goes" as you wish. To this end I would suggest you have the gammon, glazed in a mustard and sugar sauce this got my vote every time (see page 155). The Danes are renowned for their bacon and therefore gammon in Copenhagen should be of the best quality. I made sure that every time I visited Copenhagen in the summer I paid a visit to this restaurant.

Maka Maka

Moving onto the bars there is one special bar, which I regret to say I have forgotten the name of, in Tivoli that has a very special atmosphere. One of my hosts, when entertaining me, would always ensure that we paid this establishment a visit after eating. The bar consists of long wooden tables and benches, the beer is served to you in large china tankards by enthusiastic traditionally costumed barmaids. Live music is played in the evening, and drinkers are encouraged to sing along to traditional Danish drinking songs. Those of you unfamiliar with the words to the traditional Danish drinking song should have no fear, everyone is given a song sheet with the words printed on them. Oddly enough one of the “traditional” songs was “Roll out the barrel” (an English drinking song), I haven’t quite worked out how that entered Danish popular culture. However, my absolute favourite, probably because it has to be the easiest to sing along to, therefore ideal for the non Danish speaking is the “Maka maka song”. The chorus, and indeed the entire song, consists of the following:

“Maka maka, mak mak mak (*pause*)

maka maka mak mak mak (*pause*)

maka maka, mak mak mak (*pause*)

mak mak mak mak mak”

and so on! Altogether now....

The Best Laid Plans

There are occasions when the best laid plans etc etc. On one particular business trip to Copenhagen I was accompanied by one of my colleagues from my department. Under these circumstances we would normally stay in the same hotel. However, Copenhagen is a very popular destination for both the business and leisure traveller alike. On this occasion we had to stay in separate hotels in different parts of the city. This should not have presented much of a logistical problem to two experienced business professionals, such as ourselves, when arranging a meeting point after work for drinks and dinner. Well the plan seemed good, meet in one of our hotel bars and then take it from there. We arranged to meet in his hotel. I duly went to my colleague’s hotel, found the main bar and set myself up there with the standard Bloody Mary (see page 326). No sign of my colleague, so I had another drink; at this stage I had assumed that he had been delayed in the office. Having finished my second drink I went to reception to put a call through to his room, no answer. I put a call through to his mobile, but that was off so I left a message.

I then saw that there was another bar in the hotel, problem solved; clearly he was in that bar. I ambled in, it was very busy and lively (so much so that it had a bouncer on the door); it was rather difficult to see if he was in there or not. However, no point in standing around like a lemon, so I ordered another drink and wandered around. My fellow drinkers seemed very friendly, unusually so for a hotel bar, a number of them attempted to engage me in conversation. I then of course realised that this was in fact a private party, the bouncer on the door had assumed that I was with the others (I clearly looked very respectable). So where had my colleague got to?

I put another call through to his room, no answer. I began to wonder if there had been a muddle over our meeting point. I then tried the only other option, ring my hotel to find out if my colleague had gone there. They put a call out, and surprise surprise he was there. We had of course both agreed on meeting in a hotel but each of us had got the wrong hotel. Finally we co-ordinated our movements with sufficient intelligence to meet in the same place. Some drinks later it was most definitely time to dine, and so at 11.30 PM we finally sat down to a well deserved dinner!

Fawlty Towers, The Danish Version

When staying in Copenhagen I always tried to be booked into the SAS Radisson, a modern high rise hotel just on the outskirts of the city centre. The rooms were comfortable and the facilities of good quality with a good sized swimming pool, and decent restaurant (Mama's and Papa's), which served a combination of Italian and "American" style steaks etc. A perfectly respectable place for a meal, if you don't feel like going into town.

However, as I have noted Copenhagen is a popular place and finding hotel accommodation can be difficult and expensive. On more than one occasion I had to stay elsewhere. On this particular occasion I was pleased, at the time of booking, to be told by our travel bureau that a new hotel (part of the "First Group") had been built, and that as the SAS was full maybe I should consider staying there. No problem, I was happy to try a new place and was pleased that we actually had found somewhere for me to stay.

I think in retrospect that staying in a hotel that had only been open for a week, and therefore still settling in, was "chancing it a bit". I duly arrived on the Monday evening and checked in. First problem, the lifts didn't work properly; so up the stairs I went.

The style of the décor was Scandinavian (that is probably stating the obvious); wooden floors, simple furnishings, bright decoration. Another problem which I noted immediately when entering the room; it was very dusty not from previous occupants, as the hotel had only been open a week, but from the building work. As with all new buildings there is a certain amount of building dust created by the finishing off process. However, it would not have been unreasonable to expect the cleaners to remove it before allowing customers to occupy the room. The lack of carpet, perversely, meant that the dust was all the more obvious.

Well, I made a mental note to let them know; they could clean it up later when I had gone out. It was a nice summer's evening and the hotel was a short walking distance from Tivoli so the evening was mapped out. All I would need to do was unpack, have a shower, a quick drink then be on my way. I looked at the air conditioner and attempted to lower the temperature (the summer heat, and builders' dust had made it rather stuffy) no luck. I checked with the reception, apparently the AC system was down and would need to be repaired. Alright then, better unpack then have a shower. I put the TV on and flipped through the channels, guess what? The satellite channels on offer were not available, yet to be connected! I unpacked and proceeded to run the shower. The shower room, adjacent to the bedroom, was modern and functional. However it had two fatal errors in design, which I would like architects to take note of:

- The shower floor was entirely flat and level, there was no incline to guide the water to the drain in the centre of the floor.
- There was no ridge on the floor between the door of shower area and the rest of the room.

Can you guess what happened next? Yes of course, when the shower was turned on not all the water went in the direction of the drain; it spread (as water does) everywhere including the bedroom. What an excellent design! That being said the water did clean up some of the dust on the bedroom floor, I was grateful for small mercies.

I finished my shower as quickly as possible, dressed and decided to plunder the minibar for something that would put the evening on a better footing. Naturally, the minibar had not been stocked! A call then to room service. I was asked if I could go downstairs to the bar and buy it there, I said no; room service is not self service. I was told that I would have to wait for half an hour. My temper finally snapped, I rang reception and enquired as to whether they were running a hotel and as to whether I was a guest. A grumpy response acknowledged that someone would bring me a drink.

The week went on like that, I had a long tedious discussion with a member of “management” later in the week; and negotiated a discount. Suffice to say that hotel was not put on my “to stay in” list.

St Charles USA

St Charles is a typical American small town of 22000 people. It comes with a main street, a shopping mall, a cinema and beautiful surrounding countryside in the Fox River area. It was founded in 1834, and is only 35 miles from Chicago. This proximity made it popular with Al Capone, the notorious gangster of the twenties, who held speakeasies in the vicinity.

The Androids Boot Camp

Towards the end of 1999 Philips, rather unwisely in my opinion, made a deal with Arthur Andersens (known as Androids, for their de riguer black suits and clone like image, by those in the profession). Andersens being that noble bastion of propriety and best audit practice; who have since gone “belly up”, following the Enron and associated scandals. The arrangement was for them to set up an automated database for audit working papers which would be embedded into the existing world-wide audit database. Additionally, Andersens would provide ongoing risk management training.

Therefore in January 2000 I, and fifty or so colleagues from around the world, descended on St Charles; for a three week course laid on by Andersens in their corporate training headquarters. The training centre had previously been a boarding school, and was set in a secluded area of fields and woods. The centre was enormous with training rooms galore, a residential complex of sparsely furnished bedrooms (the concept of Androids was that the rooms must be uncomfortable, in order that the occupants be forced to leave them and “network”) that could accommodate several hundred people, a restaurant and a recreation centre and bar which opened in the evening. Those of us with foresight and wisdom ensured that we smuggled in extra supplies of booze, in order to get through the tedium of being incarcerated in this indoctrination centre.

One rather amusing feature of the centre, was the ever present armed security guards that patrolled the corridors and environs. We wondered if they were there to keep people out, or to keep us in. Needless to say an escape committee of like minded people soon came together; our meeting point would be my room, where in the early evening we would crack open a few beers and have the odd tincture. During these impromptu cocktail hours we discussed where we could go that evening; anywhere other than remaining in the centre. Aside from a local lap dancing club, which seemed to be rather popular, we managed to find a few more highbrow establishments; including a most excellent restaurant, The Al Capone Hideaway Lounge modelled on a 1920’s jazz club. This served the most succulent, tender and large (let us not forget that is size that counts!) steaks I have had outside of New York. A dozen of us descended upon this fine establishment one Saturday night; and had a most jolly evening gorging ourselves, I managed an 18oz T bone, whilst listening to the live jazz. After the meal we ended up, surprise surprise, in the lap dancing club. I have the T shirt to prove it!

We endured the three weeks of Andersens patronising hard sell. I wondered, as did my colleagues, if they really understood that we were experienced qualified accountants and auditors; who did actually understand the concepts of risk management and writing audit reports. One evening a group of us were in the recreation centre’s bar chatting with a couple of Andersens people, and they freely admitted that all Andersens staff at the centre had been told to be exceptionally friendly to us; as we were a valued (read money loaded) client. How shallow! This to me more resembled the tactics of an extremist religious cult rather than a professional auditing organisation. Our then Head of Corporate Audit who attended the course was very enthusiastic; he needed to be, as it was his idea to persuade Philips to pay for their services. Oddly enough we noted how much time he spent with the senior Andersens partners who were there; indeed he disappeared into Chicago (their corporate headquarters) one day. Funny that!

The training centre, following Andersens demise, was used as an outplacement centre for their staff.

Anyone for Cricket?

Having such a large number of participants on a course meant that in order to stimulate meaningful interaction we were split into two different classrooms, these were then subdivided into group tables of six people. I was pleased to see that I had been placed in the more lively room, the Head of Corporate Audit (CIA) was in the other room; where as a consequence people had to “mind their P’s and Q’s” when discussing the “new system” being implemented. Our room had no such limitations, and with a radio microphone being liberally handed around so that people could interact freely (the American concept of free speech is truly marvellous) we, well I, did not hold back in addressing the obvious failings of the “new system” of which there were many. These failings were brought into stark relief when the system went live a few weeks later, how nice to be proven right! I continued during the time there to act, as one of my colleagues observed, in a “challenging” manner even after we realised that the Head of CIA had placed a mole in our room who reported back to him everything that people were saying; what a jerk!

As entertaining as this all was, the days dragged on and people were becoming a little bored with the management exercises and case studies. Having completed one particular “no brainer” we twiddled our fingers waiting for the next game. We were bored and our group of six wandered out into the corridors to stretch our legs. Then a very good idea hit me; we had all been given “stress balls” (made of rubber and the size of a tennis ball, these were meant to be squeezed whenever you felt stressed); therefore I suggested that we play an impromptu game of cricket. I was the only Brit. on my table and so I had to explain the basics, we soon had a little game going in the corridor using one of the balls and a wooden stick for the bat. Now that’s team building! The most entertaining aspect of the game was that despite the obvious irritation it was causing the Androids people studying in the other rooms; they could not do anything about it as we were paying clients, and therefore to be acquiesced to at all times.

Ken the Stripper Has Your Hat

We endured the three weeks, and finally the day of our release came. Joy! We could not leave the place quickly enough. Three of us decided to stay one night at a hotel, near the airport, and take a trip into Chicago. We checked in, dropped our bags off in our rooms then descended upon the bar. We had a couple of drinks, and got chatting with the barman. He said it was not a good night for the hotel staff as the hotel had just been taken over and a number of staff, including him, were to be made redundant. We sympathised and bought him a drink; he reciprocated by giving us a few on the house.

Duly fortified we grabbed a taxi and headed off into Chicago, to an Italian restaurant that had been recommended to us by one of our American colleagues. This was a splendid choice, the menu had all the traditional pasta and meat dishes you would hope for. We started with an enormous bowl of spaghetti and meatballs (see page 206), which we shared between the three of us. I kid you not, the portion was ample for three and the meatballs were excellent; firm and well seasoned. Main courses, steaks all round.

Having fed the inner man we decided on having a few drinks in the bar next door. We pondered what to do next; it was our last night in the USA and then we would be heading back to our respective countries, Sweden, the UK and Australia. My two colleagues decided on a quick visit to a lap dancing club, being a polite soul I went with them. Naturally we had no idea where to go, therefore we took a big risk and hailed a cab asking for him to take us to a place he thought we be OK. This is not to be recommenced normally, most taxi drivers are paid to take you “clip joints”. However, he was decent and took us to a legitimate and regulated establishment.

We checked in, and left our coats and my hat (a black fedora which resembles a gangster’s hat, very appropriate for Chicago) with the hat check girl. We found a table and ordered a couple of drinks, the place had no liquor license so it was lemonades all round; then watched the show. Standard fayre, pneumatic blondes and brunettes gyrating to the music; making ample use of the poles that dotted the stage. The third act came on and one of my chums nudged me, pointing out that the lady was wearing my hat. It was the hat check girl, she had “borrowed” my hat to use as a prop in her act. I accepted the situation and was relaxed about it, so long as she did not lob it into the audience. She did her thing, without losing the hat. When we left a little later the hat was duly returned unharmed.

Johannesburg South Africa

In 1886 a prospector, George Harrison, stumbled onto the richest gold seam in the world. Three years later Johannesburg, or "eGoli" (the City of Gold) had grown into the third largest city in South Africa. The transformation was driven by individuals such as Cecil Rhodes, who used capital derived from diamond mines in Kimberley to fund the gold mining. He and like minded "SOB's" founded a consortium of mining which set policies on recruitment, wages, and working conditions. In 1893 this consortium set the "colour bar," which prevented the indigenous black population from performing anything other than manual labour. The first free elections were held over 100 years later in 1994, after the release of Nelson Mandela.

Gold now no longer drives the economy of Jo'burg, criminal activity has spiralled out of control and security fences, private security firms and guard dogs are now part of the scenery. The wealthy, eschewing the city centre, live in the more secure suburbs such as Rosebank.

In the Footsteps of Cecil Rhodes

When I joined De Beers I went to South Africa for a few weeks to acquaint myself with the mining side of the business, and to see the birth place of the company. I stayed in Rosebank, a suburb of Johannesburg, in a genteel hotel which (to save their embarrassment) shall remain nameless. The hotel had all the luxuries that the executive traveller may require, satellite TV, room service, an excellent restaurant and a roof garden with swimming pool. Regrettably it was run by a man I can only describe as an utterly obnoxious, unreconstructed, crawling, racist; I nicknamed him Brussel Sprout (an approximate anagram of his name).

Staying in a hotel for a long period can make one more aware of its deficiencies, and never being one to avoid pointing things out (in the spirit of constructive dialog!); I duly pointed things out that could be improved or indeed were patently wrong, eg the hotel's remarkable inability to pass on telephone messages. The latter issue cost me some money, as it delayed my booking a flight for Eva to come and visit me; resulting in me having to pay a higher price. Having received no feedback from the manager, or indeed any offer to compensate me for the financial loss, I decided that it was time to knock a few heads together. I attempted to raise this directly with Brussel Sprout, as it was clear to me that the staff were not following up the issues I was raising with them.

Hunt the Brussel

A two day game of hide and seek then ensued; as each attempt to see the Brussel Sprout or talk to him directly achieved nothing other than his assistant advising me that he had my message, and that he would get back to me. Having been rebuffed yet again, "he is off site at a meeting", I made the polite but direct point to the assistant that I would, on my return to London, advise my office to use other hotels in the future for their staff. A miracle, within 10 minutes I had the very man himself on the end of the phone saying he would be with me, if convenient, within 30 minutes. How very fortunate that his meeting ended so promptly and unexpectedly! I discussed my issues with him and he, like the truly weak man he was, tried to blame his staff; and indeed asked me specifically which of them I felt was to blame. I pointed out that as manager it was his responsibility, and his alone, for the situation. We agreed a reasonable compensation for my financial loss, and he duly paid this to me a few days later. However, was totally disgusted to see that in a note to me; he said that he had told his staff it was their fault, and that the money was being deducted from their tips fund. Utterly obnoxious!

Eva flew down to join me the following weekend. Brussel Sprout was keen to try to keep on my good side after our “full and frank” discussion. He therefore, arranged to travel with the hotel driver who had been assigned to pick her up. Poor Eva though had been suffering a little bit of airsickness. She told me that she had needed to use her sick bag, that she had been firmly clutching for the last hour of the flight, just as she was standing to leave the aircraft at Jo’burg; much to the alarm of her fellow passengers, who were “up close and personal” . She was still feeling a little “green” when met by Mr Sprout. He, by all accounts, was at his most garrulous on the journey back to the hotel; giving a very detailed guide to all the sights and history of the region. Unfortunately all Eva could do was concentrate on not throwing up again, so most of it went over her head. When they reached the hotel, Brussel Sprout attempted to give her a full guided tour; which was politely declined. Eva made a welcome dash for the room, then the bathroom, and took an hour’s nap to recover. You will be pleased to hear she recovered fully for the evening which we spent at Bodega, a continental style bistro run by a truly decent chap called Janis. We dined with my boss and his wife, kicking off what would be a very lively and pleasant evening with Kir Royales (champagne and Kir). Bodega’s speciality was spicy poussin, a whole poussin split into two griddle cooked with garlic and chilli; succulent and flavoursome, absolutely delicious. I have included a recipe for poussin with tarragon (see page 212).

Muggers Make Me Sick

Rosebank had a number of good restaurants and watering holes. My hotel had a rather elegant roof top restaurant, which served a dish that is a particular favourite of mine; namely braised lamb shank, this was tender, succulent and served in a rich red wine sauce accompanied by mashed potatoes (see page 266). Two other restaurants that I would highly recommend visiting are Katzies (a lively music bar and steak restaurant, the steaks are unctuous!) and Bodega (which I have mentioned above), their details can be found on my website www.kenfrost.com. Both these establishments were about 10 minutes walk from my hotel. However, crime against the individual is running at unacceptably high levels in Jo’burg and its surrounds. My colleagues advised me that even though the area seemed, to my innocent eyes, no more threatening than Surbiton on a Sunday afternoon; I should exercise extreme caution, and really should not walk to these places. Well as I have said before, following instructions is not in my nature, having survived many visits to the Baltics I chose to disregard all wise counsel and walked to these places whenever dining out. I would say this, no one ever threatened me or came close to threatening me (as far as I am aware). However, I remember of colleague of mine in Lithuania telling me that in his opinion the reason why I was never threatened when walking around Vilnius (which has a high level of organised crime); was because I look as though I am a member of the Mafia myself (I took that as a compliment). Maybe I gave off that same aura when in Rosebank.

I would also like to point out that I have an emergency plan, in the event I feel that I may become victim to a potential “street crime”. Namely, I will simply act as though I am about to violently throw up. I think it is fair to say that most people, even hardened criminals, have a natural aversion to vomit and an even more natural aversion to being vomited upon. Should the pretence of imminent projectile vomiting not be enough then swiftly putting my fingers down my throat and vomiting over the street assailant should halt any attack, then run like hell!

On the subject of security, the citizens of South Africa appear to have this as their number one priority. They do not walk anywhere after dark, houses have electronic gates and security systems; dogs and armed private security forces patrol the streets. Tales abound of incidents regarding car jacking and mugging. The most bizarre tale I heard was related to me when I was taken out to an Italian restaurant, some miles away from Rosebank, by a colleague and his wife. We drove into a guarded compound, where the open air car park (attached to the restaurant) had heavy metal gates manned by an armed guard. I asked my hosts over dinner as to why the car park was guarded in such a manner, I assumed that the guards should be concentrating on the restaurant. I was told that a few months earlier an armed gang had driven into the car park and held up the entire restaurant, NICE! To my humble view, no matter how reasonably priced and luxurious the houses with their swimming pools and acres of land; no amount of luxury can compensate for the fact that under these conditions one lives one's life as a prisoner in constant fear and paranoia. Nothing is worth that. I am reminded of a most excellent paragraph written by Adam Smith (this is not a literal quote):

"..and the beggar sunning himself by the highway, sleeps the contented sleep that kings fight wars for.."

ie money isn't everything.

Snowmen and Sunburn

Since I was in Rosebank during October/November, Christmas and the South African summer were both approaching. The atmosphere, to me, was quite surreal. Shops and streets were decorated with Christmas trees, snowmen, Santas and winter scenes; yet the days were sunny and hot. I naturally took advantage of the unseasonable, to me anyway, weather; whenever the opportunity afforded itself I went up to the roof garden of my hotel and staked myself out in the sun on one of the many sun-loungers; laid out on the grass by the rooftop pool. This was a very pleasant way to unwind, made even more luxurious by the fact that you could order food and drinks from the garden waiter. I cannot think of a greater overindulgence than sunbathing on a rooftop garden, whilst sipping a cocktail and munching on a little something. The menu was quite extensive, offering choices ranging from salads and steaks to sandwiches. I opted for an old favourite of mine, the Club sandwich. I note that some "celebrity chefs" turn their nose up at this noble creation; I would like to make the following points:

- I am neither a celebrity nor professional chef, and I suspect neither are the vast majority of people reading this.
- I eat what I like, not what I am told to eat or what is fashionable.

This sandwich, in my view, provides a well balanced medley of ingredients and tastes; which are a good source of protein. To create the sandwich in its basic form, you will need the following:

- Three slices of buttered toasted bread.
- Cooked sliced chicken breast, still warm.
- Cooked smoked bacon, still warm.
- Two medium poached eggs.
- Mayonnaise.

- Lettuce and sliced tomato.

Simply assemble the above in whatever order you wish, with the third slice of toast in the middle. A splendid afternoon feast, by anybody's standards! There was a price to pay for such luxury, I of course got severely sunburnt; poor me!

To counteract the heat South Africans have rather a rather strange practice when it comes to serving red wine, which they never cease to tell you about; they chill it. I was told that this custom arose because of the heat. Interesting, but to my view unless you are sitting in the middle of the African bush (why would you be drinking red wine there in the first place?) chilling red wine is unnecessary; given the fact that the restaurants are air conditioned, and the ambient room temperature never exceeds 18 degrees. Please feel free to enter into a debate with me on this subject if you wish.

An Evening at Nelson Mandela's (Well Almost)

During my lengthy visit to South Africa, as part of a moral boosting visit for me and "R&R" for her, Eva was able to fly down from London for a long weekend. In addition to meeting up for dinner on the Friday with my boss and his wife, they very kindly offered to take us out to a safari park on the Sunday afternoon. They picked us up outside the hotel, and we set off in search of big game. I must confess that I am not much of an animal spotter. However, we spent a pleasant afternoon driving through the park; looking at the hippos, rhinos, lions and other assorted wildlife, including the somewhat improbably named ha-dee-da-dee (some form of bird). We stopped off in the middle of the park and unpacked the picnic hamper; which was overflowing with rich, creamy, cheese laden quiches (see page 181), salad, beer and wine. We were careful not to stray from the car; rhinos can get spooked and charge at an impressive 30mph when the mood takes them. We sat inside the car munching and drinking our way through the contents of the hamper. Appetites sated, we continued on our drive through the park; finally heading off into the sunset back to Rosebank.

My boss suggested that we come back to their house for a drink, sounded good to me. They lived in Rosebank, some ten minutes from our hotel and next door to Nelson Mandela. This afforded them the advantage, something that is highly valued in South Africa, of exceptionally high quality security. Mr Mandela was afforded 24 hour protection; and by definition if his house was monitored closely by trained security professional, so would the neighbours'.

We sat outside in the garden having a glass or two of wine and munching on some assorted cheeses. Much like any suburban area, the houses were close enough together for you to be able to see the next door building and garden. Unfortunately, Mr Mandela was not promenading in his garden that evening; so he missed the opportunity of being introduced to us!

"Clubbing" the South African Way

As I have already noted, Jo'burg's economy was based on the Victorian gold rush. This made a number of people extraordinarily wealthy. In my experience, wealthy people do not like to mix with ordinary mortals; and tend to seek the company of similarly wealthy individuals. The wealthy Victorian pioneers in Jo'burg, at the run of the century, were no different; and sought to recreate the atmosphere of England, by establishing a number of exclusive clubs in and around the city. These still exist, and if you visit them you may catch sight of the ghost of Rhodes. I was taken to two of these clubs in Jo'burg by my boss, The Rand Club and the Country Club of Johannesburg.

The Rand Club was situated in central Jo'burg, and was a vast imposing Victorian building; decorated with heavy wooden panelling and numerous oil paintings of the past luminaries of (white) South African society. The club had numerous function rooms, bedrooms, bars and a main dining room. The furnishing and decoration was a more imposing, imperial version of the style of my own club in London, The East India. I was reminded of King Canute who tried to hold back the tide; the people who came to this place clearly felt that they were trying to hold back the 21st century. It was sad, but inevitable, that owing to the security issues in Jo'burg and I suspect the very backward looking nature of the establishment; it was very nearly empty when we went there for lunch one Friday. We kicked off with a drink in the main bar with a couple of colleagues from our headquarters in Jo'burg, then went upstairs to the main dining room for lunch. The dining room was cavernous, and clearly designed to accommodate many more than the handful of diners there that Friday. However, that meant that the service was exceptionally attentive. I am not one for having particularly large lunches, and so opted for a cheese omelette (see page 282). This to give them credit, was freshly prepared lightly cooked and creamy; unlike the overcooked dry rubber like creations served by less capable establishments.

The Country Club had a distinctly more lively and fresh atmosphere; this was partly due to the fact it was situated out of town, and was a modern complex of buildings set in beautiful grounds. The club acted as both a sports and social club, and as such the atmosphere was forward looking and not retrospective. My boss took me there for lunch on another Friday, with a colleague from the department. He had very wisely reserved a table as, in contrast to the Rand, this place was literally "heaving". Even more agreeable was the fact that the dining area, he had booked, was outside by the pool underneath and old oak tree. An excellent place for lunch, wine and relaxed conversation. We had a few drinks and settled down to peruse the menu. I opted for the buffet, which offered a variety of dishes including a very professional selection of curries with all the trimmings; nan bread, chutneys, rice etc (see page 236 for my version).

Monkey Business

I returned to South Africa in February 2001 for a conference, which was held in a hotel some distance from Jo'burg. One novel feature of the hotel, situated in a large secluded game reserve, was the warning notice in the bedroom advising guests to keep their windows shut as the monkeys (which seemed to be everywhere) would pay an unwelcome house-call to the room. They seemed quite happy to pull windscreen wipers from cars, and defecate on the roofs; so it seemed quite a sensible precaution to keep the bedroom window shut.

As part of the evening entertainment laid on for the delegates was a safari, followed by a brai in a Zulu corral. By way of background, on the trip to South Africa, the flight lasts around 11 hours from London Heathrow and takes off in the early evening; so I arrived at the conference fresh as a daisy from my overnight flight. Hence, by the late afternoon, I was beginning to feel a little weary. Our safari duly commenced, groups of ten piled into oversized land rovers which "belted along" the bush and scrub land at a less than sedate pace. The opportunity to take a quiet nap, whilst being taken for a drive in the "countryside", was therefore not really afforded me; as it took quite some concentration, and physical strength to hold on to the "grab bars" in the vehicle to prevent being catapulted out. Still it did wake me up, and so in a way I could say it was quite refreshing. We spent an hour or so driving around observing lions, hippos, wilder-beast, ha-dee-da-dees (a type of bird) and other assorted flora, fauna and wildlife.

We then arrived at the corral, a circle of well presented (as an estate agent would say) genuine Zulu huts; set up for the benefit of the tourists who could rent a hut to stay in, or indeed turn up for a fully catered barbecue (as we did). Some features that I was impressed to see installed in the corral were electric lighting, running water and a fully equipped bar. The history books, and indeed that fine film with Michael Caine and Stanley Baker “Zulu”, never made reference to these particular mod cons! We were taken on a tour of the corral, into one of the huts and then witnessed a display of native dancing. Then the serious business of beers and brai. One of the main dishes on offer was a whole lamb spit roast, absolutely first class. I have a recipe for saddle of lamb (see page 223), which offers the nearest you are likely to get to this; without putting a rotating spit in your garden. Other delicacies on offer were biltong, pork, steak and a local Zulu drink of fermented milk that was passed around in a clay mug. Highly enjoyable, when I returned to the hotel that evening I slept like a log.

Kimberley South Africa

Up until the latter part of the 19th Century, it was assumed that diamonds could only be obtained in large economic quantities in India. This was turned on its head when a farmer in Kimberley noticed some children kicking an unusual stone around in the dust, this turned out to be a large diamond (known as the Eureka stone). This sparked a diamond rush, similar to the gold rush in the States, and Kimberley was transformed from a farming town into diamond digging frenzy. As with most frenzies for every upside, there is a downside. The diamond seam appeared to be running out. At this point Cecil Rhodes started to buy up plots of land (including a farm holding run by the De Beers brothers) on the hunch that there were more diamonds. Suffice to say another seam of diamonds was found; and the rest, as they say, is history.

The hustle and bustle, during the latter part of the 19th Century it was apparently more dangerous than the American frontier towns of the old West, has long since died down; the apt description would be now a “one horse dorp” as the Afrikaners would say. However, the remnants of the original mining operations are still to be seen. Most notably there is an enormous, spectacular to be precise, hole in the ground; the bottom quarter of which has filled with water and formed a mini lake.

The town has a population of approximately 160000, and is surrounded by five of South Africa's largest rivers. There are a few sights that may be interest to visitors including; an operating diamond mine, the Kimberley Mine Museum and the omnipresent Big Hole.

One Horse Dorp

During my few weeks in South Africa, in order to learn the history of De Beers, I made a two day visit to the old mining town of Kimberley; the once bustling centre of the diamond mining industry kick started by Cecil Rhodes. I will side track briefly so as to put a little piece of historical flesh on the bones of this.

My accommodation for the evening was the Kimberley club, a throw back to the colonial days. No doubt a very salubrious establishment in its hey day but now, much like an ageing dowager, showing distinct signs of age and faded grandeur.

Myself and a colleague who had come with me were invited to a Brai (an Afrikaner word literally meaning “burnt meat”) or barbecue as you and I would understand it. It was an interesting evening, made slightly tense by the determination of the hostess not to allow anyone to have more than one portion of stilton (for reasons that still escape me) and my equally stubborn determination to have more than one portion. This culminated in me taking a second portion, and quietly reminding her that she should be proud that a guest wanted seconds. It is fair to say that I am not high on her list of people to invite to future social functions. Ah well you cannot be popular all the time!

Journey to the Centre of the Earth

Kimberley aside from possessing a large hole in the ground also boasts an operational diamond mine. I found myself booked on a tour of this. Rather alarmingly it commenced at 7:00 am, fortunately my evening out at the brai the night before had not left me with a residual hangover. I and my six fellow “tourees” gathered in the briefing room and were given our mining kit, white coverall, helmet, helmet light, battery, and steel cap boots; a little different from my normal pinstripe.

Booted and suited we made our way to the giant cage lift which took us, together with a large (in all senses of the word) group of miners, down into the mine. We spent a fascinating few hours crawling, climbing, blocking our ears from the blasting and poking our noses into the operations of the mine. The miners, who were used to tours, had their own way of amusing themselves; by detonating charges without giving us the final warning to put our earplugs in. I looked with assiduity for any stray diamonds lying around, but alas to no avail. We spent a little longer down the mine than was originally intended as the lift developed a temporary fault; so we waited, and sweated, underground for it to be repaired. During this time my companions, rather unwisely to my view, passed round a cup of water at one of the rest stations. I say “rather unwisely” for the following reasons:

- The cup was an old metal cup attached to a chain.
- It had been well used by all in the mine and had, from limited observation, a rough rim which increased the risk of accidentally cutting/grazing one’s lip.
- Hepatitis is prevalent in South Africa.
- The percentage level of HIV infection in South Africa exceeds that in the West, whatever President Mbeki chooses to believe, and is especially prevalent amongst miners. The nature of their work requires them to live away from home in camps; as such they are an easy, ready made, market for the local prostitutes.

I decided to forgo the water, stiff upper lip, and wait until we got surface side again. Never was a glass of orange squash more welcome than when it was served to us back at ground level. I was reminded of the thirst quenching effect of the lemonade my mother used to make when I was a child, and have included this in the recipe section.

Windhoek Namibia

Windhoek, capital of Namibia, with a population of 170000 was founded in a valley that was the bowl of a prehistoric lake. The town was founded in 1840 by Jonker Afrikaner, in 1890 Curt von Francois arrived with a handful of men and established a German presence in the form of a fort; which later became part of the Schwerinsburg castle.

The oldest building in Windhoek is the Alte Feste which was erected in 1890, and now serves as a museum. Although Namibia threw off the shackles of German colonialism, the German influence remains; as evidenced by the number of hotels, bars and restaurants offering German food and beer.

I went on a business trip to Namibia with a colleague from Johannesburg, our flight arrived around 6:00 PM and we drove from the airport to Windhoek. We dined in true old colonial style on duck breast in a liqueur sauce, sitting on the balcony of a restaurant overlooking the main street.

What, No Minibar!

We then drove off to our hotel, situated in a game reserve outside of town run by a German expat (trying to recreate the halcyon days of old colony of German West Africa). The hotel and accommodation facilities consisted of one large timber framed building with a thatched roof housing the reception, restaurant and bar; surrounded by individual African huts which each housed a bed, shower and toilet facilities. The owner of the game reserve was very keen that the modern world did not encroach; and as such the accommodation huts contained none of the menaces of modern society viz:

- Television
- Radio
- Minibar
- Clock
- Telephone.

All very well if you were seeking a retreat, but not much use if (like us) you had be up each day at 6:00 am for work in Windhoek. I must confess to not being one of these people who wishes to, or indeed enjoys, commune with nature at such an intimate level; and prefer my modern creature comforts. The lack of TV, minibar and alarm clocks did not particularly endear the place to me, and I unpacked that evening with a heavy heart.

The lack of phones in the rooms concerned me even more; should you fall ill during the night, through accident or food poisoning, I wondered precisely how you were meant to attract attention. The huts were a significant distance from the main complex. Walking back to the main complex in the middle of the night, across the African bush, exposed you to a very real risk of lions (which could be clearly heard), snakes or whatever other interesting creature happened to be slumbering or prowling the area at the same time as you were making your nocturnal dash back to the western world.

Waiter There's a Dead Moth in My Wine!

We dined in the game reserve restaurant on our second evening; I was pleased to see that it offered a German menu and so I had one of my favourite German dishes, Kassler and dumplings (see page 284). The food was good, and I was enjoying the wine. However, when taking another drink I noticed something brushing against my upper lip. I moved my glass away, and looked more closely. Floating, belly up, was a large moth. I summoned the waiter and, in the spirit of the well known joke, pointed out that there was a dead moth in my drink. The waiter, in a rather off hand Germanic fashion, pointed out that this was a regular occurrence as the moth had not come with the wine but had fallen from the thatched roof. He did at least offer to give me a fresh glass. I spent the rest of the meal watching my food and drink, rather hawkishly, for any other unwelcome protein. I still wonder precisely why the moths dropped dead so regularly (as the waiter implied).

Given the moth situation in the restaurant I wondered what precisely might be lurking in my African hut; which had a similar thatched roof and a lightly framed, not fully flushed door, between me the lions, snakes and other inhabitants of the reserve. I would point out that creatures that crawl, slither and flap do not inspire me. That night's sleep was somewhat fitful as every noise, flap and slither seemed to be amplified by my heightened concern. The next day I confided my concerns to my colleague; who smiled at the poor Englishman's lack of empathy with the African bush. He let me in on a marvellous, non ecological environmentally unfriendly, insect/snake repellent called Doom (I believe it has a similar formula to DDT). He got hold of a can for me and I went to work with gusto; on every noise, flap and slither that I heard during my next night's "sleep".

Whilst I may appear to be a little negative towards the game reserve (nature does not suit everyone) I would say that it provided a most unique backdrop for a few post dinner whiskies. Picture this, if you will, you have just enjoyed a very good meal (notwithstanding suicidal moths) and you repair to the bar; you order a good measure of a good Islay, then sit on the veranda looking out into the darkness with a clear star lit sky above and the sound of crickets (or related noisy insects) and the occasional lion roaring in the background. Be honest, there are not many places that you can experience that. I think this was made even more enjoyable and relaxing by the fact that we continued our post dinner drinkies until well past 2:00 am. The nature of the establishment being not to lock things away but to leave them open to guests and elements alike. All in all an experience that I will not forget.

Luzern Switzerland

Luzern, with a population of 60000, is located between spectacular hills and a crystal clear lake. The view, depending on the weather, can stretch from Mount Rigi to Mount Pilatus. Luzern was a small fishing village in the Middle Ages; it still has two wooden bridges from that era, connecting the old and new town. The Chapel Bridge at the end of the lake is named after St Peter's Chapel on the right bank. It was built shortly after the Water Tower in the fourteenth century, and is connected by a foot bridge. One of Luzern's other landmarks is the octagonal tower; this was used as an archive, a place to store loot, a jail and torture chamber. Parts of the medieval fortifications of the city have been preserved in the form of the Musegg Wall.

The town has a number of good quality hotels, as well as numerous restaurants and bars that cater for local inhabitants as well as tourists.

Swiss Bliss

In 2001 I went to the De Beers offices in Luzern, to review our operations there. The plan was for me to land at Zurich and be picked up by the company car, which would take me to my hotel. The flight was pleasant, and more importantly punctual, I landed at Zurich picked up my bags then went to the designated pick up point to look for my driver. I scanned the queue of waiting cars, looking for a sign of some sort that would indicate that the car was waiting for me; alas to no avail. I could not see any car, or driver, that remotely looked as though it was waiting for me. What happened to the legendary Swiss efficiency? I gave it another fifteen minutes; I then rang my secretary back in London, who had booked the car, to check if I was missing a vital clue as to the car's identity. She could add no further insight into the problem, more worryingly she could not ring our Swiss office as it was a public holiday in Switzerland. She advised me to wait a little longer; so I waited for a little while more, deciding to give the driver another ten minutes before taking a taxi. My mobile rang, it was my secretary, all was now clear; she had realised that when she had booked the car she had neglected to take into account the one hour time difference between the UK and Europe. My driver was not scheduled to arrive for another forty minutes. It is depressing to realise that there are people in the UK who still haven't grasped the fact that other countries do not all operate on GMT. I opted for plan B, and took a cab!

I duly arrived at the Palace Hotel, which was situated by the lake; the proximity of the town and hotel to the water reminded me of one of my apartments in Stockholm (which was also situated by the water front). I was more than pleased with the room that had been reserved for me; it had a balcony, with a table and two sun-loungers, that directly overlooked the lake. I opened up the double doors onto the balcony, fixed myself a drink, and settled into one of the sun-loungers to enjoy the last rays of the sun of the day. I then had a quick shower; and made myself presentable for meeting the CEO, and his wife, downstairs in the bar. The bar offered live piano and jazz performances in the evenings; and made a most pleasant venue to congregate both before, and after dinner.

After a couple of cocktails I was taken, by cable car, to a very elegant restaurant on top of the mountain (large hill, to be precise) that faced the other side of the hotel. I was impressed to see that the waiter decanted the wine, using a lighted candle to watch for sediment. Not a sight that I witness every day. I started with a luxurious pate de foie gras, followed by a mouth watering steak served with bernaïse sauce. I suspect that the bill was astronomical, fortunately I was the guest.

I was liberally entertained that week, being taken out each evening by various members of our team there. However, my favourite restaurant was The Old Swiss House (the contact details can be found on my website www.kenfrost.com) which was situated ten minutes walk from the hotel in the main part of town. This resembled those fairy tale houses you see painted on some Swiss chocolate boxes. It was a traditional wooden house, built in 1859, with hand carved wall panels and stained glass windows; it provided an ideal backdrop for dining on traditional Swiss cuisine. The staff were very friendly, and were dressed in traditional costumes. The three of us, the CFO and his wife were acting as my hosts that evening, had a really splendid evening; dining on moist succulent Wiener Schnitzels (see page 193) and rosti potatoes.

All good things come to an end and the week whizzed by, I bade my farewells and returned to London. However, it is my intention at some stage in the future to return there, this time though on vacation.

Moscow Russia

Moscow, with a population of nine million people, was once the capital of the Soviet Block and is now Capital of the Russian Federation. The Kremlin, in the centre of Moscow, has been the power base for the tsars and presidents of Russia over the last eight hundred years.

Adjacent to the Kremlin is Red Square, which is symbolised by the onion like multicoloured domes of St Basil's Cathedral. The approach to Red Square is a contrast of architectural styles; on the one hand there are the ugly soviet skyscrapers, and on the other are the more aesthetically pleasing buildings such as the Bolshoi Theatre.

With the collapse of the Soviet Block, the repression of the Orthodox church has been replaced by an enthusiasm to embrace religion; as the old certainties have been vanquished to the dustbin of history (nature abhors a vacuum). This is reflected in the restoration of old churches, and the rapid construction of new ones.

During the first half of 2001 I visited Moscow, for the first time on a business trip. My previous experience of Eastern Europe had been confined to the Baltic States and East Berlin; and so in some respects I was expecting a larger version of them. The key expectation being that, since the collapse of Communism and the introduction of market forces, certain aspects of the infrastructure would have been enhanced to attract Western visitors and investment.

The Airport from Hell

One key aspect of the infrastructure, that affects any visitor's views on a country, is the airport. I can vouch that during the years that I visited the Baltics, their airports were given a decent facelift and made distinctly more user friendly (despite their limited size). I was therefore expecting to see a decent airport when disembarking in Moscow. How wrong I was! Clearly the concept of a friendly welcome, and "first impressions count", has bypassed the authorities controlling Moscow airport. The month was June, and the weather warm, we disembarked; and like all other passengers from the other aircraft landing from around the world (Moscow is a busy airport) were herded through one central passport control. This consisted of six booths manned by the unsmiling uniformed customs officials, the sort usually seen in a film adaptation of a John Le Carre spy novel. As all other flight arrivals had to pass through these booths as well the area was, to say the least, busy. A simple mathematical formula could be devised to show that the speed at which passengers were arriving in "passport control" greatly exceeded capacity of the passport control to process the passports. The result a disorganised mess, not resembling a queue at all.

At this point I should mention that the airport had no air-conditioning, and the number of people and warm June weather meant that standing in the "herd" made it feel more like being in a sauna. The customs officers were thorough in their duty; each passport was passed over a "scanner" which, unlike the more sophisticated versions in the West which take a second to process the information, took at least a minute to process them. The reason was explained to me later by a regular visitor. Apparently the "scanner" is in fact a television camera, which beams the passport picture to an unseen person in a room; who then does something with a computer to process the document. Unfortunately there is only one person doing this, so all six passport booths must send the scanned image to him. Not surprisingly a bottleneck develops. I took, and this is no exaggeration, 1½ hours to get through this shambles. Ample time to admire the Soviet style décor, of brown paint, liberally coating all parts of the building. I regret to say that departing Moscow airport was equally tedious.

Being a wise traveller I try to make sure I arrive at airports with plenty of time to spare. I had been warned that departure from the airport would be every bit as tedious as arrival. Therefore, I reasoned that if I arrive early I will beat the rush and at least not have to stand in a queue for hours. So I arranged to be dropped at the airport an hour before I needed to be there. However, the best laid plans etc etc. Unlike other major airports, which have dedicated check ins for the major airlines, Moscow operated a shared desk policy. Namely, the airlines use the same check in desk at different times. Therefore, arriving early did not help; as my BA check in had not been set up yet as a local airline was using the desk. So I had an hour to kick my heels in the pre check in area. Had this been a decent airport there would have been enough places to wander round, sit down in etc. This of course was Moscow airport, and as such the customer facilities were spartan to say the least. After some effort, I found a bar at the top of the airport building, which at least would provide a bolt hole for the next hour. I deposited my suitcase with the standard unsmiling “babushka” hat check lady and settled in. Travellers’ note, although officially frowned upon, all Russians prefer to take cash payment in dollars (so make sure you have a few in your pocket).

My hour passed and I made my way back to the check in which now was operating, after a fashion. The one good thing I will say about Moscow airport is the security measures regarding screening bags. I make no exaggeration when saying that my carry on luggage was X-rayed three times. This was before 911, so it is quite possible the checks are even more rigorous now; I recommend other airports follow suit.

As predicted the customs queue was long, tedious and disorganised. It took an hour and a half to get through this, all comments regarding air-conditioning as made regarding arrival apply equally to departure! I settled into the very overcrowded business class lounge, which offered an interesting selection of rubber ham and curled slices of cheese, on dry bread, by way of refreshment.

My advice to the Moscow authorities is, please upgrade your airport; first impressions really do count!

Wet Hotel Room

I had been booked into the Marriott, a five star hotel in central Moscow, which to placate nervous Western tourists had a very visible internal security presence; heavy set gentlemen in black suits (bearing more than a passing resemblance to night-club bouncers) with hearing aids, have you noticed how so many security personnel appear to be hearing impaired? I was told later that in fact there had been a “security incident” in the hotel, when one leader of a Mafia gang had been gunned down in the elevator by another gang member, much to the distress of the other hotel guests. I checked in and went to my room, a little spartan by five star standards; but I’ve had worse. There was one curious feature to the room, namely a rather large wet patch on the carpet. This was a curiosity as there was no leak (at least that I could determine) in the ceiling, and since the weather was warm and dry I couldn’t attribute it to the weather. Maybe it was the result of an act by an unhygienic previous occupant. Oh well, no time to ponder such trivia I had a meeting booked in the bar with the management of our Moscow office; which I would be late for if I sat and pondered the wet patch. I left the room and bumped into the housekeeper, so I told her of the wet patch (in case there was some serious plumbing issue which might get worse) she looked concerned, and nodded her head vigorously as I showed it to her. She then gave me a piece of chocolate, a rather unusual approach to “customer care”. Needless to say when I returned to my room later that evening, after dinner, the wet patch was still there; but more chocolate had been placed on my pillow. The patch gradually dried of its own accord over the next few days.

Regarding security and personal safety, the hotel guide book warned visitors not to walk around the streets in the evening as the risks to your personal safety were high. The guide book went on to caution the unwary traveller that “even those of you who try to appear Russian, and not draw attention to yourself, will still look like a foreigner to the local citizens”. A particularly gruesome story “doing the rounds” was that of a hapless businessman who allowed himself to have a few drinks bought for him by an “elegant blond lady” (aren’t they all?). He, very foolishly, took her up to his hotel room. The next thing he knew was waking up in his bath, which was filled with ice, naked. The lady had “slipped him a Mickey”. A note had been pinned to the side of the bath saying, in English, that he should not move but call a doctor on the mobile phone (that had been thoughtfully placed by the bath); and tell the doctor that his kidneys had been removed. Apparently harvesting kidneys, for sale on the black market, is all the rage. Shades of Hannibal Lector!

Needless to say, I duly ignored these warnings and went with a colleague (by foot!) to Café Pushkin which was fifteen minutes walk away. I was told that this is one of Moscow’s more fashionable eating establishments, apparently even Sting had dined there. My expectations were high, but I was not to be disappointed. We had a particularly fine dinner which included Borstch (see page 133) and, having considered then dismissed the braised cocks’ combs, opted for the meat patties; washed down with a few glasses of Islay Malt. We made a point of avoiding any blond women offering to buy us a drink!

Epilogue

I hope you have enjoyed reading my traveller's tales, and I also hope that you will try some of my recipes. Please feel free to email me your thoughts and opinions at:

kenfrost@kenfrost.com

You can also view my website www.kenfrost.com "The Living Brand".

Eva and I are now going to start work on a joint book, dedicated to the cuisine of Sweden. However, first we have time for a drink and a little something to eat!

Enjoy your life, enjoy your food.

Ken

Appetisers

Start your meal as you mean to go on, with one of these splendid appetisers.

Asparagus

PREAMBLE

Whenever I go to the Netherlands it always seems to be asparagus season (officially May to June in Europe), no matter; they are a good source of vitamins A and C.

The asparagus should be served as a course in its own right before the main course.

INGREDIENTS

- Allow 6 stalks of asparagus, per person, with firm compact tips (the asparagus, not the person!). Make sure the stalks are not wilted as this means it has been sometime since they were cut.
- Butter

PREPARATION

Cut the bottom off the stalks and trim away any blemishes.

Rinse and tie together in bundles of 6.

COOKING

- Plunge into boiling salted water, leave the lid off the pan (this ensures they do not lose their colour). Boil for approximately 15 minutes until tender.
- Drain and place on a serving plate
- Melt a generous portion of butter in a saucepan, pour this over the cooked asparagus.

TIPS

The traditional method of serving this dish is with melted butter and black pepper. Eat it with your fingers.

Alternatively, serve with hollandaise (see page 318) or cheese sauce (see page 314).

Baked Avocado

PREAMBLE

This make an ideal starter for a dinner party, it can be prepared in advance then put into the oven 15 minutes or so before you need it; allowing you time to spend on other matters or indeed even talking to your guests.

INGREDIENTS

This recipe serves 6.

- 3 large, ripe avocados. Make sure they are ripe by pressing the ends of them, you should feel some “give”.
- Juice from one freshly squeezed lemon.
- 4oz of butter.
- 4oz of flour.
- ½ a pint of milk.
- 8oz of prawns, shelled and cooked.
- 1 teaspoon of paprika pepper.
- 4oz of grated mature Cheddar cheese.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Cut the avocados in half, remove the stone, and sprinkle lemon juice over them (this prevents them going brown). Place in individual avocado pots (oven resistant).
- Melt the butter in a saucepan over a medium heat, mix in the flour forming a smooth paste.
- Gradually add the milk, stirring continuously.
- Add the paprika pepper, salt and pepper, allow to thicken.
- Add the prawns, mix.
- Fill the avocados with the mixture.
- Sprinkle with the cheese.

COOKING

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees, bake for approximately 15 minutes until browned.

TIPS

Serve with wholemeal bread and butter. As an alternative to prawns you may wish to use crab.

Baked Crab

PREAMBLE

What more impressive sight, than to present your guests with their own individual baked crabs.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4 people.

- 4 dressed crabs (your fishmonger will oblige, even supermarkets sell dressed crab).
- Butter.
- 4 shallots, peeled and chopped finely.
- 1 glass of good quality brandy.
- ½ a pint of double cream.
- 6 tablespoons of breadcrumbs
- 6oz of grated mature cheddar cheese.
- 1 tablespoon of French mustard.
- 1 teaspoon of cayenne pepper.
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Remove the crab meat from the shells and put into a large mixing bowl. Place the shells to one side.
- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a saucepan, over a medium heat.
- Add the shallots and cook until soft.
- Add the shallots to the crabmeat.
- Add all the remaining ingredients, mix thoroughly.
- Refill the shells with the mixture.

- Sprinkle some extra breadcrumbs over them, and put a knob of butter on the top.

COOKING

Place on a baking tray and put into an oven preheated to 200 degrees. Bake for 10-15 minutes until brown.

TIPS

Serve as a starter with wholemeal bread and butter.

Black Bean Soup

PREAMBLE

When I was working in Simi Valley, I experienced hearty American cuisine first hand. When dining the custom there is to have a starter, followed by a soup course before the main course. American portions are not ungenerous, and to a simple European such as myself the extra course was a little daunting. However, the waiter was quite insistent that I take the soup course.

I am very glad he persuaded me to “pig out”; as it gave me the opportunity to try Black Bean soup. I now make sure that on every subsequent visit to America I have a few bowls of this marvellously tangy soup.

I have to say that the habit of having a soup course as well as a starter has stayed with me, when working away from home anyway (my excuse being that I use up more energy; therefore require more “inputs”).

The Scandinavian countries practice the concept of “healthy eating”; their Social Democratic governments have for many years pushed a healthy lifestyle, eg 100g of meat a day as being the only way to live (have you noticed how fond the so called “Social Democrats” are of telling you how to live your life?). To this end, whenever I have stayed in a Scandinavian hotel, I have experienced a raised eyebrow and query concerning my order for a starter and a soup. Ignore the raised eyebrows, the customer is always right.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4-6 people.

- 12oz of black beans
- 3 pints of water
- 4oz of smoked gammon, diced very finely.
- 4oz of lean stewing steak, diced very finely.
- 1 large carrot, peeled and sliced.
- 1 large onion, peeled and finely sliced.
- 2 teaspoons of cayenne pepper.
- 1 teaspoon of powdered English mustard.
- Butter
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Soak the beans overnight in a large bowl of cold water.
- Drain.

COOKING

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a large saucepan.
- Add the meat, carrot, onion, cayenne, mustard, salt and pepper. Stir vigorously for a few minutes until the meat begins to change colour.
- Add the beans, stir, then add the water.
- Place the lid on the saucepan and simmer for 3 hours, stirring occasionally.

TIPS

When serving, you may wish to add a swirl of double cream to each bowlfull.

Bortsch

PREAMBLE

A classic Russian soup, a very innovative use of the beetroot. I enjoyed a bowl of this in Moscow whilst listening to a traditional balalaika band. It goes without saying that I washed it down with a few shots of vodka.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 1lb of diced cooked beetroot.
- 8oz of tinned chopped tomatoes.
- 2 pints of water.
- 4 shallots, peeled and chopped.
- 8oz of lean beef, cubed.
- Juice of a freshly squeezed lemon.
- 4oz of sugar.
- 4 eggs.
- 1 teaspoon of coarse ground black pepper.
- A pinch of salt.

PREPARATION

Should you wish to cook the beetroot yourself here is the method:

- Top and tail the (young) beetroots.
- Place in a saucepan of boiling salted water.
- Simmer for approximately 1 hour, with the lid on. They are cooked when they are tender.
- Rub the skin off when cooked.

Beat the eggs in a large bowl, allow to reach room temperature, whilst the soup is cooking.

COOKING

- Mix the tomatoes, beetroot, water, shallots, beef, pepper, sugar, salt and lemon in a saucepan.
- Bring to the boil, then simmer for 60 minutes with the lid on, stir occasionally.
- Gradually add the soup to the eggs, mixing thoroughly.

TIPS

Add a swirl of double cream to each bowl of bortsch. Wash it down with a shot, or two, of ice cold vodka.

Carrot and Tomato Soup

PREAMBLE

This is a simple recipe for a nourishing, and tasty soup, that is quick and easy to prepare. Ideal for lunch, a starter or snack.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 2 people.

- 3 large carrots, peeled and chopped.
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 4 medium sized tomatoes, chopped.
- A good sized handful of fresh parsley, coarsely chopped.
- Olive oil.
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pints of water.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

COOKING

- Pour a little olive oil into a saucepan.
- Place over a medium heat and add the garlic
- Add the dry ingredients, stir.
- Add the water.
- Bring to the boil, then simmer with the lid on for approximately 25 minutes.
- Take off the heat and blend in a liquidiser, or with a handblender.
- Place over the heat and warm it up again, it is now ready to serve.

TIPS

To add richness, serve with a swirl of double cream.

The soup can be prepared several hours before it is needed, and kept chilled in the fridge.

Chicken Liver Pate

PREAMBLE

When people think of pate they often think of Ardennes or Foie Gras, which are time consuming to prepare or expensive to purchase. I too was under this delusion. However, as a student, I spent a year in a bed and breakfast run by a lady who used to cook in one of Edinburgh's main hotels. She showed me a simple recipe, similar to this one, which dispelled my prejudice.

INGREDIENTS

- 8oz of chicken livers
- Two finely chopped shallots
- Two cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon of black pepper
- 4oz of butter
- 1 wine glass of good quality brandy, eg Remy Martin VSOP

PREPARATION

Remove the sinews from the chicken livers. This is easily done by holding the sinew of each liver between thumb and forefinger, and pulling along the sinew with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand (**REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER, DO NOT WEAR JEWELLERY!**). This separates the liver from the sinew.

COOKING

- Melt two ounces of the butter in a pan over a moderate heat.
- Add the garlic, shallots and black pepper. Stir regularly until the shallots are soft.
- Add the chicken livers. Stir constantly until the livers turn pale pink.
- Add the remainder of the butter, stir and ensure it is melted.
- Add the brandy and stir in thoroughly.
- Take the pan off the heat and put the mixture through a blender.

Pour the mixture into a ramekin. Put into the fridge and allow to set. This should take approximately two to three hours.

TIPS

Serve with hot toast and butter; with a side garnish of tomatoes, finely sliced cucumber and finely sliced onion.

Fruit Cocktail with a Punch

PREAMBLE

Start your dinner party as you mean to go on!

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 6 people.

- 6oz of granulated sugar
- ¼ of a pint of water
- 2 teaspoons of freshly chopped mint
- Approximately ½ of a fresh pineapple, cubed.
- 1 orange, peeled, segmented and pips/pith removed
- 1 grapefruit, peeled, segmented and pips/pith removed
- 12 measures of gin
- 6 glace cherries
- 6 mint leaves

PREPARATION

This dish should be prepared the day before.

- Mix the water and sugar, bring to boil in a saucepan and boil rapidly for approximately 3 minutes. Take off the heat and allow to cool.
- Place the prepared fruit into a bowl, pour the sugar water over it, add the mint and gin. Stir and cover with a lid or cling film.
- Place in the fridge overnight.

TIPS

Serve in sugar frosted glasses with a glace cherry and mint leaf on top of each. I prefer this dish as a starter as it sharpens the palate, and loosens the tongues before the main meal.

I have used fresh fruit and made my own sugar sauce. However, if you are feeling lazy then purchase a couple of large tins of good quality fruit in syrup (**syrup not water!**); these will be adequate.

Mushroom and Tomato Soup

PREAMBLE

This is a simple recipe for a nourishing, and tasty soup, that is quick and easy to prepare. Ideal for lunch, a starter or snack.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 2 people.

- 6 large tomatoes, chopped.
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 4oz of flat cap mushrooms, chopped.
- A good sized handful of fresh parsley, coarsely chopped.
- Olive oil.
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pints of water.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

COOKING

- Pour a little olive oil into a saucepan.
- Place over a medium heat and add the garlic
- Add the dry ingredients, stir.
- Add the water.
- Bring to the boil, then simmer with the lid on for approximately 25 minutes.
- Take off the heat and blend in a liquidiser, or with a handblender.
- Place over the heat and warm it up again, it is now ready to serve.

TIPS

To add richness, serve with a swirl of double cream.

The soup can be prepared several hours before it is needed, and kept chilled in the fridge.

Parsnip and Carrot Soup

PREAMBLE

This is a simple recipe for a nourishing, and tasty soup, that is quick and easy to prepare. Ideal for lunch, a starter or snack.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 2 people.

- 2 large parsnips, peeled and chopped.
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 4 large carrots, peeled and chopped.
- A good sized handful of fresh parsley, coarsely chopped.
- Olive oil.
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pints of water.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

COOKING

- Pour a little olive oil into a saucepan.
- Place over a medium heat and add the garlic
- Add the dry ingredients, stir.
- Add the water.
- Bring to the boil, then simmer with the lid on for approximately 25 minutes.
- Take off the heat and blend in a liquidiser, or with a handblender.
- Place over the heat and warm it up again, it is now ready to serve.

TIPS

To add richness, serve with a swirl of double cream.

The soup can be prepared several hours before it is needed, and kept chilled in the fridge.

Salami Soup

PREAMBLE

A solid German soup ideal for lunch or supper, which takes very little time and effort to prepare.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 1lb of good quality German salami, thinly sliced.
- 2 leeks, cut into thin slices.
- Butter
- 1 teaspoon of chopped parsley.
- 1 teaspoon of chopped basil
- 1 teaspoon of chopped dill.
- ½ a pint of beef stock.
- 1 large tin of cannellini beans
- ½ a pint of milk
- ¼ of a pint of double cream.
- 2 tablespoons of flour
- Nutmeg to taste
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

PREPARATION

Mix a little of the milk with the flour and make a smooth paste, then add the remainder of the milk and mix thoroughly.

COOKING

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a large saucepan, over a medium heat.
- Add the herbs and leeks.

- When the leeks begin to soften add the stock, beans, salt pepper and nutmeg.
- Add the salami and mix.
- Bring to boil and simmer for 5 minutes.
- Add the milk/flour mixture and simmer for 5 minutes.
- Add the cream and stir thoroughly.

TIPS

Serve with German rye bread, and a quality German beer such as a Weisbier.

Savoury Chicken Livers

PREAMBLE

This dish can be served as a starter or as a savoury snack.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve four people.

- 1lb of chicken livers
- 8oz of smoked rindless streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch portions
- A good sized knob of butter
- Three finely chopped shallots
- Two fresh garlic cloves, finely chopped
- Two tablespoons of fresh coarsely chopped tarragon
- One teaspoon of black pepper

PREPARATION

Remove the sinews by hand from the liver and discard. This is easily done by holding the sinew of each liver between thumb and forefinger, and pulling along the sinew with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand (**REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER, DO NOT WEAR JEWELLERY!**). This separates the liver from the sinew.

COOKING

- Melt the butter in a good sized pan, add the garlic, black pepper, tarragon and shallots.
- Cook over a medium heat until soft.
- Add the bacon, and cook stirring regularly.
- When the bacon begins to turn pale add the chicken livers.
- Stir regularly ensuring the ingredients are thoroughly mixed.

Cook the dish for 5-8 minutes, the livers should be pink (excess cooking will toughen them).

TIPS

I do not add salt during the cooking process as this toughens the livers, add to taste when you are eating the dish.

The dish should be served on hot buttered toast.

Skagens Toast

PREAMBLE

This is a marvellous Scandinavian variation on the prawn cocktail; which, so the tourist brochures will have you believe, is one of the most popular appetisers in Sweden.

The name refers to the northern part of Denmark. Which is all very well; however, I am unclear as to why a Swedish dish names itself after a part of Denmark. Please feel free to enlighten me, I would be grateful.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 4 slices of white bread.
- 1lb of prawns, cooked and peeled.
- 6 tablespoons of mayonnaise.
- 6 tablespoons of crème fraiche.
- 6 tablespoons of freshly chopped dill.
- The juice of 1 freshly squeezed lemon.
- Butter
- 4 tablespoons of caviar (whatever brand you budget will allow).
- 4 lemon wedges.
- Coarse ground black pepper
- 4 sprigs of fresh dill.

PREPARATION

- Mix the mayonnaise, crème fraiche, dill, lemon juice and prawns together.
- Set aside in the fridge until ready.

COOKING

- Melt a very generous portion of butter in a large frying pan.

- Sauté the bread until it is golden brown on both side.
- Spoon the prawns onto the toast.
- Sprinkle with a little black pepper.
- Place a spoonful of caviar on each one.
- Lay a dill spring over each one.
- Serve with a lemon wedge.

TIPS

Serve as an appetiser with champagne, or a shot of ice cold aqua vite (Swedish schnapps).

Skol!

Smoked Salmon with Buttered Eggs

PREAMBLE

A fine starter or savoury snack.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve four people.

- 1lb of good quality smoked salmon, finely sliced.
- 8 eggs
- 6oz of butter
- 1 teaspoon of black pepper
- Fresh dill, lemon wedges and parsley for garnishing

PREPARATION

Place the smoked salmon on four serving plates.

Beat the eggs thoroughly.

COOKING

- Melt 4oz of butter in a pan over a medium heat.
- Add the black pepper and eggs.
- Stir constantly.
- When the eggs begin to coagulate, add the remainder of the butter.
- Continue to stir until the mixture “scrambles”.
- Serve on top of the salmon.

TIPS

Garnish the dish with dill, parsley and lemon wedges. Serve with buttered brown bread.

I have suggested that the eggs be placed directly on top of the salmon. Should you prefer, roll the salmon into tubes and place the eggs to the side of the tubes; whatever takes your artistic fancy!

Split Pea Soup

PREAMBLE

My father always made this the day after cooking a gammon, so there are strong connotations for me of Christmas and Easter (when gammon was particularly in abundance).

Strangely enough when I lived in Sweden I found that you could buy a version (not identical but similar) of this soup as a canned concentrate, known as “army soup” (the recipe is borrowed from the Swedish army). It comes in army green cans, and is popular with the Swedish army when they are on manoeuvres in the forest. The Swedish civilians eat their version of this on Thursdays with pancakes and punch.

However, here is my father’s recipe.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4-6 people.

- 1lb of dried yellow split peas
- 4 large carrots, peeled and thickly sliced.
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- 2 teaspoons of English mustard powder.
- 10 whole black pepper corns.
- 3 pints of water used to cook baked ham/boiled gammon (see page 155, 159).
- Rind from boiled gammon/baked ham (see recipes)

PREPARATION

- Soak the split peas overnight in a bowl of cold water.
- Skim the water used to cook the gammon, should there not be 3 pints make up with ordinary water.
- Cut the rind into strips, 1 inch by two inches.

COOKING

- Discard the water from the soaked peas, then add the peas and other ingredients to the gammon water.
- Place over a medium heat, bring to the boil stirring constantly.

- Place a lid on the saucepan and simmer for three hours, stirring occasionally.

TIPS

Should you wish to adjust the consistency of the soup then adjust the ratio of split peas to water. I have not added any salt, as the water from the gammon will have absorbed quite a bit anyway. Season to taste when the soup is served individually.

Serve with fried croutons, so hot that they sizzle when you put them in the soup.

Main Courses

Magnificent main courses to feast upon.

American Fried Chicken

PREAMBLE

Following an evening in the pub I tend to enter late night “snack attack” mode. More often than not I will head towards the nearest takeaway fried chicken emporium. I had a real fetish for this when a teenager, and still indulge.

Here is a recipe that gives an approximation to the flavour enhanced takeaway version.

INGREDIENTS

- Fresh chicken drumsticks, allow 2-4 per person. I use drumsticks as these are easier to pick up with your fingers. There is of course nothing to stop you using other parts of the chicken, eg thighs.
- Sifted flour, enough to thoroughly coat the chicken
- Milk, enough to thoroughly coat the chicken.
- 1-2 teaspoons of paprika pepper, (optional) add this should you wish to make spicy fried chicken.
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 2 teaspoons of course ground black pepper.
- Corn oil, enough to deep fry the chicken.

PREPARATION

- Place the chicken pieces into a saucepan of boiling water, put the lid on and simmer for approximately 20-25 minutes; until the chicken is cooked.
- Drain and dry the chicken on kitchen paper.
- Pour the milk into a bowl and dip the chicken pieces into it making sure they are covered.
- Mix the flour and other dry ingredients in a dry bowl.
- Dip the milk covered chicken into this, making sure the pieces are thoroughly covered.

COOKING

- Pour the oil into a saucepan, less than half full, and place over a medium heat. When the oil heats up, and the chicken is added, it is important that the pan is not overfull as the oil will “boil” over and ignite.

- When the oil is sufficiently hot put a few chicken pieces in and deep fry until golden brown (this should take about 10 minutes). Do not put too many pieces in as this will make it difficult to cook the chicken, and you risk the oil spilling over the sides of the pan.
- Using a slotted ladle/large spoon remove the pieces, place on a rack and put into a hot oven to keep warm.

Fry the next batch of chicken.

TIPS

This is ideal for serving at buffets, or for lunch with chips (English style) or mashed potatoes.

The boiling of the chicken may be done the day before you need to fry it, keep it in the fridge over night then coat with the flour etc before you fry it.

Bacon Roll

PREAMBLE

This is one of my father's ways to use up left over gammon.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 1lb of cooked gammon, diced.
- 1 large onion, peeled and diced.
- 8 tablespoons of finely chopped parsley.
- 4 tablespoons of finely chopped sage.
- 2 tablespoons of finely chopped rosemary.
- 2 tablespoons of finely chopped tarragon
- 1 finely chopped bayleaf
- 8oz of flour
- Water
- 4 oz of shredded suet
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Mix the flour and suet together with a pinch of salt and pepper. Add some cold water, a little at a time, until the mixture forms a firm soft dough. Should you add a little too much, then add some more flour and suet until you achieve the desired result.
- Flour a working surface.
- Roll out the dough into an oblong, just over ¼ of an inch thick.
- Cover the dough evenly with the ham and onion, like a pizza.
- Mix the herbs together, then sprinkle evenly over the ham and onion.
- Sprinkle a little black pepper over it.

- Take one of the long sides and start to roll the dough, so that the result is similar to a Swiss roll.
- Crimp the ends to seal the roll.
- Wrap the roll in greased baking paper, greased side against the dough.
- Double wrap and seal the wrapped roll in aluminium foil, the seal should be good enough to prevent water getting in.

COOKING

- Place the roll in a large saucepan with enough water to cover it. Should the roll be too long for the saucepan then gently bend it to fit.
- Simmer with the lid on for 2 hours.
- Remove from the pan and carefully take off the aluminium and greased paper.

TIPS

The roll should be craved into slices like a Swiss roll and served with mashed potato.

Baked Ham

PREAMBLE

A longstanding drinking chum of mine in Seoul has made a special request that I put this one in writing (before senility or booze erases it from my memory cells).

To put a little bit of “touchy feely” family appeal to this one, it is a recipe passed down to me by my father.

INGREDIENTS

- One smoked gammon (allow 1lb per person).
- Tinned pineapple chunks in syrup (don’t buy the unsweetened “healthy” variety, the syrup is used in the sauce and has more flavour).
- Powdered English mustard
- Cloves
- Demerara sugar

PREPARATION

Soak the gammon overnight in cold water, make sure that it is fully covered by the water. The soaking process is important as it removes the excess salt.

COOKING

Place the soaked gammon in a pot of cold water (water almost covering the gammon). Bring to the boil then simmer for 20 minutes per lb. Should you be cooking a large piece that requires lengthy cooking, then don’t forget to keep an eye on the water and top up accordingly to prevent boiling dry.

Whilst the gammon is simmering, prepare the marinade:

- Drain the pineapple chunks and set aside, **DO NOT THROW AWAY THE SYRUP THIS FORMS PART OF THE MARINADE!**
- Stir in two teaspoons of the English mustard into the syrup.
- Stir in four tablespoons of demerara sugar into the syrup.
- Add water to bring the volume of liquid up to approximately half a pint.
- Heat gently in a saucepan until the sugar and mustard are fully dissolved. **DO NOT BRING TO THE BOIL.** Take off the heat and set aside.

When the gammon is cooked, removed from the water and place in a roasting tin.

- Gently peel off the rind (skin) of the gammon (do not remove the fat). Place this rind in the water which you cooked the gammon (you will be able to make split pea soup from this).
- Score the fat of the gammon in a criss cross fashion creating one inch squares, much like a chess board.
- Insert one clove in each alternate square, and one pineapple chunk (with a toothpick) in the non cloved square until the fat side of the gammon is fully decorated.
- Pour the marinade over the gammon, making sure all parts are covered.
- Place the gammon in the oven (preheated to 180 degrees).
- Bake for 45-60 minutes (the gammon remember is already cooked, this process serves to caramelise the marinade).
- Baste the gammon regularly to make sure it receives the full flavour of the marinade.
- Remove from the oven place on a serving dish and allow to rest before carving. Pour the juices from the roasting tray into a sauce boat and serve with the dish.

I recommend this dish be served with mashed potatoes, pease pudding (I can provide you with recipe for this) and carrots.

TIPS

I specify a smoked gammon, this is down to personal preference as to my view the flavour is superior to unsmoked. When selecting the gammon make sure that:

- It has a rind.
- It is covered in a good even layer of fat (this is an integral part to the flavour, without it the dish does not work).

I specify tinned pineapple chunks, if you want to make extra work for yourself by all means buy a fresh pineapple and cube it yourself...but tinned chunks from a reputable brand are every bit as good.

By the way for all you scientists out there, pineapple has an enzyme in it that when brought into contact with pork acts as a natural tenderiser (**the dish I present here does not need tenderising**, but I thought I would throw in that small piece of trivia).

Beef Stew and Dumplings

PREAMBLE

Banish the memories of those watery, tasteless stews served up in your youth with this hearty recipe.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4-6 people.

- 2lbs of lean stewing steak, cut into cubes.
- 6 large carrots, peeled and sliced.
- Flour.
- 1 pint of beef stock.
- ½ a pint of stout.
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped.
- Lard.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.
- 1 teaspoon of English mustard powder.
- Worcestershire sauce.
- 2 tablespoons of tomato puree.

Dumplings:

- 6oz of flour
- 3oz of suet.
- Water
- Pinch of salt

PREPARATION

- Flour the beef thoroughly.
- Melt a good sized knob of lard in a large frying pan, add the beef.

- When the beef begins to brown remove from the pan and place in a good sized saucepan.
- Melt some more lard in the frying pan and add the carrots and onions, when the onions begin to soften remove the carrots and onions; add them to the beef.
- Place the saucepan over a medium heat and stir the beef, carrots and onions.
- Add the mustard, salt, pepper and a few drops of Worcestershire sauce. Stir thoroughly.
- De-glaze the frying pan with a little of the stock. Pour this together with remaining stock and stout over the beef, stir.
- Place a lid on the saucepan and simmer for 2 hours until tender, stirring occasionally.

Whilst the stew is cooking prepare the dumplings:

- Mix the suet, flour, salt and water (enough to make a firm dough).
- Roll out dough balls with your hands, approximately 1 ½ inches in diameter.

COOKING

When the stew has cooked for 2 hours add the dumplings by placing them on top. Cover with a lid and simmer for a further 30 minutes.

TIPS

Enjoy with a robust claret.

Boiled Gammon

PREAMBLE

In this recipe I specify a smoked gammon, this is down to personal preference; as to my view the flavour is superior to unsmoked. When selecting the gammon make sure that:

- It has a rind.
- It is covered in a good even layer of fat (this is an integral part to the flavour, without it the dish does not work).

INGREDIENTS

One smoked gammon joint (allow 1lb per person).

PREPARATION

Soak the gammon overnight in cold water, make sure that it is fully covered by the water. The soaking process is important as it removes the excess salt.

COOKING

Place the soaked gammon in a pot of cold water (water almost covering the gammon). Bring to the boil then simmer for 25 minutes per lb. Should you be cooking a large piece that requires lengthy cooking, then don't forget to keep an eye on the water, and top up accordingly to prevent boiling dry.

Place the cooked gammon on a serving dish, using a sharp knife gently peel off the rind (leave the fat on the meat) and put the rind back into the water, this can be used to make split pea soup (see 148).

Allow the joint to rest for 10 minutes before carving.

TIPS

Serve with mashed potatoes, carrots and parsley sauce (see 321).

Cold cuts make excellent sandwiches, and are also splendid with a plate of fried eggs.

Chicken Breast in Mushroom Sauce

PREAMBLE

This dish is a favourite on the “rubber chicken” circuit (dinners for large groups of people eg weddings, political dinners etc). I have had my fair share of it, made to varying degrees of quality. However, if made well I find it is perfectly decent to serve for dinner or lunch with.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of fresh chicken breast, de-boned but leave the skin on.
- 8oz of button mushroom, sliced.
- Butter.
- ½ a pint of double cream.
- 2 glasses of white wine
- Salt and course ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Lay the breasts, side by side, in a shallow roasting tray.
- Sprinkle with a little salt and pepper.
- Place then in an oven, preheated to 180 degrees. They will take 30 minutes to cook.

COOKING

The sauce will take at the most 15 minutes, so co-ordinate your actions to ensure that the sauce is ready the same time as the breasts.

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a saucepan, over a medium heat.
- Add the mushrooms, stir.
- Add some salt and pepper to personal preference.
- When the mushrooms have softened, be careful not to brown them, add the wine.
- Allow to simmer for a few minutes.

- Add the cream, stir.
- Stir in a knob of butter to give the sauce a sheen.

Place the breasts on a serving dish and pour the sauce over them. Excess sauce can be poured into a sauce boat.

TIPS

This is complimented by with sauté or mashed potatoes. However, as an alternative why not serve it with rice?

Chicken in a Lemon and Oregano Sauce

PREAMBLE

This is a very refreshing dish, ideal for summer.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 people.

- 2lbs of fresh chicken breasts, cut into cubes.
- 2 large fresh lemons.
- ½ a pint of chicken stock.
- 3 tablespoons of chopped oregano.
- Butter, this must be at room temperature.
- 1 tablespoon of flour.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Finely grate the rinds of the lemons (zest), put to one side.
- Squeeze the juice from the lemons.
- Blend thoroughly 1 tablespoon of butter and the flour, with a spoon.

COOKING

- Melt a very generous knob of butter in a saucepan, over a high heat.
- Add the chicken and stir.
- When the chicken pieces have started to change colour turn the heat down.
- Add the lemon zest and lemon juice, stir.
- Pour in the stock, add the oregano, salt and pepper.
- Simmer for 30 minutes with the lid on, stirring occasionally.

- Take a few spoonfuls of the liquid and add to the flour butter mixture, blend well (make sure there are no lumps).
- Add the blended mixture back to the chicken and stir for a couple of minutes. This will thicken the sauce.

TIPS

This is excellent served with boiled rice or mashed potatoes.

Chicken in Red Wine

PREAMBLE

I love taking a whole pile of ingredients and throwing them together, not exactly Cordon Bleu but fun nonetheless. I have used chicken breasts in this recipe, by all means use other parts of the chicken; such as the thighs.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of fresh chicken breasts (**leave the skins on**), cut into good sized cubes.
- Butter
- 8oz of rindless smoked streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch strips.
- 8oz of button mushrooms, halved.
- 4 shallots, peeled and sliced.
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped.
- ½ a pint of chicken stock.
- Flour.
- ½ a bottle of good quality red wine.
- 2 tablespoons of tomato puree.
- 4 carrots, peeled and sliced.
- 2 bayleaves.
- 1 glass of good quality brandy.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Flour the chicken thoroughly.

COOKING

- Melt a very generous knob of butter in a good sized saucepan over a medium heat.

- Add the garlic and shallots, sauté gently.
- When the shallots begin to soften, add the mushrooms and continue to sauté gently.
- When the mushrooms begin to soften add the chicken and bacon.
- When the chicken begins to brown add the tomato puree, salt and pepper.
- Add the brandy and stir in thoroughly.
- Add the stock, wine, carrots and bayleaves.
- Simmer for an hour with the lid on, stirring occasionally.

TIPS

This is excellent served with mashed potatoes or boiled rice.

Chicken in White Wine

PREAMBLE

You will see that I am quite generous with the quantity of wine used, what the hell you only live once!

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of fresh chicken breasts, cut into good sized cubes.
- Flour
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Six cloves of garlic, crushed.
- Four shallots, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 8oz of diced button mushrooms
- 8oz of smoked streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch pieces.
- A bunch of fresh tarragon, chopped
- ½ a pint of chicken stock.
- 1 bottle of good quality white wine.
- 1 teaspoon of coarse ground black pepper.
- Salt

PREPARATION

Roll the chicken breast cubes in flour.

COOKING

- Pour the olive oil into a good sized saucepan, enough to cover the bottom. Place over a medium heat.
- When the oil begins to get hot add the garlic, shallots and black pepper. Stir constantly.
- When the shallots begin to soften add the mushrooms and tarragon. Continue to stir.

- When the mushrooms have begun to soften add the chicken and the bacon. Keep stirring.
- Allow the chicken to cook for a few minutes, then add the stock, white wine and a pinch of salt.
- Bring the mixture to the boil then reduce the heat until the mixture simmers gently.
- Place a lid on the saucepan and simmer for 1 hour. Stir occasionally.

TIPS

Serve with boiled rice or mashed potatoes.

Chicken with Prunes

PREAMBLE

A good friend of ours recently served this at a dinner party. I have, with her permission, “cadged and adjusted” the recipe. I heartily recommend it, and indeed should you be suffering from constipation the prunes will work wonders with your bowels the next day!

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people:

- 3lbs of chicken breasts, de-boned but leave the skin on.
- 1 large wine glass of extra virgin olive oil.
- 1 large wine glass of red wine vinegar.
- 10 green olives, de-stoned and cut into halves.
- 1 large tin of prunes, de-stoned, in syrup.
- 4 tablespoons of chopped oregano.
- 8 cloves of garlic, peeled and sliced.
- 6 tablespoons of demerara sugar.
- 1 bottle of white wine.
- 4 bay leaves.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Place all the ingredients in a very large bowl.
- Stir.
- Cover with cling film.
- Place in the fridge over night.

COOKING

- Place the ingredients in a suitably large casserole dish.

- Cover with a lid.
- Place in an oven preheated to 160 degrees.
- Cook for 1½ hours.

TIPS

This is excellent served with rice.

You may, if you prefer, cut the breasts into cubes.

Chilli Con Carne

PREAMBLE

I first tried a version of this dish in my distant youth when still a student. It was cheap, filling and (depending on the quantity of chilli used) warm enough to prevent even the coldest of Edinburgh nights (my old university) from giving you the flu (possibly it was also rather good at soaking up the booze!).

My next serious encounter with this dish was whilst studying accountancy in London, one of my colleagues had quite a passion for the dish (one might almost say a fetish); to the extent he would throw chilli parties where he would prepare three versions mild, hot and volcano.

My third serious encounter was whilst performing a business review in Simi Valley (for all you masters of trivia out there this is where Ronald Regan resides), the hotel I was staying at produced a very decent version.

Before you start to yawn and wonder why I appear to be straying from the cooking, and moving into the area of travelogue; I am making the very pertinent point that with this dish there are innumerable versions. What suits one person's pallet, does not necessarily suit another.

The recipe I present below is my own version; using ideas picked up over the years and adjusting to my own preferences. I would point out that what to my pallet may constitute medium, may to others be too mild or too strong. Please feel free to adjust the proportions according to your taste.

INGREDIENTS

This recipe should feed between four to six people.

- 2lb of lean minced beef
- Eight fresh red chillies (the long thin ones), chopped and de-seeded.
- Eight fresh green chillies (the long thin ones), chopped and de-seeded.
- Three fresh red bonnet chillies, chopped and de-seeded (**WARNING THESE ARE HOT!**)
- One large fresh red pepper, chopped and de-seeded.
- Eight large fresh tomatoes, chopped.
- 1lb of tinned red kidney beans, drained.
- 8oz of tinned spicy refried beans (pinto beans with chipotle chillies).
- One large chopped onion.
- Six cloves of fresh garlic, chopped.

- Olive oil.
- Four teaspoons of sugar.
- One teaspoon of cider vinegar.
- Two wine glasses of Blossa Glögg (a Swedish fortified wine), if you can't get this then use red wine.
- Three tablespoons of tomato puree.
- One dash of tobasco.
- Two dashes of Worcestershire sauce.
- Black pepper and salt to taste.

COOKING

- Pour the olive oil into a large casserole pot, enough to cover the base.
- Add the black pepper, salt and garlic.
- Place the pot over a medium heat and when the garlic starts to sizzle add the onions, chillies and peppers.
- Stir thoroughly and reduce the heat.
- When the fresh ingredients begin to soften up add the meat, tomatoes and other ingredients (except the Glögg) in separate batches stirring in each to ensure that it is properly mixed.
- Add the Glögg last.
- Simmer for one hour, stir regularly.
- Set the chilli aside to rest for two hours. Trust me, this lets the flavours meld.

Before serving bring up to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes.

This dish is excellent served with rice, baked potatoes, tacos, tortilla chips or whatever combination takes your fancy.

TIPS

When dealing with fresh chillies it is important to note that they are not only hot when you eat them, but can burn you when you handle them. Make sure you wash your hands promptly after chopping them, and under no circumstances rub your eyes until your hands have been dechilled! If you do, by accident, then rinse your eye with cold water immediately.

Should you wish to be absolutely safe then use rubber gloves when chilli chopping (if people laugh at you then give them a serving with an extra raw hot bonnet chill in...**they won't laugh at you again!**)

Chorizo and Cannellini Beans

PREAMBLE

Here is a dish that I would call a cross between a soup and a stew. It is my version of a tapas dish that used to be served by El Patio, an excellent Spanish restaurant in Croydon that is now sadly closed.

I heartily recommend it, but then I would wouldn't I?

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 1lb of Chorizo sausages, cut into 1 inch slices.
- 1lb of belly of pork, cut into 1 inch chunks.
- 1lb of tinned cannellini beans, drained.
- 1½ pints of chicken stock
- 1 glass of dry white wine.
- Extra virgin oil
- 6 cloves of garlic, peeled and sliced
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

COOKING

- Pour a good measure of olive oil into a saucepan.
- Place over a medium heat and add the garlic.
- Sauté gently.
- When the garlic begins to soften add the pork and the Chorizo.
- Sauté until the pork starts to go brown.
- Add the stock and the wine.
- Season and simmer with the lid on for 45 minutes.
- Add the cannellini beans.
- Simmer for a further 30 minutes, with the lid on.

TIPS

This makes an ideal starter or late evening snack, just right for soaking up the alcohol after a night out.

Serve with good quality crusty bread.

Classic Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding

PREAMBLE

This is a classic British dish, and yet one that is so often ruined by poor the quality of meat or inattention to the basic steps in preparing and cooking this dish.

I have so often looked forward to enjoying this, either at friends' or in well known restaurants, only to be bitterly disappointed. The meat is either dry and overcooked, or it is tough and inedible.

If you follow my basic recipe below, paying specific attention to the quality of meat that you purchase, you will have a dish that people will ask you to prepare again and again.

INGREDIENTS

Obtain, from a good butcher you trust (**see Tips below**), a suitably aged rolled sirloin of beef or rib of beef (the latter with the bones still on). Both cuts should have a good layer of fat. Fat is important to baste the meat with, and it adds flavour. I am sure your cardiologist will forgive you this indulgence once in a while!

Beef tends to lose approximately 25% of its body weight when cooking so allow for this when selecting a joint, also allow for the weight of the bones should you choose rib.

I tend to err on the generous (leftover cold beef is as good as hot, and a host who allows his guests to still feel hungry or guilty if asking for seconds is a poor host!), namely a 6lb joint will feed 4 (adjust according to your appetite).

Yorkshire pudding mix:

- Two large eggs
- 8 ounces of plain flour
- 1 pint of milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

Find a good size (both in terms of depth and area) roasting tin and rack that fits the tin. Place beef on the rack in the tin.

Sprinkle a little black pepper over the beef, **do not put salt on it** as this will toughen it.

COOKING

Preheat your oven to 180 degrees. Place beef in the centre of the oven, allow 20 minutes per pound plus an extra 20 minutes to cook for medium done (25/30 minutes per pound, plus an extra 20 minutes, if you prefer well done).

Baste the meat at regular intervals.

Whilst the beef is cooking prepare your Yorkshire pudding mix:

- Place the flour, and salt and pepper, in large mixing bowl.
- Make a hole in centre of the flour.
- Break the eggs into the hole and add a little of the milk.
- Mix, with a wooden spoon, into a claggy paste.
- Start to add more milk, keep mixing.
- You are aiming for a thick, creamy, smooth paste. Try to smooth out any lumps of flour that have not properly mixed.
- Should the consistency not appear right, then add more flour or milk until appropriate.
- Set mixture aside, and allow to stand for at least 45 minutes.

This mixture will take approximately 50 minutes to cook. Therefore 50 minutes before the beef is done, take the beef out of the oven and pour the Yorkshire pudding mix into the roasting tin under the meat. The fat and juices will float on the surface of the pudding mix (this is good).

At this point I expect to be shouted down in howls of protest from fellow Brits who cook the mix separately in small baking trays, this gives a light fluffy rise to the pudding...very nice I suppose, but I don't like it like that!

My recipe will ensure that the pudding absorbs the fat and juices of the meat and will not rise, far more tasty (especially cold the next day!).

Place the meat and pudding back in the oven and cook for the remaining 50 minutes.

TIPS

The selection of a good butcher is one that is made more difficult these days by the interminable rise of the supermarket. I do not pretend that it will be easy for you to find a good butcher (around the corner); you may well have to do some leg work in the phone book and travel a little to find the right place. However, be assured, the results will be worthwhile.

When selecting a piece of beef you will doubtless be familiar with the bright red (more suited to the special effects department of B rated horror movie) cellophane wrapped, specimens that are "lovingly" cut by machines and presented in your supermarket refrigerated display.

AVOID THESE !!!

Your primary requirement when selecting beef, for roasting, is that it must be properly aged. This process naturally (no chemicals!) tenderises the beef and reduces the bright red appearance. With regard to age, I recommend that the beef be hung for 3 weeks. You must ask your butcher directly how long the meat is hung for. Should he not be able to answer; **walk out** (he is not a professional!).

When serving the meat I suggest you allow it to rest for approximately 10-15 minutes before carving, this allows the juices to settle and altogether improves its taste and appearance.

Cut the Yorkshire pudding into equal size portions (enough for all and leftover snacking).

Serve with roast potatoes, Brussels sprouts, carrots, gravy , English mustard and horseradish sauce.

Devilled Spaghetti

PREAMBLE

Here's a novel combination of spaghetti and chicken which I used to cook in my pre-teen years. I rediscovered this in my student days as an economical way of producing a "romantic" dinner.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve between 4-6 people.

- 1lb (dry weight) of spaghetti, I prefer the long version.
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped.
- 3 cloves of crushed garlic.
- 2lbs of roughly chopped tomatoes.
- 8oz of button mushroom, sliced.
- 2lbs of chicken breast, cubed.
- Butter
- 2 tablespoons of sugar.
- 2 teaspoons of cayenne pepper.
- 6oz of grated mature cheddar cheese.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

PREPARATION

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a large frying pan, over a medium heat.
- Add the garlic and onion.
- When the onion begins to soften add the mushrooms, stir.
- As the mushrooms begin to soften add the chicken.
- Allow the chicken to lightly brown, then add the tomatoes.
- Add the sugar, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper; bring to the boil.

- Simmer, very gently, for 20 minutes (stirring regularly).
- Cook the spaghetti until tender, drain and put into a large (well buttered) casserole pot.
- Pour over the chicken and tomatoes. Toss thoroughly to ensure it is fully mixed with the spaghetti.
- Sprinkle the top with the grated cheese.

COOKING

Place in an oven, preheated to 180 degrees, bake for 20-30 minutes until the mixture is hot and the cheese melted through.

TIPS

I have used fresh chicken in this recipe. However, you can use cooked chicken; merely reduce the time that you simmer the mixture to about 5 minutes (you will need to pre cook the tomatoes in this case).

Eisbein

PREAMBLE

Memories of many visits to Berlin. No serious evening's bar/night-club tour could be contemplated before eating one of these. It provided a very solid base for evenings that would sometimes not end until 6am the following morning. These sessions were not for the fainthearted, the energy drain required regular replenishment, I recall on day wandering back to my hotel with my chums and having a spaghetti carbonara for breakfast (but that's another recipe).

I have found an excellent roast version of this dish in Riga (Latvia). One particular evening I was there Riga suffered a minor power cut. I was in no mood to miss out on my favourite dish in my favourite Latvian restaurant; so myself and a colleague sat in the restaurant (now illuminated by torchlight) drinking stoically for 2 hours, until power resumed and the cooking could commence. The meal was well worth the wait.

INGREDIENTS

- One 2lb pig's knuckle per person.
- Salt

PREPARATION

Shave the knuckle, if you are fussy (the Berliners don't).

COOKING

- Place the knuckle in a good sized saucepan, cover with water and add a good sized pinch of salt.
- Bring to the boil, then simmer for approximately 2 hours with the lid on. Remember to keep topping the water level up with hot water.
- Drain the knuckle and serve.

TIPS

Delicious with sauerkraut, mashed potatoes and German Mustard. Wash it down with a good German beer or white wine.

If you wish to try the roasted version, then rub salt over the rind of the knuckle and put in a 180 degree oven for approximately an hour.

Eva's Bacon Flan

PREAMBLE

Eva is very fond of cooking this dish, she used to bring it round to me in Stockholm and we would have it warmed up in the oven when we came back from one of the local bars. Eva, like all Swedes, loves picnics so this dish often appears in the summer months.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for one flan, depending on the size of the flan dish.

- 8oz of flour
- 4oz butter, at room temperature.
- Approximately 2 tablespoons of water
- 8oz of smoked streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch strips.
- 1 large onion, peeled and finely chopped.
- 1 large red pepper, de-cored and finely chopped.
- 8oz of grated mature cheddar.
- ½ a pint of double cream.
- 2 eggs.
- Salt and coarse black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Mix the flour and butter together with the water to make a firm dough. Should the mixture need a little more water then add another tablespoon (until the correct consistency is achieved).
- Put the dough in the fridge for 1 hour.
- Roll the dough into a circle approximately a ¼ of an inch thick.
- Line an appropriately sized flan dish. Any excess dough can be used to decorate the top of the flan, or frozen for another day.
- Place the bacon, onion and pepper into the flan.
- Mix the eggs and cream add the salt, pepper and 4oz of the cheese.

- Pour the mixture over the bacon etc.
- Sprinkle the remainder of the cheese over the top.

COOKING

Put into an oven, preheated to 180 degrees, bake for approximately 30 minutes until golden brown.

TIPS

Serve hot or cold with a green salad, baked potato or baked beans.

Eva's Flying Jacob

PREAMBLE

I asked Eva why this dish is called “flying Jacob”, and she said she had no idea. Her best guess is that the inventor of the dish was called Jacob. Well, whatever the real story, here is her version of this dish which is apparently popular among young Swedes.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 8 fresh chicken thighs, leave the bones in and the skin on (as this gives more flavour).
- ½ a pound of smoked streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch strips.
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- 1 large fresh red pepper, cut into large chunks.
- 2 large fresh green peppers, cut into large chunks.
- 1 pint of double cream.
- 3 tablespoons of chilli sauce, a reputable brand.
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

PREPARATION

- Season the chicken thighs and roast in an oven, set to 180 degrees, for approximately 40-45 minutes; until cooked.
- Drain the fat and keep the thighs warm.

COOKING

- Pour a good measure of olive oil into a large saucepan and place over a medium heat.
- Sauté the garlic and onions until soft.
- Add the peppers and sauté until soft.

- Add the bacon and seasoning, sauté until the bacon is cooked.
- Add the chilli sauce and the thighs, stir thoroughly.
- Add the cream and stir.
- Simmer over a low heat, with the lid on, for approximately 25 minutes.

TIPS

This is excellent served with rice or sauté potatoes.

Eva's Lasagne

PREAMBLE

I am very fond of lasagne, and being a “greedy pig”, tend to have this as a starter when having an Italian meal. Naturally for those of you who are less hungry it makes an ideal main course.

This is Eva's version of the dish which she makes for me, if I have been a good boy and taken the garbage out.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of lean minced beef.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- 4 shallots, peeled and sliced.
- A handful of fresh basil, coarsely chopped.
- 4 tablespoons of tomato puree.
- 1 glass of Swedish Glögg.
- Approximately 8oz of dried lasagne pasta
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce.
- 1 can of tinned tomatoes.
- 4oz of flat cap mushrooms, chopped.
- 2 cloves of fresh garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 1 pint of fresh milk.
- 2oz of butter.
- 2oz of flour
- 6oz of mature English cheddar, grated.
- Parmesan cheese, freshly grated.

- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Firstly prepare the bolognese sauce:

- Pour a good measure of olive oil into a saucepan over a medium heat.
- Add the garlic and shallots, stir.
- When the shallots have softened add the mushrooms.
- When the mushrooms start to exude water add the meat.
- Stir and allow the meat to brown slightly.
- Add the basil, salt, pepper and a dash of Worcestershire and Tabasco sauce.
- Stir thoroughly.
- Add the tomatoes, tomato puree and Glögg.
- Stir thoroughly, simmer over a low heat with the lid on for around 50 minutes.

Approximately 10 minutes before you are ready to “build the dish” prepare the cheese sauce:

- Thoroughly blend the four and butter together, in a saucepan, over a low heat.
- Gradually add the milk until there is an even consistency.
- Add the grated cheese, a little at a time, stirring constantly until it is fully mixed in.

Now you are ready to build the dish:

- Butter the a suitably sized oven dish.
- Pour in a layer of bolognese sauce.
- Cover this with sheets of dry pasta.
- Pour over another layer of bolognese.
- Pour over a layer of the cheese sauce.
- Repeat this process until the top of the dish is finished with a layer of pasta covered by a layer of cheese sauce.

- Sprinkle a good measure of the grated parmesan on the top.

COOKING

Place in an oven, preheated to 180 degrees, and cook for approximately 50 minutes until the top is golden brown.

TIPS

You can prepare the meat sauce the day before, and store this in the fridge.

Serve with a good Chianti and green salad.

Eva's Minced Beef Flan

PREAMBLE

This is a variation on Eva's bacon flan (see page 181), she usually does one of each.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for one flan, depending on the size of the flan dish.

- 8oz of flour
- 4oz butter at room temperature.
- Approximately 2 tablespoons of water
- 8oz of lean minced beef.
- 4oz of flat cap mushrooms, coarsely chopped.
- 3 tablespoons of tomato puree.
- 1 large onion, peeled and finely chopped.
- 1 large green pepper, de-cored and finely chopped.
- 8oz of grated mature cheddar.
- ½ a pint of double cream.
- 2 eggs.
- Salt and coarse black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Mix the flour and butter together with enough water (you may wish to add a little more) to make a firm dough.
- Put the dough in the fridge for 1 hour.
- Roll the dough into a circle approximately ¼ of an inch thick
- Line an appropriately sized flan dish. Any excess dough can be used to decorate the top of the flan or frozen for another day.
- Melt a large knob of butter in a frying pan

- Add the onion and sauté until soft.
- Then add the mince, tomato puree, salt, pepper, mushrooms and green pepper.
- Stir until the meat is browned
- Spoon the meat, onion and pepper and pepper into the flan.
- Mix the eggs and cream add the salt, pepper and 4oz of the cheese.
- Pour the mixture over the meat etc.
- Sprinkle the remainder of the cheese over the top.

COOKING

Put into an oven preheated to 180 degrees, bake for approximately 30 minutes until golden brown.

TIPS

Serve hot or cold with baked potato, sauté potato, a green salad or baked beans.

Frankfurter Casserole

PREAMBLE

My mother used to dish this up on firework night, great for filling and warming you up. Oddly enough I came across a similar dish when working in Salt Lake City. The restaurant I had been taken to had a “Wild West” theme. The tables, which resembled covered wagons, were placed in a circle around the room; the centre of which had an open camp fire and mock up saloon. The ceiling had been lit to resemble a night sky, and an impromptu gun fight was enacted for the diners. The food was excellent, one of the “side dishes” being something very similar to this. Marvellous place!

I digress, on with the recipe.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 3 large cans of propriety baked beans.
- 8 large frankfurters, cut into 1-2 inch lengths.
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped.
- 8oz of smoked streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch lengths.
- 3 teaspoons of English mustard powder.
- 2 tablespoons of Demerara sugar.
- Coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

Mix all the ingredients thoroughly in a large casserole pot.

COOKING

Put a lid on the pot and place in a 160 degree preheated oven. This will take about 1 hour to cook.

TIPS

This can be prepared well in advance before cooking.

It is excellent with baked potatoes.

Goulash

PREAMBLE

I seem to recall the evil queen in Narnia used this to bribe one of the children who had passed through the wardrobe, whatever happened to good old fashioned cash?

Don't let evil queens put you off this, it tastes really good. I have enjoyed this dish in Russian, Hungarian and Austrian restaurants both in London and New York.

The New York experience was a particular hoot. That afternoon New York had seen the worst downpour in years (the remnants of a tropical storm). Very few taxis were running that evening, consequently very few people were out. We were the only guests in the Hungarian restaurant, were out of boredom the owner and her husband had drunk themselves into oblivion. Whilst we were eating, we were treated to our lady hosts rendition of various folksongs (the quality of which I am not worthy to judge). However, the food was excellent.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4-6 people.

- 2lbs of lean stewing steak, cut into cubes.
- Flour.
- 2 large onions, peeled and sliced.
- Lard.
- 1 bouquet garni (a fresh bayleaf, a sprig of thyme and a few sprigs of parsley tied together).
- 2 tablespoons of paprika pepper.
- 2 tablespoons of tomato puree.
- 1 pint of beef stock.
- 4 cloves of garlic, crushed.
- 2 red peppers, chopped (core and pips discarded).
- 2 large tomatoes, coarsely chopped.
- ¼ of a pint of double cream.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Flour the meat thoroughly.

COOKING

- Melt a good sized knob of lard in a large frying pan, over a medium heat.
- Add the meat, allow to brown. Remove the meat and place in a large saucepan.
- Melt more lard into the frying pan, add the onions and peppers, allow to soften.
- Add the onions and peppers to the meat. Place over a medium heat and season with salt, pepper and the paprika.
- De-glaze the frying pan with a little of the stock, add this to the meat together with the remaining stock and tomatoes.
- Stir thoroughly, simmer for 2 hours.
- Add the cream, stir thoroughly. Serve.

TIPS

Serve with rice or sauté potatoes. Drink a robust claret.

Holstein Schnitzel

PREAMBLE

I encountered a particularly fine version of this dish, some years ago, in a restaurant in Kensington (The Twin Brothers) run by an expat Austrian. He was happy to serve as many fried eggs with it as you wished. There were occasions when I would have four eggs with this. However, I would suggest that for most people two eggs should be sufficient.

INGREDIENTS

- One good sized veal escalope (half an inch thick) per person
- One beaten egg
- Seasoned flour
- Breadcrumbs
- Butter
- Two eggs per person
- Lemon wedges

PREPARATION

- Cover the escalope in the flour
- Brush with the beaten egg
- Cover the escalope thoroughly with the breadcrumbs, by pulling it through a bowl of breadcrumbs.

Repeat for each escalope

COOKING

- Place a large frying pan over a medium heat, and melt a good sized knob of butter.
- Fry each escalope in the butter, for approximately 8 minutes, turning once. They are cooked when they are golden brown.
- Place each cooked escalope on to a plate, and put into a warm oven to keep hot.
- Fry two eggs per escalope and put the eggs on top of the escalope, some people may even wish to lay an anchovy on top as well.

Serve immediately with a lemon wedge.

TIPS

This dish is well complimented by serving it with sauté potatoes.

Your butcher should be able to prepare the escalope for you, namely batter it with a meat bat until it reaches the correct dimensions. However, if you wish to do it yourself, then use either meat bat or rolling pin and place the escalope between two greased pieces of grease proof paper. Whack it until the desired dimensions are achieved. Very good for relieving stress!

Julskinka

PREAMBLE

Pronounced “Yule shinker” meaning “Christmas Ham”, this is served in Sweden at Christmas time and forms the centrepiece of the Christmas buffet table. I see no reasons why this should be served only at Christmas. I have, with full apologies to my girlfriend, made a few adjustments to the recipe.

In this recipe I specify a smoked gammon, this is down to personal preference; as to my view the flavour is superior to unsmoked. When selecting the gammon make sure that:

- It has a rind.
- It is covered in a good even layer of fat (this is an integral part to the flavour, without it the dish does not work).

INGREDIENTS

- One smoked gammon joint (allow 1lb per person, if serving for dinner).
- 1 egg
- 4 tablespoons of prepared English mustard.
- 2 teaspoons of demerara sugar.
- Breadcrumbs, enough to cover the gammon.

PREPARATION

- Soak the gammon overnight in cold water, make sure that it is fully covered by the water. The soaking process is important as it removes the excess salt.
- Wrap the gammon in aluminium foil and place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees. Bake for 25 minutes a pound.
- Whilst the gammon is baking mix the egg, mustard and sugar.
- When the gammon is cooked, take out from the oven and remove the aluminium foil.
- With a sharp knife carefully remove the rind, making sure you leave the fat on the meat.
- Smear the gammon with the mustard mixture, then cover it thoroughly with the breadcrumbs.

COOKING

Place the gammon on a rack in a roasting tray. Place the gammon in an oven preheated to 200 degrees. Bake for approximately 30 minutes until golden brown.

TIPS

Allow to rest for 10 minutes before carving. Serve with sauté or mashed potatoes.

This is delicious cold, so there is no reason why you should not serve this at a buffet party; with a good quality potato salad.

Korean Bulgogi

PREAMBLE

I dined on this dish several times during a protracted, but highly enjoyable, business trip to Seoul. I was more than delighted to find that on moving to Stockholm, I was only five minutes away from an excellent Korean restaurant which served this dish.

This is a tasty, hearty dish, appropriate for Korea's harsh winters. It is essentially barbecued beef ('bul' in Korean means fire, and 'gogi' means meat), and is usually appreciated by foreign visitors who find some of the more fiery creations on offer a bit too much to handle. It is also one of the easiest Korean dishes to prepare.

My thanks to my good friends, who live in Seoul, for the authentic recipe.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve four people.

- 2lbs of good quality, lean, tender beef. Cut into thin strips, no larger than 1inch by 3 inches.
- 1 tablespoon of caster sugar
- Sesame oil

Marinade

- ½ a pint of water
- ½ a pint of dark soy sauce
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed
- 1 onion, peeled and sliced
- 15 whole black peppercorns
- 10 dried anchovies; you may need to find these in an oriental supermarket, they usually come in small packets and are served as drinking snacks. You need a little background fish flavour, but don't use tinned anchovies, these are too strong.
- 1 tablespoon of rice wine; this should be fairly easily available as sake in oriental supermarkets; but if you can't find it, try white wine.

PREPARATION

- Place the beef into a bowl, add the sugar and mix thoroughly.

- Set aside for around 30 minutes whilst you make the marinade. The sugar acts as a tenderiser on the beef.

Marinade

- Pour the water and soy sauce into a saucepan (they should always be in equal quantities). Place over a medium heat and bring to the boil.
- Once the mixture starts boiling, add the other marinade ingredients and simmer for 10 minutes; stirring constantly.
- Take off the heat and allow to cool.
- When the mixture is cool, strain the sauce to remove the whole ingredients, pour the liquid into the bowl with the beef.
- Cover with Clingfilm and place in the fridge.
- Marinade overnight.

COOKING

- When you are ready to eat; drain the marinade into a saucepan, place over a medium heat and bring to the boil. Simmer for 5 minutes then pour into a suitable serving bowl (for use as a communal dip) and set aside.
- Place a large frying pan over a medium heat and pour in enough sesame oil to cover the base. Should you not be able to find this then use corn oil.
- When the oil is hot, add the beef and stir fry until it is cooked slightly rare.
- The meat is ready to be served.

Serve on a large warm plate placed in the centre of the table so that guests may help themselves.

TIPS

Koreans are fond of gut wrenchingly spicy food, and I have to say this recipe is the mildest. If you want to make it more interesting, you should increase the quantity of garlic, and add some green spring onion leaves to the marinade.

This should be served with boiled rice, raw Chinese cabbage leaves and kimchi (see page 259).

The strips of the beef should be picked up dipped in the marinade (if required) and placed into a cabbage leaf. This should be rolled up, and eaten with chopsticks or with your fingers.

I heartily recommend the local tippie, soju, as an accompaniment. Similar to Japanese sake, this is made from tapioca (the main brand of which has a picture of a toad on the bottle); which looks like how you will feel the next day if you have more than one bottle. Failing that sake will also go with it.

Lamb Cutlets with Mushroom Sauce

PREAMBLE

This dish can be prepared and cooked in a very short space of time, yet it makes an excellent main course for a dinner party.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 12-16 lamb cutlets depending on your appetite.
- 1lb of button mushrooms, sliced.
- 4 shallots, peeled and sliced.
- Butter
- ½ a pint of double cream
- 1 glass of a good quality brandy, such as Remy Martin VSOP.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a large frying pan, over a medium heat.
- Add the shallots and allow to soften.
- Add the mushrooms, salt and pepper.
- When the mushrooms have softened add the brandy. Simmer for a few minutes.
- Add the cream, stir thoroughly.

COOKING

Whilst you are preparing the sauce, grill the cutlets according to your preference (rare to well done).

TIPS

Place the cutlets on an appropriate serving dish and pour some of the sauce over them, decorate with parsley. Serve the remainder of the sauce in a sauceboat.

This dish is complimented by sautéed potatoes and flageolet beans.

Lancashire Hotpot

PREAMBLE

A hearty warming dish, good for a winter's evening.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4-6 people.

- 2lbs of lean lamb, cut into 1 inch cubes.
- 6 lamb's kidneys, cut in half and with their cores removed.
- ½ a pint of lamb stock.
- Flour
- Worcestershire sauce
- ½ a pint of stout
- 4 cloves of crushed garlic
- 4 large carrots, peeled and sliced.
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- 4 good sized potatoes, peeled and cut into ½ inch slices.
- Lard
- Salt and black pepper
- 4 bay leaves

PREPARATION

- Cover the lamb cubes in flour.
- Melt a good sized knob of lard in a large frying pan with the garlic, brown the lamb and kidneys.
- Spoon a little of the lamb and kidneys into a good sized casserole pot.
- Put a layer of carrots onions and potatoes on top.

- Put another layer of lamb and kidneys on top of the vegetables.
- Repeat the process alternating the layers, the top of the hot pot being a layer of potatoes.
- Mix the stout and stock in a jug, add a generous pinch of black pepper, a pinch of salt and a few drops of Worcestershire sauce. De glaze the frying pan. Pour the mixture over the hotpot, ensuring the top layer of potatoes is not covered by the liquid.
- Push the bay leaves down the sides of the casserole.

COOKING

- Place a lid on the casserole pot and put into a 160 degree preheated oven.
- Cook for 1 ½ hours.
- Remove the lid and brown the top of the potatoes for another 20 to 30 minutes (raising the temperature to 180 degrees).

TIPS

Enjoy with a robust claret.

Meatloaf

PREAMBLE

There is a degree of snobbery about this dish, people associate it with the rather twee world of the Bradys (an old TV sitcom from the sixties, for those not old enough to remember). However, the dish is both high in protein, simple to make and very tasty.

Don't knock it until you have tried it... then write and complain to me!

INGREDIENTS

This recipe should serve approximately 6 people.

- 1lb of lean minced beef
- 1lb of lean minced pork
- 1lb of lean minced veal
- 8oz of chicken livers, well chopped.
- 2oz of butter
- 4oz of breadcrumbs
- 8 rashers of good quality, fatty, streaky bacon
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon of English mustard
- 2 tablespoons of double cream
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce
- Salt and black pepper to taste

PREPARATION

- Combine the pork, beef and veal in a large mixing bowl. Mix thoroughly with your hands **(REMEMBER TO WASH THEM BEFORE AND AFTER. DO NOT WEAR JEWELLERY!)**.

- Add the chicken livers. Mix thoroughly.
- Add the butter, eggs, mustard and cream. Mix thoroughly.
- Add the bread crumbs and parsley. Mix thoroughly.
- Add a few drops of Worcestershire sauce and tabasco sauce, together with the salt and pepper. Mix thoroughly.
- Form the mixture into a loaf shape and place in greased roasting tin.
- Place the bacon rashers evenly across the top of the loaf tucking them in if they overhang. You may wish to make a pattern (if symmetrical) eg Union Jack (or any other national flag that you may feel to be appropriate...I am not quite sure how you could make the Stars and Stripes but any suggestions please share them).

COOKING

Place in a 180 degree preheated oven, and cook for between 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hours 30 minutes. Baste regularly.

TIPS

Allow to stand for 10 minutes before serving, with mashed potatoes and gravy.

Should there be any leftovers then it is perfectly decent cold, or you can reheat. Bored with having it two days running, then freeze and take out when needed again.

Old Fashioned Meatballs

PREAMBLE

This dish is based on a recipe my Mother used to make when I was a child. I have made some alterations (**sorry Mum!**); to reflect the variations I have enjoyed in New York's Little Italy and Chicago. Depending on your appetites, and how much spaghetti you serve with it, it will serve between 4-6 people.

INGREDIENTS

- 1lb minced beef
- 1lb minced veal
- 1lb minced pork
- Two eggs
- Fresh basil, chopped
- Worcestershire sauce
- Flour
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Two tins of chopped tomatoes
- Tomato puree
- Swedish Glögg (this is a spiced fortified wine from Sweden, if you can't get any then red wine will do)
- Four bay leaves
- 8oz of flat cap mushrooms, cut into large chunks
- Half a pint of beef stock
- One large onion, peeled and chopped
- Six cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped
- Salt and black pepper
- Sugar

PREPARATION

- Place the beef, veal and pork in a large mixing bowl add the eggs, a pinch of black pepper and a generous sprinkling of chopped basil. Use a fork and spoon to mix the ingredients fully.
- Cover a working surface, or board, with a generous amount of flour.
- Take a spoonful of the mixture and roll in your hands (make sure your hands are covered in flour as this will stop the mixture sticking to your hands) into a ball approximately 1.5 inches in diameter. Roll the ball in the flour and place to oneside.

Repeat the above until all the mixture is used.

- Pour the olive oil into a frying pan (enough to cover it), heat until the oil is hot enough to fry.
- Gently fry a batch of meatballs (do not overfill the pan) turning regularly until brown on the outside. Remove from the pan, drain and place to oneside. Repeat until all the meatballs are browned. Note the meatballs only need to be browned not cooked at this stage.

COOKING

- Pour a generous quantity of olive oil into a large casserole pot. Heat the oil and add the onions, garlic, a generous quantity of chopped basil and a generous pinch of black pepper.
- Cook gently until the onions are soft (do not overcook or brown the onions), add the mushrooms and cook until the juice from the mushrooms starts to appear.
- Add the chopped tomatoes, bay leaves, stock, a few dashes of Worcestershire sauce, four tablespoonfuls of tomato puree, two teaspoonfuls of sugar and a pinch of salt.
- Stir the mixture then add the meatballs making sure they are thoroughly covered by the mixture.
- Add two wine glasses of the Glögg stir and bring to the simmer.
- Cook the mixture (stirring regularly for a good hour).

Serve with spaghetti (I prefer the long version) and a good Chianti.

Paella

PREAMBLE

This is a splendid Spanish dish, full of flavour evocative of sunshine and sangria.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for two people.

- One and a half cups of arborio rice.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- A good sized handful of fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 onion, peeled and chopped
- 1 red and 1 green pepper, de-cored and de-seeded chopped into 1 inch chunks.
- Two cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 2oz of cooked peas.
- Butter
- 1lb of fresh chicken breast, cut into good sized cubes.
- 3 chorizo sausages, cut into 1 inch pieces.
- 5 cups of chicken stock.
- 1 large glass of white wine.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

COOKING

- Pour a good measure of olive oil into a large saucepan, place over a medium heat.
- Add the garlic, and allow to soften for a couple of minutes.
- Add the onion and stir.
- Add the chicken and sausage.
- Stir the mixture and allow the chicken to cook through for around five minutes or so.

- Add the parsley, peas and peppers, stir.
- Add the rice and gradually start to add the stock, stirring all the time.
- The rice will start to absorb the stock.
- When you have added all the stock, add the wine.
- Allow the mixture to gently simmer with the lid on for around fifteen minutes or so, until the rice is cooked.
- Season to taste, stirring thoroughly.
- Add a knob of butter.

The dish is ready to eat.

TIPS

The dish should be served straight from the pan, and is ideal with sangria or a sharp white.

You can replace the chicken, or augment it, by adding shell fish and using fish stock.

Pig's Trotters in Split Pea Soup

PREAMBLE

You can use every part of a pig, apart from his oink.

Here is a variation on the basic split pea soup that my father makes (see page 148). This method does not require you to cook a gammon beforehand.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4-6 people.

- 1lb of dried yellow split peas
- 4 large carrots, peeled and thickly sliced.
- 6 pig's trotters, get these from your local butcher (your supermarket won't have a clue as to what you are talking about), they are very cheap (you can even negotiate a discount if you make a bulk purchase).
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- 10 whole black peppercorns.
- 1 teaspoon of English mustard powder.
- 3 pints of water used to cook baked ham/boiled gammon (see page 155, 159). This is optional as plain water will do instead.
- Rind from boiled gammon/baked ham (see recipes). This is optional.
- Salt to taste if you are using plain water.

PREPARATION

- Soak the split peas overnight in a bowl of cold water.
- Skim the water used to cook the gammon (if you are using this), should there not be 3 pints make up with ordinary water.
- Should you have the rind available, cut it into strips, 1 inch by two inches.
- Rinse the trotters under a cold tap.

COOKING

- Discard the water from the soaked peas, then add the peas and other ingredients to the gammon (or plain) water.
- Place over a medium heat, bring to the boil stirring constantly.
- Place a lid on the saucepan and simmer for two hours, stirring occasionally.

TIPS

Should you wish to adjust the consistency of the soup then adjust the ratio of split peas to water.

Serve with fried croutons, so hot that they sizzle when you put them in the soup.

You have three options when it comes to dealing with the trotters in your soup:

- Serve each soup portion with a trotter in the bowl. Eat the trotter according to your preference with your fingers, with a spoon (whatever). Provide finger bowls and copious quantities of napkins.
- Serve the hot trotter on separate plate, either as another course or as a side dish to the soup. Excellent with English mustard.
- Remove the trotters from the soup, allow them to go cold; delicious to snack on.

Poussin with Tarragon

PREAMBLE

I have a particular fondness for serving this dish at dinner parties. It is relatively simple to prepare and cook, yet the presentation to each guest of a whole poussin on their individual plates adds the touch of “theatre” to the proceedings that make the evening feel a little more special.

All chefs have egos and they like to be stroked!

As I have noted before, I err on the generous, some of you may feel that a whole poussin per guest is too much. My view is, be generous; and allow people to overindulge without guilt.

INGREDIENTS

Poussin can be obtained from your local butcher, or reputable supermarket. Allow 1lb birds of equal sizes per person.

- Fresh tarragon
- Fresh peeled garlic cloves (one per bird)
- Butter
- Salt and black pepper

PREPARATION

- Chop the tarragon.
- Place an individual poussin on a piece of aluminium foil (large enough to wrap it).
- Place a good sized knob of butter in the carcass of the bird together with; one whole garlic clove (do not chop or crush the clove as this will overpower the bird), a good pinch of chopped tarragon and salt and pepper to taste.
- Place a large knob of butter on the outside of the carcass, sprinkle the carcass liberally with tarragon and salt and pepper to taste.
- Wrap the bird tightly in the foil, this ensures the flavour is sealed during the first part of the cooking process.
- Repeat for each bird.

COOKING

Place the wrapped birds on a rack in a roasting tray and put in a preheated oven at 180 degrees.

After one hour open the foil containers, exposing the bird (make sure you leave the birds in the foil as this allows you to baste each bird with its individual juices).

Baste regularly until golden brown (I usually find this takes about another 20-30 minutes). Place each bird (whole) on each guest's plate and serve with rosemary potatoes, stuffed tomatoes and a green vegetable (eg peas).

TIPS

When cooking poultry it is important to use fresh produce, don't use frozen birds (they are sad creatures who look floppy and unloved when defrosted).

Make sure you store the bird in a refrigerator before cooking, poultry (especially in a warm climate) goes off very quickly. When preparing the bird smell it to ensure it is still fresh.....if in doubt:

CHUCK IT OUT!

Rabbit in a Mustard Sauce

PREAMBLE

I first tried this at a dinner party many years ago; the “designated cook” for evening (a visitor from France) was kind enough to share the recipe.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 6 people.

- 2lbs of fresh rabbit, cut into cubes.
- 8oz of smoked streaky bacon, cut into inch slices.
- 2oz of butter
- 8 shallots, peeled and sliced.
- 4 cloves of crushed garlic
- Flour
- 4 tablespoons of French mustard
- ½ a pint of chicken stock
- ¼ of a pint of double cream
- Bouquet garni (a fresh bayleaf, a sprig of thyme and a few sprigs of parsley tied together)
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Flour the rabbit.

COOKING

- Melt the butter in a large casserole dish, add the garlic and shallots.
- When the shallots begin to soften; add the rabbit and bacon, stir thoroughly.
- As the rabbit begins to brown; add the French mustard and stir in thoroughly.
- Add the stock, salt, pepper and the bouquet garni. Stir, making sure the pan base is thoroughly de-glazed.

- Place a lid on the pot and simmer for around an hour until the rabbit is tender, stir occasionally.
- When the rabbit is tender, remove the bouquet garni and turn the heat up to reduce the liquid. Add the cream, turn the heat down, and stir thoroughly for a few minutes.

The dish is now ready to serve.

TIPS

This is well complimented by mashed or sauté potatoes, and flageolet beans.

Risotto

PREAMBLE

This is a splendid Italian dish, full of flavour and with a marvellous creamy texture.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for two people.

- One and a half cups of arborio rice.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- A good sized handful of fresh parsley, chopped
- Two cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 8oz of flat cap mushrooms, sliced.
- Butter
- ¼ pint of double cream
- 4oz of parmesan cheese, grated
- 5 cups of chicken or vegetable stock.
- 1 large glass of white wine.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

COOKING

- Pour a good measure of olive oil into a large frying pan, place over a medium heat.
- Add the garlic and allow to soften for a couple of minutes.
- Add the mushrooms and stir.
- When the mushrooms begin to exude their juices, add the parsley and rice.
- Stir the mixture and gradually add the stock, stirring in all the time.
- The rice will start to absorb the stock.
- When you have added all the stock, add the wine.

- Allow the mixture to gently simmer for around fifteen minutes or so until the rice is cooked.
- Season to taste, add the cream and parmesan. Stir thoroughly.
- Add a knob of butter.
- The dish is ready to eat.

TIPS

The dish should be rich and claggy, add more stock to make it more liquid, according to taste.

Roast Chicken with Stuffing

PREAMBLE

Great for dinner parties or a traditional family lunch

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 6 people.

- A 6-8lb good quality fresh chicken
- Half to three quarters of a loaf of white bread, made into crumbs
- 1 cup of fresh chopped sage
- One large onion, peeled and chopped.
- Two teaspoons of coarse ground black pepper
- Butter
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper

PREPARATION

- Put the breadcrumbs into a large mixing bowl.
- Add the black pepper and a generous pinch of salt.
- Add the sage and, using your hands, ensure that the ingredients are thoroughly mixed.
- Add the onion and mix by hand as above.
- Place a few knobs of butter on the stuffing, and gently turn into the mixture by hand.
- Place a good sized knob of butter in the carcass of the chicken together with a pinch of black pepper.
- Stuff the bird by hand (any stuffing that is left over can be frozen).
- Tie the legs tightly together with string.
- Smear the breast and leg joints with butter, sprinkle salt and pepper over the bird.
- Wrap the bird in aluminium foil.

COOKING

Place in a roasting pan into a preheated 180 degree oven. The total cooking time is 25 minutes per pound plus another 25 minutes. Do not forget that the stuffing **must be included in the weight** (this will probably add another pound).

Approximately 45 minutes before the bird is cooked, open up the aluminium to expose the bird; thereby allowing it to brown. Baste regularly.

Note in order to check the bird is cooked, perform the following tests:

- Stick a knife into the thick underside of the leg, the juices that run from this must be clear (if they are pink the bird is not yet cooked)
- Grasp the tip of the leg between thumb and forefinger (**yes it is hot! So use a cloth**) move it; the leg should move freely but the bird should not, if the bird moves then it is not cooked.

Keep cooking until the bird is cooked (**your guests would prefer to wait rather than get food poisoning**).

Allow to stand for 10 minutes before carving.

TIPS

Do not use a frozen chicken as the birds tend to look very flaccid and sorry for themselves once they are defrosted. I recommend you purchase a fresh bird from a good quality butcher, not supermarket, so that you can see it without being covered in clingfilm. Additionally, make sure you take the giblets with you as they will provide the stock for the gravy (please refer to my recipe for giblet gravy).

I happen to enjoy this dish with a boiled gammon (see boiled gammon recipe page 159); it is a most excellent and hearty combination. Additionally, serve with roast potatoes, giblet gravy, Brussels sprouts and cranberry sauce.

Roast Leg of Lamb

PREAMBLE

My father taught me a very bad habit when cooking this dish. When the joint is three quarters cooked cut a thick slice of bread, dip it in the fat and sprinkle salt and pepper over it then eat it. The ultimate in taste sensation, but probably a bit suspect with respect to cholesterol levels. I would suggest that you don't tell your cardiologist about this.

INGREDIENTS

One leg should serve 4 people, should you have more guests then cook more than one leg. Do not buy an oversized leg as it is unlikely to have come from a tender, young lamb, and will be as tough as shoe leather.

- 1 leg of lamb, approximately 5lbs in weight.
- Sprigs of fresh rosemary.
- 4 bayleaves.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Make a number of incisions in the fat part of the lamb, approximately 1 inch wide and 1½ inches deep.
- Insert the sprigs of rosemary and bayleaves into the incisions.
- Salt and pepper the joint.
- Place on a roasting rack in a roasting tray, fat side up.

COOKING

Place the joint in an oven, preheated to 180 degrees. Roast for 25 minutes per pound, basting regularly.

Allow to stand for 10 minutes before carving.

TIPS

When choosing your leg make sure it is covered in a good layer of fat, do not have it trimmed.

Serve with roast potatoes, carrots, peas and of course mint sauce (see page 320).

Roast Loin of Pork with Stuffing

PREAMBLE

This is a splendid dish, ideal for the traditional Sunday lunch or a dinner party. Cold leftovers make scrumptious sandwiches.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 6 people.

- A 6lb rolled loin of pork, boned and scored.
- Half a loaf of white bread, made into crumbs
- 1 cup of fresh chopped sage
- One large onion, peeled and chopped.
- Two teaspoons of coarse ground black pepper
- Salt

PREPARATION

Put the pork in a deep roasting pan. Rub a generous quantity of salt over the rind of the pork (this enhances the crackling process), put into the oven as per “Cooking” below.

Prepare the stuffing whilst the pork is roasting.

- Put the breadcrumbs into a large mixing bowl.
- Add the black pepper and a generous pinch of salt.
- Add the sage and, using your hands, ensure that the ingredients are thoroughly mixed.
- Add the onion and mix by hand as above.
- Place a cloth over the bowl and set aside.

COOKING

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees, put the pork in. It is vital that the oven is hot, otherwise the crackling will not crackle!

The cooking time will be 25 minutes per pound. The stuffing will take 45 minutes to cook.

45 minutes before the pork is ready, take it out of the oven. The roasting pan should have a good layer of melted fat from the pork. Put the joint onto a plate. Add the stuffing into the roasting pan, and mix thoroughly with the melted fat. Should the mixture appear a little dry, then add some water.

Push the stuffing mixture into a form that ensure as much of it as possible lies under the pork. Put the pork on top of the stuffing.

Place the dish back in the oven and cook for 45 minutes.

When the pork is cooked place it on a large serving dish. Stir the stuffing thoroughly in the roasting pan to ensure all the meat juices are absorbed. Spoon out the stuffing and lay it around the pork.

TIPS

I have opted for a loin of pork as this, to my view, is the most suitable for roasting; providing a good amount of fat for succulent moist stuffing.

Go to your trusted butcher and ask him for a loin of pork with a good layer of fat, the weight should be approximately 6lbs after it is boned. Ask him to bone and roll the loin, and to score the rind (this will provide good bite size pieces of crackling).

Serve the pork with roast potatoes, Brussels sprouts, gravy and apple sauce.

Roast Saddle of Lamb

PREAMBLE

This part of the lamb is the double loin taken to the tail. This is a most splendid dish to serve at a dinner party; it impresses both the palette and the eyes when served. Indeed we served it last Saturday, it was pronounced a success by all.

I was discussing it with the butcher when collecting it, and he said that it is not ordered that often these days; apparently people are too lazy, and settle for loin chops or cutlets from the supermarket. Well I say, more fool them!

As with all joints of meat, make sure you find a butcher you can trust to provide you with the quality needed for a succulent and tender joint. With this particular dish, ensure that you have him insert the two kidneys one on either side of the backbone in the part nearest the tail. This is easily done by making an incision with a knife, pushing them halfway in and securing them with a wooden skewer.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 6 people.

- 1 saddle of English lamb (trussed for roasting), approximately 7lbs-8lbs in weight (don't forget to dress it with the kidneys for decoration!).
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- 8 whole cloves of fresh garlic, peeled.
- A handful of fresh rosemary sprigs.
- A handful of fresh bayleaves.
- 2 teaspoons of English mustard powder.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

You should prepare the joint the morning before you cook it, to allow the flavours to permeate the meat.

- Place the joint upside down and insert (at even intervals), into the folds of fat/meat on the underside, the cloves of garlic.
- Turn the meat over and place into a suitably sized roasting pan.
- Using a sharp knife make 45 degree incisions to the horizontal (deep enough to accommodate half the length of a bayleaf) into the upper side of the joint, on either side of the backbone at 1½ inch intervals.

- Pour over a generous measure of olive oil, and massage into the joint (use your fingers, very sensual!).
- Insert into each slit a bayleaf and sprig of rosemary, half the bayleaf and rosemary sprig should be protruding.
- Sprinkle the mustard powder evenly over the joint.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Place in the fridge for a good 6 hours.

COOKING

Place the joint in an oven, preheated to 180 degrees. Allow 20-25 minutes per pound cooking time, depending on whether you prefer it a little pink or not.

Baste thoroughly at regular intervals. Should the meat appear to be cooking too fast, as can happen if you are using a fan oven, then turn the heat down to 160 degrees.

When cooked, remove from the oven and place the joint on a serving plate.

Allow to rest 10 minutes before carving.

TIPS

Carving may appear to be a little daunting, don't worry. Do not attempt to carve across the backbone, you will achieve nothing!

Instead carve small slices at 45 degrees to the backbone. Starting furthest away from the tail, with the sharpest end of the knife pointing outwards from the backbone but towards the tail.

Serve with rosemary roast potatoes (see page 264), peas, carrots, roast parsnips (see page 262), a good lamb stock gravy and mint sauce (see page 320).

Sailor's Stew

PREAMBLE

This dish comes from Sweden, well my girlfriend to be precise. She would sometimes bring a pot of this around, when we lived in Stockholm, and we would heat it up after coming back from one of the local bars.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve between 4-6 people.

- 2lbs of lean stewing steak, cut into thin slices.
- 2 bay leaves
- ½ a pint of beef stock
- 4 good sized potatoes, peeled and sliced into ¼ inch slices
- ½ a pint of stout
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced
- Butter
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

PREPARATION

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a frying pan over a medium heat.
- Add the onion and cook gently until soft.
- Add the meat and sauté gently until brown.
- Place a layer of the meat and onions in the bottom of a casserole dish. Place a layer of potatoes on top of this, then add another layer of meat and onions. Repeat the process, making sure that the final layer is made up of potatoes.
- De glaze the frying pan with the stock and stout, add a little salt and pepper. Pour this over the meat and potatoes in the casserole. Push the bay leaves into the sides of the casserole. Put a lid on the casserole.

COOKING

Put the casserole into an oven, preheated to 160 degrees, and cook for approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

TIPS

Serve this with crusty bread and a robust claret.

Sautéed Kidneys in Cream

PREAMBLE

I enjoy kidneys, and would like to see them served in more restaurants. This dish, or rather a version of this, used to be served in our local Spanish restaurant (El Patio) now sadly closed.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 16 lambs' kidneys, halved and cored.
- Butter
- ½ a pint of double cream
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce
- 2 tablespoons of French mustard
- 1 glass of good quality brandy.
- 1 glass of white wine.
- 4 shallots, peeled and sliced.
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- 8oz of button mushrooms, sliced.
- 1 teaspoon of paprika pepper.
- 4 tablespoons of fresh parsley, chopped.
- 1 teaspoon of coarse ground black pepper.
- Salt to taste.

COOKING

- Melt a very generous knob of butter in a large frying pan.
- Add the garlic, black pepper and shallots, sauté gently over a medium heat.

- When the shallots begin to soften add the mushrooms.
- When the mushrooms begin to soften add the kidneys.
- After about 5 minutes add the mustard together with a few drops of Worcestershire and Tabasco sauce, stirring in thoroughly.
- After approximately 1 minute add the brandy.
- After about 1 minute add the white wine.
- Stir in the paprika, salt and parsley.
- Pour in the cream, simmer for 2 minutes whilst stirring thoroughly.
- Add a knob of butter and stir it in.

Serve.

TIPS

This is excellent served with boiled rice or sautéed potatoes.

Sautéed Calves Liver

PREAMBLE

As a child I held a particular aversion to liver, the tasteless overcooked shoe leather presented by my school's catering staff did much to prejudice me against this dish. However, as I grew older and experienced a wider world of cuisine I learnt to appreciate and enjoy this dish; as I hope you will do.

INGREDIENTS

The ingredients are, per person.

- 8oz of thinly sliced calves liver.
- Butter
- Flour
- Three shallots, peeled and sliced.
- Two cloves of crushed garlic.
- Two glasses of white wine.
- Coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

Thoroughly flour the liver.

COOKING

- Melt a generous knob of butter in a frying pan, add the garlic, shallots and black pepper; sauté gently over a medium heat.
- When the shallots begin to soften put the liver in the pan, and sauté gently for a three minutes or so on each side; the liver should be pink in the centre. Overcooking will toughen it up.
- Add the wine, and allow the liquid to reduce by a quarter; serve.

TIPS

This dish is complimented by either mashed or sauté potatoes.

Shepherd's Pie

PREAMBLE

Anyone who has been through the British school system will remember Shepherd's Pie. However, I hope you will find this to be more appetising and enjoyable than those rather sad, dry versions served up during school days.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of lean minced lamb
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped
- 4 cloves of crushed garlic
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of tomato puree
- 1 teaspoon of cornflour
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce
- 2 teaspoons of English mustard powder
- Half a pint of lamb stock
- 2 teaspoons of propriety Madras curry powder
- 4 medium sized potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 4oz of butter
- One cupful of grated, good quality, mature English Cheddar
- 2 teaspoons of black pepper
- Salt to taste

PREPARATION

- Pour the olive oil into a good sized saucepan, enough to cover the bottom. Place over a medium heat.

- When the oil is hot add the garlic, onion and black pepper.
- Stir constantly, when the onion begins to soften add the lamb.
- Stir regularly.
- When the meat has browned; add the mustard, curry powder, cornflour and a few drops of Worcestershire and Tabasco sauce.
- Stir thoroughly, add the stock, tomato puree and a pinch of salt.
- Turn down the heat and simmer for approximately 45 minutes, stir occasionally. Spoon the mixture into a suitably sized casserole dish.
- Simmer the potatoes in a saucepan of salted water until cooked.
- Drain; add the butter, a pinch of salt and black pepper. Mash the mixture.
- Spoon the mash on top of the meat, ensure that it is covered evenly. Use a fork to even it out and create a ridged pattern.
- Sprinkle the grated cheese on top, add a pinch of black pepper and a liberal dose of Worcestershire sauce.

COOKING

Place in the oven preheated to 180 degrees. Cook for 45 minutes.

TIPS

The dish can be prepared a day before you need it, if you keep it in the fridge.

Serve with the vegetables of your choice.

Spaghetti Bolognese

PREAMBLE

A beloved dish from student days.

INGREDIENTS

This recipe should serve between 4-6 people.

- 2lbs of lean minced beef
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 8oz of flat cap mushrooms, sliced thickly.
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped.
- 4 cloves of garlic, crushed.
- 4 bay leaves
- 4 tablespoons of tomato puree
- 6 medium sized tomatoes, roughly chopped.
- ½ of a pint of beef stock
- Worcestershire sauce
- 6 tablespoons of fresh chopped basil
- 1 glass of Blossa Glögg (a Swedish fortified wine), use red wine if you can't find this.
- 2 tablespoons of sugar.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

Have a drink.

COOKING

- Pour the olive oil into a suitably sized saucepan, enough to cover the base, and place over a medium heat.

- When the oil is hot, add the onion and garlic.
- When the onion begins to soften, add the mushrooms and basil; stir the mixture.
- As the mushrooms begin to soften, add the meat.
- Allow the meat to brown a little, then add the tomatoes.
- Pour in the stock and stir.
- Add the bay leaves, Glögg, tomato puree, sugar, a few drops of Worcestershire sauce and salt/pepper to taste.
- Place the lid on the saucepan and allow to simmer for approximately 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

Cook the spaghetti in accordance with your preference, eg soft. Serve and enjoy.

TIPS

I find a good sized knob of butter on each serving of Bolognese enhances its texture and flavour. Freshly grated parmesan is a must.

Spaghetti Carbonara

PREAMBLE

When I was a trainee accountant in London, no evening out with my fellow “would be” accountants was complete without an end of evening spaghetti carbonara to absorb the alcohol. An excellent source of protein and carbohydrate for hungry 20 something’s.

I have come across some very strange versions of this dish; some include mushrooms others even add peas, how bizarre. Oddly enough, one of the best carbonaras I have tasted was a few years later in an Italian restaurant in Seoul. I washed it down with Chianti (Hannibal Lector was popular then).

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 1-1½lbs (dry weight) of spaghetti, use the long kind. Adjust the weight according to your appetite, I err as always on the side of generosity (always overfeed your guests, never underfeed).
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- 1lb of thick cut rashers of smoked streaky bacon (rindless), this should be quite thick (1/4 of an inch) and then chopped into 1 inch strips.
- 6 eggs.
- Butter.
- ¼ of a pint of double cream.
- 8oz of freshly grated Parmesan cheese.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

PREPARATION

- Begin to cook the spaghetti in sufficient time before preparing the sauce, so that the two parts come together at the same time.
- Mix the eggs thoroughly with the cream.

COOKING

- Pour a little olive oil into a saucepan and add a good sized knob of butter, place over a medium heat.

- When the butter has melted add the bacon, stir constantly.
- When the bacon is cooked, but not crispy, turn the heat down very low and pour in the egg/cream mixture stirring constantly (make sure you keep the heat as low as possible, do not allow the mixture to scramble/coagulate).
- Immediately add the parmesan cheese and stir, the parmesan should start to melt.
- Take off the heat.
- Drain the spaghetti, put back into the saucepan.
- Add the salt and pepper to the sauce, stir and pour over the spaghetti.
- Toss to mix, serve.

TIPS

This can be served as a starter or main course.

Serve each portion with freshly grated Parmesan cheese, a generous knob of butter and (if you wish to add richness) a raw egg yolk (in half an egg shell) placed in the centre of each portion. To drink, what else but Chianti.

Spicy Asian Chicken

PREAMBLE

The word curry is used by many as a catch all phrase to cover tikka, madras, karai or indeed any dish that purports to come from the Indian subcontinent. The ignorance of the cuisine from this part of the world extends to the political “elite”. I seem to recall that one of our so called political leaders recently said that the national dish of Britain was the chicken koorma. How pathetic, I doubt that there is any research that backs this up.

I have therefore avoided using the word curry here. I have given this a rather amorphous name because this dish does not come from a specific region, it is combination of chillies and some of the spices that are common in Asian cuisine; it cannot be attributed to any specific area.

I like food with a bite, however some of you may find strength of this dish not to your taste (too weak/too strong). The strength of the dish can be changed by adjusting the quantity of chillies.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of fresh chicken breasts, cut into generous sized cubes.
- ½ a pint of chicken stock.
- 6 large tomatoes, coarsely chopped.
- 6 cloves of garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped.
- 1 large onion, peeled and coarsely chopped.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- 1 tablespoon of mango chutney.
- 6 long thin fresh red chillies, coarsely chopped.
- 6 long thin fresh green chillies, coarsely chopped.
- 3 teaspoons of freshly grated ginger.
- Tabasco sauce.
- 3 tablespoons of tomato puree.
- 2 tablespoons of turmeric.

- 1 teaspoon of ground coriander.
- 2 cinnamon sticks.
- 1 teaspoon of ground cumin.
- 1 teaspoon of sugar.
- Juice of a freshly squeezed lemon.
- 2 teaspoons of black pepper.
- Salt to taste.

COOKING

- Pour the olive oil into a saucepan, enough to cover the base. Place over a medium heat.
- When the oil is hot add the black pepper, garlic, chillies and onion. Stir.
- When the onion begins to soften add the chicken and stir.
- When the chicken has changed from pink to a pale white add all the other dry ingredients.
- Stir thoroughly then add the tomatoes and mango chutney.
- Pour in the stock and add the tomato puree.
- Place a lid on the pan and simmer for an hour, stirring occasionally.

TIPS

Serve with rice. The accompaniments should include (but not necessarily be limited to), mango chutney, desiccated coconut, sliced tomatoes, sliced onions and raisins.

Steak and Kidney Pudding

PREAMBLE

This dish is also known as “baby’s head pudding”, so called because of the shape and the cloth wrapping used (in some versions) to cover the top.

This dish sometimes has rather a bad press, I heard in one American sitcom the phrase “kidney pudding” used in a disparaging way to mock British cuisine. I suspect the reason why some people shudder when they see it, or hear its name, is their concentration on the kidney element; coupled with a bad experience probably at school with a mass catered version. The kidneys should be used in a sensible way to enhance the flavour, rather than dominate it. In my experience unpleasant tasting puddings are caused by one, or both, of the following:

- Excess proportions of kidneys in the dish.
- The use of ox kidneys rather than lamb’s kidneys. Ox kidneys have a much more powerful flavour than lamb’s, and are totally unsuitable for this dish.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 1½lbs of lean stewing steak, cubed.
- 3 lambs kidneys, cut into quarters with the white core removed.
- 1 pint of beef stock.
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped.
- 4oz of flat cap mushrooms, cut into 1 inch cubes.
- 1 glass of sherry.
- 1 teaspoon of English mustard powder.
- ¼ of a pint of double cream.
- 8oz of flour
- Water
- 4 oz of shredded suet
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Mix the flour and suet together with a pinch of salt and pepper. Add some cold water, a little at a time, until the mixture forms a firm soft dough. Should you add a little too much, then add some more flour and suet until you achieve the desired result.
- Cut 1/3 of the dough off and place to one side.
- Flour a working surface.
- Roll out the main portion of the dough into a circle just over ½ an inch thick.
- Place this into a standard sized pudding basin (it must have an outside lip) and line the base and sides. Pack it down with you hands to ensure snug fit. Allow an overlap of dough at the top.
- Put the meat, onions and mushrooms into the pudding in alternate portions. Pack down firmly.
- Mix the stock with the mustard and a pinch of salt and black pepper.
- Pour into the pudding leaving just enough room for the sherry and cream. Any stock left over can be heated up and served as a light gravy.
- Pour in the sherry, and spoon the cream over the top.
- Roll out the remaining portion of dough into a circle just over ½ an inch thick.
- Place on top of the pudding and seal it, any excess overhang can be trimmed off.
- Take a square of aluminium foil (large enough to more than cover the top of the pudding) and crimp and fold over the centre by an inch (this allows for expansion). Place on top of the pudding and tie it around the lip of the basin.

COOKING

- Place the pudding in a large saucepan of cold water, the water must be no more than 1½ inches from the top of the basin (to prevent the water boiling into the pudding).
- Bring to the boil then place a lid on the saucepan and simmer for 4 hours. Remember to top the water level up during the process.

When the pudding is cooked remove the foil and serve in the basin (I never bother trying to turn the pudding out as that is a recipe for disaster).

TIPS

Serve with mashed potato and Brussels sprouts or peas.

Steak Diane

PREAMBLE

A romantic meal for two.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 good quality sirloin steaks (between 8oz-10oz in weight)
- 1/4 of a pint of double cream
- 2 cloves of crushed garlic.
- 6oz of sliced button mushrooms
- 4 shallots, peeled and sliced
- 2oz of butter
- 2 tablespoons of French mustard
- 1 wine glass of good quality brandy, eg Remy Martin VSOP
- 1 glass of red wine
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Make sure you ingredients are prepared, and to hand. The time taken to cook the sauce is only a few minutes longer than to grill the steaks (dependant on how rare you like them).

COOKING

- Melt the butter in a large frying pan over a medium heat.
- Add the shallots and garlic.
- When the shallots begin to soften add the mushrooms, turn them over regularly.
- When the mushrooms have begun to soften, begin to grill the steaks.

- Add the French mustard, Worcestershire sauce and Tabasco sauce; stir thoroughly.
- Add the brandy, be careful it may ignite. This is not problem so long as you don't set fire to anything else.
- Add the wine and turn the heat up for two minutes to reduce the liquid.
- Add the cream and turn the heat down. Stir thoroughly for a few minutes, adding the salt and black pepper.

The sauce and steaks should now be ready. Place the steaks on a plate and pour a little of the sauce over them; leaving some in a sauce boat. Serve immediately.

TIPS

Make sure when you buy your steaks they have come from beef that has been hung for 3 weeks. The bright red packets of steak that you see in supermarkets may look appetising but that is merely a sign that they have not been properly hung. Should you buy these you will have a steak the consistency of shoe leather and you will spend the rest of your romantic evening picking the sinews out of your teeth.

This dish is complemented by sauté potatoes or French fries, together with a side salad.

Swedish Meatballs

PREAMBLE

I cannot possibly claim to have lived in Sweden without passing on a recipe for Swedish meatballs.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 2lbs of lean minced beef.
- 8oz of lean minced pork.
- ¼ of a pint of milk.
- 1 egg.
- 4oz of breadcrumbs.
- 1 large onion, peeled and grated.
- Butter.
- Flour.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Pour the milk into a mixing bowl.
- Add the breadcrumbs and let them soak up the milk for about 30 minutes.
- Add the egg and mix.
- Add the minced meat, salt, pepper and onion, stir until thoroughly mixed.
- Flour your hands then roll out the meatballs which should be approximately just under 1 inch in diameter (they should not be too big, otherwise they will need too much time to cook and will burn).

COOKING

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a frying pan.

- Add some meatballs, leave enough space for turning them in the pan.
- Sauté over a medium heat until brown, this will probably take around 8 minutes.
- Place in a serving dish and keep warm in the oven whilst you cook the remaining batches.

TIPS

Serve the Swedish way with boiled, mashed or sauté potatoes, gurnies, lingonberry jam and a salad.

Vegetables

Recipes for vegetable dishes that make perfect accompaniments to the main courses.

Bubble and Squeak

PREAMBLE

I feel a bit of a lecture coming on:

Do you know what, in my opinion, is one of the worst attributes of modern Western civilisation?

Waste!

We kid ourselves that we live in a world of abundance, where the “tab” will be picked up by someone else. This is especially true when it comes to food; the amount that we waste here in the West when others go hungry is truly scandalous.

My parents lived through the war, and therefore fully understand the principle of making the most of what you have got. War time rations were, for example; 2oz of butter per person per week, 1 egg per person per week.

I was brought up never to waste food, leftovers can always be used. Here is such a recipe, so called by the way because it bubbles and squeaks when you cook it.

Lecture over, back to the cooking!

INGREDIENTS

The number of people this serves depends very much on how much leftovers you have.

- Approximately 6oz of cooked potato per person; leftover boiled, mashed or roast will do.
- Approximately 6oz of cooked Brussels sprouts or cabbage per person.
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped.
- Lard.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste.

PREPARATION

Mix the potato, onions, greens, salt and pepper roughly with a fork in a mixing bowl. If the potatoes you are using were not originally mashed, then break them up coarsely with a fork first.

COOKING

- Melt a large knob of lard in a good sized frying pan. Add the bubble mixture and flatten down with a fish slice.
- Press the mixture down at intervals, and flip a fish slice size over every so often.

When the mixture has developed a crunchy brown coat it is cooked.

TIPS

This is excellent for breakfast, lunch or supper. I recommend you serve it with thick cuts (1/4 of an inch) of smoked back bacon, which should be fried in a pan. Fried eggs can also be added.

Chips

PREAMBLE

Here is my method for cooking perfect chips, these do not in any way resemble the fat laden reconstituted potato “fries” served by fast food outlets and some chains of restaurants.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for two people.

- Two good sized King Edward potatoes, peeled and cut into ½ inch wide chips along the length of the potato.
- Corn oil.

COOKING

- Pour the oil into a deep saucepan, until 1/3rd full. Under no circumstances pour more than this amount into the pan, oil should be treated with great respect when cooking with it. Overfilling the saucepan will increase the chances of the oil bubbling over the top and catching fire.
- Place the pan over a medium heat, and bring the oil up to the cooking temperature. This can be tested by putting a chip into the oil, the correct temperature is reached when the chip bubbles to the surface. Note under no circumstance should the oil smoke, this is a sign that the temperature is too high and increases the risk of the oil catching fire. Should your oil smoke, turn the temperature down.
- When the oil has reached the optimum temperature, add the chips in small batches. Do not tip them all in at once, as this may cause the oil to splash.
- Cook for around 7 minutes or so, until the chips are a light golden brown. Adjust the temperature to maintain the “bubble”.
- Turn the heat off, and remove the chips with a slatted spoon or scoop. Place them on a rack to drain for a minute; then serve.

TIPS

Should you be worried about putting on weight, then reduce the amount of salt that you put on the chips. The salt stimulates your body’s uptake of sugar, and consequently increases your weight gain.

As I have already noted, oil must be treated with respect. Here are a few tips to help you cook with oil safely:

- Do not fill the pan with oil by more than a 1/3rd.

- Do not allow the oil to overheat, smoking oil is sign that the temperature is too high.
- Do not leave the kitchen when cooking with oil, a fire can take hold very quickly. Ignore phone calls and the television when cooking with oil.
- If you are splashed with hot oil when cooking, put the affected area under a tap of cold running water immediately.
- Should the oil catch fire, under no circumstances pour water onto it; the water will cause the oil to explode from the pan, and you will have made a bad situation worse. Instead, turn the heat off, cover the pan with a damp towel or with the lid of the pan. If you have a foam, or CO₂, fire extinguisher use that at the base of the fire; not at the centre as this will spray the oil everywhere. Call the fire brigade.

Continental Style Shallots and Tomatoes

PREAMBLE

A very pleasant alternative to the standard pea and carrot accompaniment to meat dishes.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 servings.

- 16 shallots, peeled.
- 6 medium tomatoes, coarsely chopped.
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed.
- 2 bayleaves.
- 1 glass of white wine.
- ¼ of a pint of chicken stock.
- 1 tablespoon of finely chopped basil.
- Butter.
- 4 cloves.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Blanch the shallots in boiling water for 1 minute.
- Drain and shake off excess water.

COOKING

- Melt a very generous knob of butter in a saucepan, over a medium heat.
- Add the garlic and shallots, sauté very gently.
- When the shallots begin to go soft add the tomatoes.
- Stir, and allow the tomatoes to soften.
- Add the wine, stock and remaining ingredients.

- Stir thoroughly, and simmer with the lid on for 30 minutes.

Serve.

TIPS

This makes an excellent vegetable accompaniment for grills such as lamb cutlets or steaks.

Devilled Potatoes

PREAMBLE

Spice up the traditional baked potato.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4 people.

- 4 good sized baking potatoes, washed.
- 6oz of butter
- 12 cocktail sausages
- 3-4 teaspoons of cayenne pepper (adjust according to your preference)
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper

PREPARATION

- Bake the potatoes in a 180 degree oven until cooked, this should take around 1 hour 20 minutes (depending on the size of the potatoes).
- Cut the potatoes in half, and scoop out the centres (carefully without damaging the skins) into a mixing bowl.
- Add the butter, cayenne pepper, a few dashes of Worcestershire sauce and Tabasco sauce, a pinch of salt and a generous pinch of black pepper; mix thoroughly.
- Scoop the mixture into the potato skins.
- Place 3 cocktail sausages in each potato (at 90 degrees to the longest side of the potato), press down so that only the top half of the sausages are visible.

The potatoes can be prepared in advance, and stored for a few hours in the fridge until needed. I would not recommend storing for more than a few hours as they will gradually dry out.

COOKING

- Place the potatoes on a baking tray, put a good sized knob of butter on each one and sprinkle a few pinches of cayenne pepper on each.

- Place in the oven, preheated to 180 degrees and cook for approximately 20-25 minutes until golden brown.

TIPS

Ideal as a light lunch or supper dish.

Remember to eat your skins, they are an excellent source of vitamin C.

Eggy Baked Potatoes

PREAMBLE

Cheap, cheerful and a delicious source of protein and carbohydrate.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve 4 people.

- 4 large baking potatoes, washed and scrubbed.
- 4 eggs.
- Butter
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Bake the potatoes until cooked in a 180 degree oven, this normally takes around 1 hour 20 minutes.
- Cut ½ an inch off the top of the potatoes.
- Carefully scoop out the inside and spoon into a mixing bowl.
- Place the cases on a baking tray and set to one side.
- Mash the scooped potato with a good measure of butter, salt and pepper.
- Spoon the mashed potato back into the cases.
- Make an indentation in the centre of each potato, enough room to accommodate an egg in each.
- Put a knob of butter in each indentation.
- Carefully break an egg into each potato, don't break the egg yolk.
- Sprinkle with a little black pepper.

COOKING

- Place the potatoes in an oven preheated to 180 degrees.
- Bake for 20-25 minutes until the eggs are set.

TIPS

These are ideal for lunch or a late night snack.

These can be prepared some hours before being finished off in the oven, don't add the egg though until the last minute. You may wish to sprinkle some good quality grated mature cheddar onto the eggs before you put them into the oven.

You can place the tops that you cut off on the baking tray as well, sprinkle with a little cheese and chopped bacon and cook with the eggy potatoes; et voila savoury potato wedges!

Eva's Kisir Salad

PREAMBLE

I saw Eva making this the other day and asked her what it was. She said it is a special salad that she first had when she visited Turkey some years ago. Subsequently, when she was working on a project with Turkish immigrants in Sweden, this would often be prepared in the project kitchen by the members of the project.

I have tried it and must confess, that although I am not a great fan of salads, think it is rather good.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve four people (feel free to adjust the quantities of ingredients to suit your specific tastes):

- 8oz of bulgur (a form of cracked wheat available from your local Turkish shop)
- 16 cherry tomatoes, halved.
- 1 large jar of pickled sweet red peppers, cut the pepper into sizeable chunks.
- 4 spring onions, chopped.
- 2 shallots, peeled and chopped.
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped.
- A very large (**and I mean large!**) amount of fresh parsley, chopped.
- The juice from 2 fresh lemons.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Soak the bulgur in cold water for an hour.
- Drain
- Put the soaked bulgur into a saucepan, cover with water.
- Bring to the boil then simmer, with the lid on, for 5 minutes.
- Drain and allow to cool.

- Toss all the ingredients, with the exception of the bulgur and oil, in a large salad bowl.
- Add the olive oil according to preference.
- Add the bulgur and toss.

TIPS

This dish can be served as a lunch, in its own right, or as a starter/accompaniment to a dinner.

This can be eaten wrapped in iceberg lettuce, or as it is.

Farmhouse Courgettes

PREAMBLE

I find plain courgettes (ie boiled or sautéed) to be a little bland, so here is a way to enhance their flavour.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4-6 people.

- 6 good sized courgettes, cut into slices approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick.
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 3 cloves of crushed garlic
- 4 shallots, peeled and finely chopped.
- 1lb of tomatoes.
- 6oz of good quality grated cheddar.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper

PREPARATION

- Blanch the tomatoes in boiling water for approximately 2 minutes. Drain, dry and peel the tomatoes; then slice them roughly.
- Pour the olive oil into a large frying pan, enough to cover the base. Place over a medium heat.
- When the oil is hot, add the courgettes. Sauté for a few minutes, turning occasionally, until light brown.
- Set the courgettes to one side. Pour more oil into the frying pan and place over a medium heat.
- Add the shallots, garlic, salt and black pepper to taste.
- When the shallots begin to soften; add the tomatoes. Cook for about 5 minutes.
- Arrange the courgettes, tomatoes and cheese in alternate layers in casserole dish. The final layer should be cheese.

COOKING

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees. This should take around 45 minutes to cook.

TIPS

The dish can be prepared a few hours in advance before you need to bake it.

I find the goes well with lamb or poultry.

Kimchi

PREAMBLE

Kimchi (or kimch'i, sometimes known as gimchi) is in effect the national dish of Korea. At its most basic it is a pickled cabbage; served with every meal, including breakfast. There are many different kimchis; spicy, not so spicy, water kimchi, radish kimchi, cucumber kimchi. All Korean families will have their own recipe.

Although eaten all year round, it is traditionally made in early winter; around the time of the cabbage harvest. So important is this process, that in North Korea the entire population is mobilised to bring in and distribute the cabbage harvest before it freezes. All over the country, housewives and grannies will be busy searching for the best cabbage, the tastiest fish sauce and the freshest vegetables. They will spend hours chopping and seasoning the family's coming year's supply of kimchi.

With the modern world's increasingly fast pace of life, more and more people buy it in a packet from the local supermarket. However, for those of you who wish to taste the fruits of your labour; here is a typical recipe for a 'salad' kimchi (one that will not blow your head off) but which will provide an excellent accompaniment to traditional Korean food such as bulgogi (see recipe).

My thanks to my good friends in Seoul who provided me with this authentic recipe.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 side dishes.

- 1lb of young Chinese cabbage leaves.
- 1 tablespoon of salt.
- 1 tablespoon of oriental shrimp sauce, you will find this in an oriental supermarket as it's widely used in Chinese and Southeast Asian cooking
- 1 tablespoon of chilli powder
- 1 tablespoon of sugar.
- 1 tablespoon of chopped fresh garlic.
- ½ tablespoon of chopped fresh ginger.
- 2 tablespoons of sesame seeds.
- 1 tablespoon of sesame oil.

PREPARATION

- Rub the salt into the cabbage and set aside for about 20 minutes, this will allow the cabbage to soften.
- Mix together the remaining ingredients, as a sort of salad dressing, and mix with the cabbage. You can also add cucumber and/or spring onion leaves for more zest. Both should be cut into 2 inch lengths, then quartered.

You have the option of eating this immediately or storing it in the fridge, in a sealed container, until you require it.

TIPS

As noted, this can be served right away as a side dish. However, it is supposed to start fermenting to acquire the authentic taste; ie the longer you leave it the better it will taste. Traditionally, kimchi was kept all winter outside in underground earthenware kimchi pots, but nowadays people use the fridge. But beware of the smell, it's the oriental equivalent of saving a particularly ripe camembert. Even in Korea, more and more people have a separate kimchi fridge.

Rich Baked Potatoes

PREAMBLE

Potatoes are a very versatile dish; it saddens me as to how many people are stuck in the mindset of fries or mash.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4-6 people.

- 6 good sized potatoes, peeled and sliced into quarter inch slices.
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- 1 pint of milk
- Butter
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Generously butter the inside of a good sized casserole dish.
- Arrange the potatoes and onions in alternate layers in the dish (the last layer being potatoes), sprinkling a very small amount of salt and pepper over each layer.
- Pour the milk over the potatoes, enough to come up to just below the top layer of potatoes.
- Put a few knobs of butter on the top layer of potatoes.

COOKING

Place in the oven preheated to 180 degrees.

Cook for approximately 1 hour; the top of the potatoes should be brown and crunchy, whilst the underside should be soft and creamy.

TIPS

This is quite a rich dish, as such I would recommend that it be served with a lighter meat such as chicken breast or lamb cutlets.

Roast Parsnips

PREAMBLE

No roast beef meal is complete without roast parsnips.

INGREDIENTS

- Allow two medium sized parsnips per person.
- 4oz of butter
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Top and tail the parsnips.
- Peel and quarter them lengthways.
- Cut out the woody centre.

COOKING

- Pour a good quantity of olive oil into a roasting pan (enough to cover the bottom). Add the butter.
- Place in a 180 degree oven.
- When the butter has melted add the parsnips, and turn to ensure that they are covered with the oil/butter mixture.
- Season with the salt and pepper.
- Put in the oven and roast for approximately 45 minutes, turning occasionally, until golden brown.

TIPS

This dish goes well with other roasts such as turkey.

Roast Potatoes

PREAMBLE

I am often disappointed by the lack of attention paid in the preparation of this dish, by restaurants and people holding dinner parties. To my view a poor quality roast potato can spoil the meal. However, for a little effort you will have perfect potatoes every time.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 people.

- 6 good sized potatoes, peeled and quartered.
- 4 oz of lard.
- 4 oz of butter.
- Flour
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

Par boil the potatoes in a saucepan of salted water, do not cook for more than 10 minutes.

Drain the potatoes and lay out in a roasting tray. Allow the steam to freely dispel, this ensures that the potatoes do not disintegrate.

COOKING

- Melt the butter and lard in a roasting pan, place the potatoes in the pan and turn to ensure they are covered in the butter/lard mixture.
- Sieve the flour over the potatoes, enough to coat them.
- Sprinkle the salt and pepper over the potatoes.

Roast in a 180 degree oven for approximately 45-60 minutes, until golden brown. Turn regularly.

TIPS

Any leftovers can be sliced and fried the next day.

Rosemary Potatoes

PREAMBLE

This is a simple variation on the traditional roast potato.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 people.

- 6 good sized potatoes, peeled and quartered.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- A bunch of fresh rosemary.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

Par boil the potatoes in a saucepan of salted water, do not cook for more than 10 minutes.

Drain the potatoes and lay out in a roasting tray. Allow the steam to freely dispel, this ensures that the potatoes do not disintegrate.

COOKING

- Cover the potatoes with a generous quantity of the olive oil.
- Strip the rosemary from the sprigs, by pulling them between thumb and forefinger. Sprinkle a generous amount over the potatoes.
- Put 4 complete rosemary sprigs into the roasting pan.
- Sprinkle the salt and pepper over the potatoes.

Roast in a 180 degree oven for approximately 45-60 minutes, until golden brown. Turn regularly.

TIPS

This dish is excellent with poultry.

Sauté Potatoes

PREAMBLE

Another variation on the ever versatile potato.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4-6 people.

- 6 good sized potatoes, peeled and sliced into ½ inch slices.
- Lard
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

Par cook the potatoes in a saucepan of salted water. The water should be boiling before you put the potatoes in. Cook for no more than 3 minutes (the potato must not over cook, as it will disintegrate when you sauté it). Drain the potatoes, and lay out on a board or working surface. This allows them to cool, and for the steam to dissipate freely (to prevent disintegration).

COOKING

- Melt a generous knob of lard in a large frying pan (placed over a medium heat), enough for a layer of approximately ¼ of an inch of melted fat to form on the base of the frying pan.
- When the melted fat is hot enough (you should see a heat haze shimmering over the pan), place some potatoes in the pan (allow enough space in the pan to be able to turn them over). Sauté turning regularly, with a fish slice, until they are golden brown.

Place them in a warmed serving dish in a hot oven to keep warm. Repeat the above procedure until all the potatoes are sautéed.

Sprinkle with a little salt and pepper, then serve.

TIPS

Serve with poussin, lamb, gammon, Holstein schnitzel, fried eggs; whatever takes your fancy.

Special Mashed Potatoes

PREAMBLE

I have inherited my mother's fondness for this dish, being Irish she has an affinity for the potato. This goes well with such favourites as chicken, sausages, pies, lamb; a myriad of dishes.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 people.

- 4 medium sized potatoes, peeled and quartered.
- 2oz of butter.
- 2 tablespoons of horseradish sauce.
- ¼ of a pint of milk.
- 2-4 tablespoons of double cream, depending on your taste.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Place the peeled/quartered potatoes into a saucepan of cold salted water, until needed (this prevents them discolouring).

COOKING

- Bring the water to the boil then simmer for 20-25 minutes until the potatoes are tender (test with a knife to see that they are cooked properly).
- Drain the potatoes.
- Add the butter and horseradish, mash the potatoes with a fork or mashing tool. Do not use a blender or processor, as this destroys the starch molecules, as you end up with a runny mess closely resembling wallpaper paste.
- Add the milk and cream, whip with a fork to increase the lightness and whiteness of the potatoes (this is achieved by beating in air).
- Season with salt and pepper, folding this in with the fork.

TIPS

The richness and creaminess of this dish can be adjusted to taste by altering the amount of butter, milk and cream.

To make a change to the basic recipe why not add chopped chives or chopped shallots.

Stuffed Aubergine

PREAMBLE

Aubergines, on their own, can be a remarkably boring vegetable. Try this recipe out, it adds flavour and colour.

INGREDIENTS

This serves 4 people.

- 2 aubergines.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- 4 medium tomatoes, coarsely chopped.
- 2 large onions, peeled and chopped.
- 1 teaspoon of chopped parsley.
- 1 teaspoon of chopped basil.
- Breadcrumbs
- Butter
- Freshly grated Parmesan cheese.
- Salt and coarse ground pepper.

PREPARATION

- Cut the aubergines in half.
- Score the inside and sprinkle with salt, leave for 30 minutes (this mellows their flavour).
- Rinse and wipe dry.
- Pour some olive oil into a large frying pan, enough to coat the bottom. Place over a medium heat.
- Gently sauté the aubergines until soft. Take the pan off the heat.
- Remove the aubergines from the pan and carefully (without damaging the skins) remove and pulp the centre; place the skins and pulped centre to one side.
- Place the frying pan back over a medium heat, and add a little more olive oil as necessary.

- Add the onions, salt pepper and herbs, sauté until the onions are soft.
- Add the tomatoes and aubergine, simmer for a few minutes stirring thoroughly.
- Put the mixture into the skins.
- Sprinkle with parmesan cheese and black pepper.

COOKING

Place the stuffed aubergines on a baking tray, and put into an oven preheated to 180 degrees for approximately 15 minutes until brown.

TIPS

Serve as a starter or as a vegetable side dish with a main course, such as lamb.

Stuffed Potatoes

PREAMBLE

Superb for supper, lovely for lunch!

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4 people.

- 4 good sized baking potatoes, washed.
- 4oz of butter
- 8oz of mature English cheddar
- 8oz of smoked streaky bacon, cut into 1 inch pieces
- Worcestershire sauce
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper

PREPARATION

- Bake the potatoes in a 180 degree oven until cooked, this should take around 1 hour 20 minutes (depending on the size of the potatoes).
- Cut the potatoes in half, and scoop out the centres (carefully without damaging the skins) into a mixing bowl.
- Add the butter, cheese, a pinch of salt and a generous pinch of black pepper; mix thoroughly.
- Lightly grill the bacon pieces, stir the pieces into the mixture.
- Scoop the mixture into the potato skins.

The potatoes can be prepared in advance, and stored for a few hours in the fridge until needed. I would not recommend storing for more than a few hours as they will gradually dry out.

COOKING

Place the stuffed potatoes on a baking tray, put a good sized knob of butter on each one and sprinkle a few drops of Worcestershire sauce on each.

Place in the oven, preheated to 180 degrees and cook for approximately 20-25 minutes until golden brown.

TIPS

If you have any vegetarian friends then simply leave the bacon out of their potatoes. Pre prepare the potatoes, go down the pub have a good night out then come back and warm them up in the oven. A nice change from takeaways, and far cheaper!

Stuffed Tomatoes

PREAMBLE

Tomato trivia: did you know that only a few centuries ago people believed that tomatoes were poisonous?.

The tomato was recognised by eminent botanists of the day as being part of a family of poisonous plants. This was challenged by a very brave (or foolhardy) individual (I have forgotten his name), who ate one on the steps of Congress. He did not drop dead as everyone expected, and consequently people began to use tomatoes.

Please feel free to correct me if the above story is inaccurate.

INGREDIENTS

This serves 6 people.

- 6 large beef tomatoes.
- 6 large flat cap mushrooms.
- 4oz of button mushrooms, very finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons of breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon of chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon of chopped basil
- Butter
- 3 shallots, peeled and finely chopped.
- 3 cloves of crushed garlic.
- Salt and coarsely ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Remove the stalks from the flat caps. Finely chop the stalks and add to the chopped button mushrooms.
- Remove the tops from the tomatoes and carefully scoop out the inside core, juice and pips. Set the cases to one side, and discard the core etc.

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a large frying pan. Cook the tops of the flat caps for a few minutes, turning occasionally, until the juices begin to flow. Set the caps to one side.
- Melt a good sized knob of butter in the frying pan over a medium heat. Add the shallots and garlic.
- When the shallots begin to soften; add the chopped mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper. Cook over a medium heat for around 6 minutes.
- Put the cooked shallots and mushrooms into a mixing bowl. Add the parsley, basil, breadcrumbs and egg. Mix thoroughly.
- Stuff the tomatoes, and place a flat cap on top of each.

COOKING

Place the tomatoes on a baking tray and put into a 180 degree preheated oven. They should take about 15-20 minutes to cook.

TIPS

This dish can be prepared several hours before it needs to be cooked in the oven.

It provides a good accompaniment to lamb or poultry. Alternatively, it makes a pleasant tasting starter if you serve each tomato on a circle cut of fried bread.

Savouries and Snacks

Succulent savouries and snacks to whet your appetite or to fill a hole.

Angels on Horsebacks

PREAMBLE

Splendid to serve as a canapé.

INGREDIENTS

This will make 8 devils.

- 8oz of smoked oysters, a good propriety tinned product will be ideal.
- 8 rashers of smoked streaky bacon, rind removed.
- Tabasco sauce.
- Black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Divide the oysters into equal portions of 8.
- Place the rashers flat on a board.
- Sprinkle the rashers lengthways with a little Tabasco sauce and black pepper.
- Place an oyster portion at one end of the rasher.
- Roll the rasher from that end, so that the oyster is in the centre of the roll.
- Skewer the roll with a toothpick.
- Repeat for the remaining rashers.

COOKING

Place the angels on a baking tray.

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees. Bake for 10-15 minutes, until the bacon is sizzling.

TIPS

Serve this with Devils on Horsebacks (see page 281) as a compliment to one another.

Classic Cheese Savoury

PREAMBLE

The savoury, a dish forming an integral part of the meal (usually served after the main course), is not often served nowadays. Places such as my club still offer this dish; though, I must confess when I am eating there with friends I am usually the only person who eats this course. If you are reluctant to include it as part of your dinner party then try it as a light lunch or evening snack.

INGREDIENTS

The quantities below are enough for approximately 2 slices of toast, adjust according to your requirements.

- 2 slices of good quality bread, toasted and buttered.
- 1oz of butter
- 1oz of flour
- 4 tablespoons of milk.
- 4oz of mature cheddar cheese, grated.
- Worcestershire sauce
- Coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Put the butter and flour in a saucepan over a medium heat.
- Stir the mixture thoroughly as the butter melts.
- When the butter has melted, and the flour has been thoroughly mixed in, gradually add the milk.
- When the mixture is hot add the cheese, and stir thoroughly.
- Spoon over hot buttered toast, sprinkle a few drops of Worcestershire sauce over it and a pinch of black pepper.

COOKING

Place under a grill and serve when the cheese has become a golden brown.

TIPS

The above recipe is the basic version, I tend to augment it by adding mushrooms (chopped flat caps fried in butter) and bacon (smoked back bacon grilled, and cut in to pieces) to mixture. Why not throw in a tomato as well?

Corned Beef Hash

PREAMBLE

I ordered this dish once in a restaurant in New York, which was on a list of recommended independent steak houses. The dish was a total disappointment, dry and tasteless. The waiter, who effected an American accent but was in fact a Brit., compounded the offence by not heeding my constructive comments or passing them on to the chef...no tip for you my lad!

Given that a seven year old could cook this without ruining it (I know because I was seven once, and did cook it) I was almost inclined to ask for the chef's recipe and technique to discover the secret of his failure.

However, let us accentuate the positive, here is a recipe that will give you a decent result.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 2 people.

- 1 normal sized can of good quality corned beef.
- Mashed potato, at least double the quantity of corned beef, use leftover mash.
- 1 onion, peeled and finely chopped.
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pint of beef stock.
- Worcestershire sauce.
- Lard.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Mix the mash, corned beef, onion, stock, a generous portion of Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper together in a mixing bowl.

COOKING

- Melt a good sized knob of lard in a large frying pan.
- When the lard is hot add the mixture, and press it down evenly across the pan with a fish slice.
- Keep turning the mixture, in fish slice portions, for about 10 minutes.

- Turn up the heat to brown off the underside, remembering to press down with the fish slice.

TIPS

Serve for lunch, or supper, with fried eggs and maybe bacon.

Devils on Horsebacks

PREAMBLE

Splendid to serve as a canapé.

INGREDIENTS

This will make 8 devils.

- 8oz of chicken livers.
- 8 rashers of smoked streaky bacon, rind removed.
- Cayenne pepper
- Black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Remove the sinews from the livers, place a sinew between thumb and forefinger of one hand and pull the liver off with the other thumb and forefinger.
- Divide the livers into 8 equal portions.
- Place the rashers flat on a board.
- Sprinkle the rashers lengthways with a little cayenne and black pepper.
- Place a liver portion at one end of the rasher.
- Roll the rasher from that end so the liver is in the centre of the roll.
- Skewer the roll with a toothpick.
- Repeat with the remaining rashers

COOKING

Place the devils on a baking tray.

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees. Bake for 10-15 minutes until the bacon is sizzling.

TIPS

Serve this with Angels on Horsebacks (see page 275) to compliment one another.

Omelette (Cheese and Mushroom)

PREAMBLE

I must confess that for quite some years my omelettes were an unqualified disaster area. Usually a combination of some, or all, of the following occurred:

- The underside was overcooked and leathery.
- The omelette broke when I attempted to fold it over.
- The centre (or top side) was a claggy uncooked mess.
- The omelette collapsed into a sorry looking heap when I tried to transfer from the pan to my plate.

I decided that I simply “did not do omelettes”. Well, part of my nature is not to give up (some people would put it more bluntly that I am just a stubborn S.O.B.).

I watched the professionals on TV do their specials, and tried a few in my local Spanish restaurant (El Patio). I found that by making a few simple changes to the cooking procedure I greatly reduced, and indeed eliminated (almost every time!) the risk of the above problems.

At this point, I would add that my father has one more technique, which I don’t use (probably out of sheer laziness); which adds to the fluffiness and volume of the omelette. He separates the yolks from the whites. He whisks the whites until they are stiff, like a meringue, then gently folds in the yolks.

INGREDIENTS

This is per person.

- 3-4 eggs at room temperature, well beaten (by all means use my father’s additional step as noted above).
- 3 flat cap mushrooms, cut into good sized slices.
- Butter.
- 3-4oz of mature Cheddar cheese, grated.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Turn your grill on to full heat (**this must be red hot by the time you have completed the other steps**).

COOKING

- Melt a generous knob of butter, over a medium heat, in a frying pan (select a pan of suitable proportions for the omelette).
- Add the mushrooms, and sauté gently until they are cooked.
- Pour the beaten egg over the centre, and allow it to cover the mixture evenly by moving the pan.
- Sprinkle the salt and pepper evenly over the top.
- Sprinkle the cheese evenly over the top.
- Allow to cook for around 2-3 minutes.
- Take off the heat and place under the grill.
- When the cheese has melted, and starts to gently bubble; the omelette is cooked. Note it should be a little creamy, not dark brown and leathery; so it should not need more than 2 minutes under the grill.
- Remove from the grill, and with a spatula gently ease the sides of the omelette away from the pan.
- Bring your plate to the pan and, holding both at an angle, slide the omelette onto the plate.

TIPS

The nature of the dish is that whilst you may be able to prepare/cook the ingredients, such as mushrooms, in larger batches for several omelettes; each omelette has to be cooked individually. You may keep them on their plates in a warm oven, but the longer you do this increases the chances of them becoming dry and leathery. In essence omelettes are not really suitable for large numbers of people unless they are prepared to eat in batches.

The above recipe uses only cheese and mushrooms. However, there are numerous other ingredients/combinations of ingredients you can use such as:

- Ham
- Tomatoes
- Chorizo
- Bacon
- Sweetcorn
- Sweet red peppers
- Prawns
- Chicken etc.

Experiment, and create your own “signature” omelette.

Potato Dumplings with Bacon

PREAMBLE

I have enjoyed these many times during my visits to Lithuania. They can be served as an appetiser after the soup course (before the main course), or as an accompaniment to the main course. In fact, when really pushing the boat out; have a pre dinner glass of Lithuanian beer and a plate of sliced hog's ears.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4 good sized balls.

- 8oz smoked streaky bacon joint, remove the rind and cut into thick pieces approximately ½ an inch thick by 1 inch long.
- 1 good sized potato, peeled and quartered
- Butter
- A little milk.
- 6oz of flour
- 3oz of suet.
- Cold water
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Simmer the potato in salted water until cooked.
- Add a good sized knob of butter, a little milk, salt and pepper; mash the potato.
- Set to one side, allow to cool to a tepid temperature.
- Mix the flour, suet, salt and pepper.
- Add the potato and then add a little water (a few tablespoons at a time), mix with your hands (**clean hands please**) until the mixture forms a dough.
- Roll out 4 equal sized dough balls.

COOKING

- Put the bacon into a saucepan (large enough to hold the dumplings) of cold water.
- Bring to the boil, then simmer with the lid on for approximately 10 minutes.
- Bring back to boil and put the dumplings in the water.
- Simmer, with the lid on, for approximately 30 minutes.
- Remove the dumplings with a slotted spoon and place on a serving dish. Using the same spoon, extract the bacon; and spoon equal portions of it over the dumplings.

Serve.

TIPS

Should you feel that your guests have suitably hearty appetites then serve as an appetiser or as an accompaniment to say pork chops or smoked sausages. Conversely these make a decent lunch time snack.

Stuffed Peppers

PREAMBLE

This dish adds a dash of Mediterranean colour to your table.

INGREDIENTS

This recipe is for 6 people.

- 6 large peppers (3 green, 3 red)
- 1lb of lean minced beef
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 8oz of flat cap mushrooms, diced.
- 4 shallots, peeled and finely chopped.
- 4 cloves of garlic, crushed.
- 2 bayleaves
- 3 tablespoons of tomato puree
- 4 medium sized tomatoes, roughly chopped.
- ¼ of a pint of beef stock
- Worcestershire sauce
- 4 tablespoons of fresh chopped basil
- 1 glass of Blossa Glögg (a Swedish fortified wine), use red wine if you can't find this.
- 2 tablespoons of sugar.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Cut the tops off the peppers and carefully remove the core and pips (discard the core and pips).
- Put the pepper cases and tops in boiling water, and blanch for approximately 1 minute. Drain and dip the peppers into cold water (this is known as refreshing them). Drain and set aside.

- Pour the olive oil into a large/deep frying pan, enough to cover the base, and place over a medium heat.
- When the oil is hot, add the shallots and garlic.
- When the shallots begin to soften, add the mushrooms and basil; stir the mixture.
- As the mushrooms begin to soften add the meat, allow to brown a little.
- Add the tomatoes, allow to soften a little.
- Pour in the stock and stir.
- Add the bayleaves, Glögg, tomato puree, sugar, a few drops of Worcestershire sauce and salt/pepper to taste.
- Simmer for approximately 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Remove the bayleaves and discard.
- Place the peppers upright into a deep oven dish, spoon the meat into each one.
- Place the tops of the peppers back on.
- Brush a little olive oil over each pepper.
- Cover the dish with a lid, or aluminium foil.

COOKING

Put the stuffed peppers into an oven preheated to 180 degrees. Bake for approximately 40 minutes.

TIPS

The dish can be prepared several hours before you wish to cook it.

This dish makes a good starter or, if you prefer it for lunch, serve it with boiled rice.

Suppertime Spaghetti

PREAMBLE

This is a very simple dish and is very easy to prepare, but will satisfy a healthy appetite. I suppose it is fair to say that this is one of the very first dishes that I honed my culinary skills on, probably around the age of eight or so.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 2 people.

- Spaghetti, use the long variety, weight according to your appetite.
- 2 large onions, peeled and cut into large chunks.
- 4-6 large tablespoons (live a little!) of tomato puree.
- Extra virgin olive oil.
- 1 teaspoon of coarse ground black pepper.
- Salt to taste.

PREPARATION

- Cook the spaghetti, when cooked drain.
- Toss with a some olive oil, and keep warm in the saucepan.

COOKING

- Pour a very generous (**and I mean generous!**) amount of olive oil into a saucepan and place over a medium heat.
- Add the salt and pepper.
- Add the onions and stir thoroughly ensuring they are covered by the oil.
- When the onions have softened lower the heat and add the tomato puree.
- Stir thoroughly and allow to cook for a couple of minutes.
- Pour over the spaghetti and mix, by tossing, thoroughly.
- Put the lid on the saucepan and put over a low heat for 2 minutes

Serve.

TIPS

This is a splendid lunchtime snack or supper dish.

Serve with freshly grated parmesan cheese and a Barola or Chianti.

Tunnbrödsrulle

PREAMBLE

When you read the recipe your first thought will be that I have had one too many, and that I have muddled up several recipes. No, I write this stone cold sober, on a Monday morning sitting on my balcony watching the gardeners cut the grass below.

Eva introduced this one to me when I was living in Stockholm, it is a popular dish provided by the numerous takeaway sausage kiosks dotted around Stockholm. I personally recommend it as an “apres bar” snack. Definitely a change from Chinese or a burger.

My personal thanks to the kiosk opposite Dramaten, at the end of Strandvägen, for feeding me on many a Friday evening.

INGREDIENTS

The ingredients are per person.

- 1 large, soft, round tortilla wrap (the precise name in Sweden is tunnbröd, I have taken the nearest equivalent that you should be able to find outside of Sweden).
- Butter.
- 1 large frankfurter.
- Mashed potato.
- Prawns, cooked and peeled. The quantity is up to the individual, err on the generous.
- Prawn cocktail sauce.
- Coarse ground black pepper.

PREPARATION

- Prepare a batch of mashed potatoes (see page 266).
- Cook the frankfurter(s).

COOKING

- Butter one side of the tortilla and place butter side down in a hot dry pan for two minutes.
- Remove and lay butter side up.
- Spoon a serving of mashed potato into the centre, spread out (1 inch thick) to within an inch of the circumference.

- Place the frankfurter in the middle and press slightly into the mash.
- Spoon the prawns over it (as many as you want).
- Spoon the prawn cocktail sauce over this, then sprinkle with black pepper.
- Fold the wrap (one side over the other).

TIPS

Try this after coming home from the pub, serve it for lunch or at a barbecue. Some Swedes add tomato ketchup, so keep a bottle handy (should Sven or Ulrika be passing by).

Desserts

Delicious desserts to make your mouth water.

Apple Crumble

PREAMBLE

This was one of my mother's favourite ways to use up the glut of cooking apples we had every year from the apple tree in our garden.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve between 4-6 people.

- 2lbs of cooking apples (preferably Bramleys), peeled, cored and sliced.
- Juice of 1 freshly squeezed lemon.
- 8 cloves.
- Nutmeg
- 4oz of butter
- 8oz of flour.
- 8oz of demerara sugar.
- Butter for the dish.

PREPARATION

- Sprinkle the sliced apples with lemon to prevent them going brown.
- Grease a deep oven proof dish with some butter.
- Place the apples in layers (interspersed with the cloves) in the dish.
- Mix the flour and butter together in a bowl, use your hands (**remember to wash them and remove jewellery first!**), until it forms a crumb like texture.
- Add the sugar, and use your hands to mix it well.
- Cover the apples with the mixture, and press down firmly.
- Sprinkle the top with good measure of nutmeg.

COOKING

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees. Cook for 45 minutes or so, until the apples are tender and the top golden brown.

TIPS

Most excellent with double cream, custard or ice cream.

Apple Pie

PREAMBLE

As I have said in another recipe, we had an apple tree in the garden which encouraged my parents to cook and preserve the apples in many forms. Apple pie is reasonably universal; crossing cultures such as Swedish, British and American.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve between 4-6 people.

- 8oz of flour.
- 4oz of butter.
- Approximately 2 tablespoons of water.
- 6 large cooking apples (preferably Bramleys), peeled and sliced.
- 4oz of castor sugar.
- 6 cloves.
- 2 tablespoons of cinnamon.
- The juice of 1 freshly squeezed lemon.
- 1 tablespoon of nutmeg
- 1 beaten egg.

PREPARATION

- As soon as you have peeled and sliced the apples, pour the lemon juice over them ensuring all apples have been in contact with it. This will prevent them going brown.
- Mix the flour and butter together with the water to make a firm dough. Should the mixture need a little more water then add another tablespoon (until the correct consistency is achieved).
- Wrap the dough-ball in cling film and put it into the fridge for 1 hour.
- Cut off one quarter of the dough, and set to one side.
- Roll the larger portion of dough into a circle approximately a ¼ of an inch thick.
- Line an appropriately sized deep pie dish.

- Fill the pie with the apple slices, interspersing with the cloves.
- Sprinkle 3oz of the sugar over the apples.
- Sprinkle the cinnamon over the apples.
- Roll the remainder of the dough into a circle, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch thick.
- Place this on top of the pie.
- Seal the edges and trim the excess.
- Make an incision in the middle, like a cross (this lets the steam out).
- Brush with beaten egg.
- Sprinkle with nutmeg and the remaining sugar.

COOKING

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees for approximately 45 minutes. Bake until golden brown.

TIPS

Scrumptious hot or cold. Serve with double cream, ice cream, custard or just on its own.

Baked Apples

PREAMBLE

My mother often used to cook this dish when I was growing up, it was her way to get a healthy sugar fix.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large cooking apple (such as Bramley) per person (these apples are high in acidity when raw, if you eat them uncooked you will get a stomach ache..I know this from first hand experience!).
- Demerara sugar
- Butter

PREPARATION

- Wash and de-core the apples.
- Place in a roasting dish, buttered on the base.
- Pour demerara sugar into the de-cored centre of each apple, enough so that it overflows down the sides.
- Put a knob of butter on the top of each mound of sugar.

COOKING

Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees. Cook for approximately 45-60 minutes until the apples are tender and the sugar has caramelised.

TIPS

Serve this as a desert (or sugar snack attack) with ice-cream, double cream, custard or whatever takes your fancy.

Bread and Butter Pudding

PREAMBLE

My English readers will no doubt have mixed memories of this dish from school days. Don't despair, I have added a couple of things (namely cream and sherry) that would not have appeared in the school cook's shopping list (well not for the pupils anyway!)

INGREDIENTS

This recipe should be enough for 4-6 people.

- Approximately six medium thickness slices of brown bread (if you need more then use more)
- Approximately six medium thickness slices of white bread
- A cupful of raisins
- Half a pint of double cream
- A quarter pint of milk
- Two eggs
- Two glasses of sherry
- Four tablespoons of demerara sugar
- Two drops of vanilla essence
- Nutmeg
- Butter

PREPARATION

- Butter the bread and cut the crusts off (save the crusts for later).
- Cut the bread into soldiers (approximately 1 inch wide).
- Layer the base and side of a casserole/baking dish (dimensions approximately 5 inches deep, 8 inches in length and 5 inches wide) with the alternate brown and white soldiers (butter side down).
- Sprinkle the few raisins, then place more bread on top (butter side down), press down.

- Repeat the above step with layers of raisins and bread until you come to ½ an inch or so from the top of the dish.
- Mix the milk, cream, eggs, vanilla, sherry and sugar thoroughly.
- Pour the mixture evenly, and slowly, over the bread allowing it to soak in.
- Place the crusts of bread in a pattern over the top of the dish.
- Sprinkle some raisins, sugar and a generous pinch on nutmeg over the top.

COOKING

Place in a preheated 180 degree oven for 45 minutes. Serve piping hot.

TIPS

This dish is very good with either custard or double cream.

Any leftovers can be served cold with ice cream.

Choux Balls with Chocolate

PREAMBLE

I seem to recall first trying this one when I hit double digits (10).

INGREDIENTS

- 2 eggs, beaten
- 4oz of flour
- 4oz of butter, at room temperature
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pint of water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ a pint of double cream

Sauce Ingredients

- 4oz of dark chocolate
- 4oz of caster sugar
- 2oz of cocoa powder.
- 4 tablespoons of water

PREPARATION

- Put the butter and water into a bowl and place over a pan of hot water, do not let the bowl touch the water.
- Mix with a wooden spoon until the butter is melted.
- Gradually add the flour, stirring all the time.
- Once all the flour has been added, start to beat the mixture.
- Once the mixture is smooth and has formed a ball remove from the heat.
- Gradually add the eggs, beating continually.

The mixture should resemble a smooth paste.

COOKING

- Place greased baking paper on top of a baking tray.

- Spoon the mixture onto the paper, make the choux balls approximately 1½ inches in diameter.
- Place in an oven preheated to 160 degrees and bake for approximately 20 minutes until they are crisp and brown.
- Remove from the oven and make a slit three quarters of the way in, squeezing gently between thumb and forefinger just enough to open the ball up a little.
- Allow to cool.

Whilst they are cooling prepare the chocolate sauce:

- Put all of the sauce ingredients in a bowl and place over a saucepan of hot water. Do not let the bowl touch the water, as this will burn the chocolate.
- Stir until they are fully mixed.
- Whip the cream until it is stiff and fill the choux balls.
- Pour the sauce over the balls.

TIPS

Excellent with a well chilled dessert wine. You may wish to add a glass of brandy to the chocolate sauce for added punch.

Pears in Brandy

PREAMBLE

A lovely dish to end a special meal with.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 3-4 ripe pears, peeled and quartered.
- 1 glass of brandy.
- Butter
- ½ a pint of double cream.
- 4 tablespoons of honey.

PREPARATION

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in a frying pan over a medium heat.
- Put the pears into the pan and sauté for a few minutes.
- Add the honey and continue to sauté until the pears start to turn brown.
- Take off the heat.

COOKING

- Put the pears and honey/butter sauce into an oven proof dish.
- Put into an oven, preheated to 180 degrees.
- Cook for 10 minutes, or until they are golden brown.
- Remove from the oven and put back into the frying pan over a medium heat.
- When the sauce begins to bubble add the brandy.
- Stir in the cream.

Remove from the heat and serve.

TIPS

Superb on their own, or with ice cream.

Queen of Puddings

PREAMBLE

A good chum of mine is very fond of this dish, and often serves it at dinner parties. I understand that it was developed for Queen Victoria, hence the title.

INGREDIENTS

- 4oz of breadcrumbs.
- 10oz of caster sugar.
- Zest (grated rind) of 1 fresh lemon.
- 1 pint of milk.
- 4 eggs, separate the yolks from the whites.
- 4 tablespoons of raspberry jam.
- Butter.

PREPARATION

- Mix the breadcrumbs, zest and 2oz of sugar together in a bowl.
- Bring the milk to the boil.
- Blend the milk into the breadcrumb mixture.
- Add the egg yolks to the above mixture and stir thoroughly.
- Generously butter an appropriately sized baking dish.
- Allow to rest for 30 minutes.

COOKING

- Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees, and bake for approximately 40-50 minutes until set.
- Leave the oven on, and increase the temperature to 200 degrees.
- Allow the pudding to stand for 15 minutes.
- Warm the jam and spread over the top of the pudding.

- Place the egg whites in a large bowl and whisk until stiff, the bowl should be able to be inverted without the mixture dropping out.
- Blend in the sugar, gradually, using a wooden spoon. If you drop it in all at once your meringue mixture will lose its stiffness, as the air will be knocked out of it.
- Spoon, with the wooden spoon, the meringue over the top of the pudding.
- Place the pudding back into the oven and bake for approximately 15-20 minutes until the meringue begins to turn golden brown.

TIPS

This is quite a sweet desert and I would suggest you forgo the normal desert wine (which in itself is sweet) in favour of a dry alternative, say Chablis.

Meringues can be a little temperamental. Here are a few technical notes regarding the preparation of meringues:

- The stiffness of the meringue mixture is achieved by adding air to the egg white.
- Should you be making meringue on a humid/muggy day you will not achieve as good a result as on a dry day (**check your barometer before making meringue!**).
- When adding the sugar it should be done gradually so as not to knock the air out.
- Use a wooden spoon, or plastic spatula, when blending the sugar into the egg whites and spooning the mixture. Cold metal spoons bruise the mixture and will not get the results that you desire.

Rice Pudding

PREAMBLE

This dish is a staple from the school kitchens of Britain, I have enriched it.

INGREDIENTS

This should serve between 4-6 people.

- 4oz of rice.
- 3oz of butter, this must be at room temperature.
- 3oz of demerara sugar.
- 1 pint of milk.
- ¼ of a pint of double cream.
- 1 egg yolk.
- Nutmeg.
- Butter for the dish.

PREPARATION

- Butter a deep baking dish.
- Mix the rice, milk, cream, egg yolk, sugar and butter thoroughly and pour into the dish.
- Sprinkle a good measure of nutmeg over the top.

COOKING

Place in an oven, preheated to 160 degrees. Bake for 2½ hours, stirring on an occasional basis.

TIPS

Serve with jam to add a fruity flavour.

Sherry Trifle

PREAMBLE

My father and I have along running disagreement over the method of making this. He believes that the custard should be poured over the sponges before the jelly. I believe that the jelly should go over the sponge first, followed by the custard.

In truth it does not matter in what order you put the custard or jelly in; cooking should be about what you want to do, not what others tell you to do.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 6 people.

- 1 pint of custard, either use my recipe with 6 eggs, or (more sensibly in my opinion) use a propriety brand of powdered custard.
- 4 eggs
- 4oz of flour
- 4oz of butter
- 4oz of sugar
- 1 pint of double cream
- 1 large tin of mixed fruit salad, in syrup.
- 1 propriety slab of fruit jelly (the flavour is up to individual taste) enough to make 1 pint of jelly.
- Fruit jam, flavour up to individual taste.
- Fresh strawberries or glace cherries for decoration.
- 2 wine glasses of good quality sherry.

PREPARATION

Preparations for this dish need to commence the day before you wish to serve it, I am assuming you will be serving this in the evening. The day before you serve it you will need to do the following:

- Mix the flour, eggs, butter and sugar thoroughly.
- Pour into two greased cake tins (approximately 7 inches in diameter, 2 inches deep).

- Place in an oven preheated to 180 degrees.
- Bake for approximately 30 minutes, it should be golden brown and springy if you gently press the centre.
- Turn out from the tins onto a cake rack, and allow to cool.
- When they are cool spread jam on both of the sponges and stick them, jam side facing each other, together.
- Cut into large slices and place into a large crystal trifle dish.
- Pour the sherry over the sponges.
- Make up the jelly, according to the packet instructions except only use $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pint of water.
- When the jelly slab has dissolved add the tin of fruit (including the juice).
- Pour over the sponge.
- Allow to cool, and place in the fridge over night.

The next day, in the morning:

- Make up the custard.
- Allow to cool to a tepid temperature, pour over the jelly.
- Place in the fridge and allow to set.

Two hours, or so, before you need to serve the trifle:

- Whip the cream until stiff.
- Spoon it evenly over the custard.
- Use a fork to make patterns, or use a spoon to smooth it over.
- Decorate with fresh fruit, place in the fridge.

TIPS

Serve with a good quality dessert wine, and argue with your guests over the merits and demerits of putting the jelly or custard in first.

Stocks and Sauces

The finishing touches to your culinary creations.

Apple Sauce

PREAMBLE

Quite honestly I very rarely make my own apple sauce, I buy a large jar of a good brand name and keep it in the fridge. My parents would be appalled at this extravagance, as they always make their own.

Some have described cooking as “an expression of love”; therefore why not show someone that you love them by making your own apple sauce.

This is a classic case of do as I say not as I do!

INGREDIENTS

This should make good sized batch, enough for a dinner party of 6-8 people.

- 6 large cooking apples (preferably Bramleys); peeled, de-cored and diced.
- ¼ of a pint of water.
- 6oz of caster sugar.
- 6 cloves

COOKING

- Put all the ingredients into a saucepan and stir.
- Bring to the boil then put the lid on and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the apples mush into a sauce.

TIPS

This can be served hot or cold, and is an ideal accompaniment to roast pork or roast Eisbein (see recipes).

Beef/Lamb Stock

PREAMBLE

Stocks are an essential element in many of the recipes. I appreciate that most people don't have the time to prepare their own, to this end most mainstream supermarkets offer cartons of stock that are ideal for cooking.

However, for completeness I show below how to make your own; should you have a rainy afternoon with nothing good on the television.

INGREDIENTS

- A good quantity of fresh beef/lamb bones between 2-3lbs in weight (get these from your butcher).
- 2 large carrots, peeled and diced.
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- Bouquet garni (a few fresh sprigs of fresh parsley, thyme and bayleaf tied together)
- Water
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Place the bones, carrots and onions into a roasting pan. Place in an oven, preheated to 180 degrees, roast for 45 minutes.

COOKING

- Tip the roasted bones into a suitably large saucepan.
- Cover with water.
- Add the bouquet garni and season with salt and pepper.
- Simmer (as gently as possible) with the lid on for 4 hours.
- Strain the stock.
- Allow to stand and cool, then skim the top of any scum.

TIPS

This can be frozen until required.

Bread Sauce

PREAMBLE

An excellent accompaniment to game birds, turkey and chicken.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pint of milk
- 1 medium onion, peeled.
- 6 cloves.
- 4oz of white breadcrumbs.
- Butter
- Salt and ground white pepper, to taste.

COOKING

- Stud the onion with the cloves.
- Pour the milk into a saucepan and put the onion in.
- Place over a medium heat and simmer, with the lid on, for around 15 minutes.
- Remove the onion and add the breadcrumbs, salt and pepper.
- Simmer for no more than 5 minutes, stirring constantly.
- Add a good sized knob of butter and stir in.

Serve.

Cheese Sauce

PREAMBLE

Cheese sauce, nice and rich; try this on cauliflower or asparagus.

INGREDIENTS

- 1oz of flour
- 1oz of butter.
- ½ a pint of milk.
- 8oz of grated mature Cheddar cheese.
- 1 teaspoon of English mustard powder.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

Make sure that the dish you are serving this with is ready at the same time as the sauce.

COOKING

- Blend the flour, mustard and butter together well in a saucepan over a low heat.
- Add the milk gradually, stirring constantly.
- Allow the mixture to thicken over a medium heat, stirring constantly.
- Add the cheese, gradually, stirring constantly (as ever).
- Add the salt and pepper, stir in and take off the heat.

TIPS

If you are serving with cauliflower, pour the sauce over the cooked florets in a roasting dish. Place in a 180 degree oven to brown for 10-15 minutes.

Chicken Stock

PREAMBLE

Stocks are an essential element in many of the recipes. I appreciate that most people don't have the time to prepare their own, to this end most mainstream supermarkets offer cartons of stock that are ideal for cooking.

However, for completeness I show below how to make your own; should you have a rainy afternoon with nothing good on the television.

INGREDIENTS

- Chicken carcasses or boiling fowl totalling 2-3lbs in weight (get these from your butcher), chopped into small pieces (ask your butcher to do this).
- 2 large carrots, peeled and diced.
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced.
- 1 leek sliced.
- 1 celery stick sliced.
- Bouquet garni (a few fresh sprigs of fresh parsley, thyme and bayleaf tied together)
- Water
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, to taste.

COOKING

- Place the carcass, vegetables and bouquet garni into a suitably large saucepan.
- Cover with water.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Simmer (as gently as possible) with the lid on for 4 hours.
- Strain the stock.
- Allow to stand and cool, then skim the top of any scum.

TIPS

This can be frozen until required.

Giblet Gravy

PREAMBLE

Use the giblets from either the chicken or the turkey, depending on what you are cooking. The method is the same.

INGREDIENTS

- Turkey or chicken giblets.
- 2 bayleaves.
- 2 shallots, peeled and chopped.
- Water.
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper, a generous pinch of both.

COOKING

- Place the giblets, shallots, salt and pepper in a saucepan.
- Cover with cold water.
- Simmer with the lid on for 3 hours.
- Strain, and skim the surface of scum

Reheat when required.

TIPS

This can be made in advance, and frozen until required.

Hollandaise Sauce

PREAMBLE

This is a very versatile sauce; and makes an excellent accompaniment to vegetables, meat and fish dishes.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 egg yolks, beaten.
- 4oz of butter.
- The juice of a freshly squeezed lemon
- Salt and smooth ground white pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

- Ensure that the butter is at room temperature, work it over well with a spoon in a bowl.
- Mix the eggs yolks with a spoonful of the butter in another bowl, add a pinch of salt and pepper.
- Add the lemon juice.

COOKING

Place the egg yolk mix bowl over a saucepan of warm water (which itself is over a medium heat).

Stir the mixture gradually adding the remaining butter. Should the mixture start to become too thick, then remove from the heat.

TIPS

The sauce should be loose, and not able to stand. Adjust consistency, and taste, by adding more salt/pepper and butter as needed.

This should be served lukewarm (**not hot**).

Home-made Custard

PREAMBLE

I will make a little confession here, I very rarely make custard using this recipe. Quite frankly I find that a decent proprietary powdered version produces equally satisfactory results, with less fuss. However, I include this recipe for completeness; so you will be able to prepare it for a special event proudly telling your guests it is home-made.

INGREDIENTS

This will make 1 pint.

- 3 eggs, beaten.
- 4oz of caster sugar.
- 1 pint of milk.
- ½ a teaspoon of vanilla essence.

PREPARATION

- Scald the milk in a saucepan, that is bring it quickly to the boil then take it off the heat immediately.
- Mix the eggs, sugar and vanilla in a bowl.

COOKING

- Pour the scalded milk gradually into the bowl stirring thoroughly with a fork.
- Place the bowl over a pan of hot water, stir vigorously until it thickens. **Do not boil it!**

TIPS

Serve hot as a sauce. Should you wish this to be able to set as in a Trifle (see page 307), then use 6 eggs.

Mint Sauce

PREAMBLE

This is an excellent accompaniment to roast lamb. I have tried the ready made versions, available in supermarkets, they are fine in an emergency. However, I have yet to taste a ready made version that comes anywhere near the one that my parents make.

Yes, I probably am biased!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large bunch of fresh mint leaves; washed, dried and finely chopped.
- 4 tablespoons of caster sugar.
- 3 tablespoons of boiling water.
- 4 tablespoons of cider vinegar.

PREPARATION

- Place the chopped mint into a bowl and add the boiling water.
- Add the remaining ingredients, mix thoroughly.

Taste and add more sugar, or vinegar, as appropriate.

TIPS

The sauce can be prepared several hours beforehand, and can be kept in the fridge in the bowl covered with cling film.

Parsley Sauce

PREAMBLE

This is an excellent accompaniment to boiled gammon, fish or poultry.

INGREDIENTS

This makes ½ a pint.

- 1oz of flour.
- 1 oz of butter, at room temperature.
- ½ a pint of milk.
- 4 tablespoons of finely chopped fresh parsley.
- Salt and course ground black pepper, to taste.

PREPARATION

The sauce takes only a few minutes to make, so ensure that all your other dishes eg gammon, are ready when the sauce is served. Yes I know that seems obvious, but a large element of successful cooking is timing; namely ensuring that all parts of the menu come together when needed.

COOKING

- Start to melt the butter in a saucepan over a low heat.
- Add the flour whilst the butter is melting, blend with a spoon.
- When the flour and butter have been thoroughly mixed gradually add the milk, stirring all the time.
- Turn the heat up to medium, allow the mixture to thicken.
- Add the parsley, salt and pepper.
- Stir thoroughly.

Serve in a sauce boat.

TIPS

The thickness and flavour can be adjusted by altering the proportions of the ingredients.

Pepper Sauce

PREAMBLE

This is one of my favourite sauces for steaks, when properly made it enhances the flavour of the meat. However, I have in some restaurants been presented with a disappointing bland version of what is, in essence, a very simple but flavoursome sauce.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for 4-6 good sized sirloins.

- ½ a pint of double cream.
- Butter.
- 2 cloves of fresh garlic, peeled and crushed.
- 3 tablespoons of whole black peppercorns.
- 1 teaspoon of coarsely ground black pepper.
- Worcestershire sauce.
- 1 large wine glass of good quality brandy, such as Remy Martin.

COOKING

- Melt a good sized knob of butter in saucepan.
- Add the garlic, peppercorns and ground pepper.
- Stir for a few minutes over a medium heat.
- Add a few drops of Worcestershire sauce and stir.
- Add the brandy and allow to bubble for a minute or two.
- Add the cream, stir well for two minutes.
- Melt another knob of butter into the sauce, to give it a sheen.

Serve immediately.

TIPS

This should be poured over the steaks (which of course you have remembered to cook) and served immediately before it begins to congeal.

You can use green peppercorns if you prefer. Vary the quantity of pepper to adjust the strength of the sauce.

Drinks

A little something to wash it all down with.

Champagne Cocktail

PREAMBLE

Bored with “plain old champagne”, then why not try this classic cocktail for a real buzz.

INGREDIENTS

The quantity of the ingredients depends on how many cocktails you are making. Allow 1 bottle of champagne per 6 cocktails.

- Good quality champagne, eg Moet, chilled.
- Good quality brandy, eg Remy Martin VSOP.
- Brown sugar cubes.
- Angostura bitters.

PREPARATION

- Put a sugar cube into a fluted champagne glass.
- Put no more than two drops of Angostura bitters onto the cube.
- Pour in 1-1½ inches of brandy.
- Pour in the champagne, up to just below the rim of the glass.

TIPS

Ideal for pre dinner drinks.

Classic Bloody Mary

PREAMBLE

Necessity being the mother of invention I found myself having to make my own in an upmarket Oslo hotel (see foreword). Here is a recipe that gives you a good start to your evening.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough for two or three highballs of Bloody Mary's. Adjust the spices according to taste.

- 1 pint of chilled tomato juice.
- 6 measures of good quality vodka
- 2 glasses of dry sherry.
- 1 stick of celery.
- Worcestershire sauce
- Tabasco sauce.
- The juice of one freshly squeezed lemon.
- Coarse ground black pepper.
- Celery salt.
- Ice cubes.

PREPARATION

- Put a handful of ice cubes into a large glass jug.
- Pour in the vodka, sherry and lemon juice.
- Add a good measure of Worcestershire sauce and Tabasco sauce. Mix.
- Add a good measure of black pepper and celery salt.
- Pour in the tomato juice, stir and garnish with the celery stick.

Pour and drink immediately.

TIPS

A good friend of mine adds a little twist of his own by putting in a handful of peeled cooked prawns, you will need a spoon to drink his version.

Glögg

PREAMBLE

This is a Swedish version of mulled wine, traditionally served in the bleak mid winter as a warming mood enhancing drink.

You will see that I use it in some of my recipes, such as chilli.

INGREDIENTS

This should be enough to serve 4 people.

- 1 bottle of red wine.
- 2 large wine glasses of vodka.
- 1 large chunk of fresh ginger, peeled.
- 2 cinnamon sticks.
- 1 teaspoon of cardamom seeds.
- 8 cloves.

COOKING

- Place all the dry ingredients into a large saucepan.
- Pour in the wine and vodka.
- Place over a medium heat; bring the mixture to just below boiling, stirring all the time.
- Reduce the heat to the lowest possible, place a lid on the saucepan and allow the mixture to draw for 15 minutes or so.
- Serve hot with raisins and peeled almonds in small cups.

TIPS

This is an ideal winter drink to serve at parties, or before dinner.

If you wish to cook with it; then prepare as above, allow to cool and strain..

Irish Coffee

PREAMBLE

I am sure you all know how to make this. I include it as it is, after all, a classic drink taken after dinner.

Notwithstanding the presumed public knowledge of the recipe; I am often disappointed to find that restaurants serve some appalling versions of this. Some made from single cream (which of course does not float), or worse spray cream from one of those cans used to pump antiperspirant under peoples' sweaty armpits; **truly disgusting!!!**

INGREDIENTS

I leave quantities/proportions to the individual, to suit taste and size of glasses used.

- Good quality malt whisky.
- Good quality black coffee.
- Demerara sugar.
- Double cream.

PREPARATION

- Take a large brandy glass and pour a good measure of whisky into it.
- Add sugar to taste.
- Pour in the coffee allowing a gap of 1 inch from the rim, stir to ensure the sugar is fully dissolved.
- Place a metal spoon upside down over the top of the coffee (almost touching the liquid).
- Pour the cream slowly over the back of the spoon, it should float on the surface.

TIPS

Sometimes even the best attempts at this fail, and the cream mixes. Don't worry, treat this as a free sample down it in one and try again; by your third or fourth attempt you won't really care!

Should you wish to try other flavours, use brandy, tia maria or rum as an alternative to the whisky.

Morning Glory

PREAMBLE

When I was working in Korea a combination of work, and lengthy after work entertaining, took their toll on my sleep. I found this drink an ideal start to the day, giving me the pep and energy I needed to stay on the ball. A splendid way to give you pep.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 1 person.

- ½ a pint of fresh orange juice
- 2 teaspoons of granulated sugar.
- 1 egg.
- 2 tablespoons of liquid ginseng.

PREPARATION

- Break the egg into a high ball glass, add the sugar and ginseng then pour in the juice.
- Stir vigorously with a fork, or use a hand blender, until fully mixed.

TIPS

You can give this a punch by adding a measure, or two, of vodka.

Mum's Home-made Lemonade

PREAMBLE

As the name suggests, this is the recipe that my mother would make in copious quantities during the summer. This was sheer nectar to me during the UK drought of 1976 (should you not be old enough to remember the drought, don't worry I am sure we will have another one).

INGREDIENTS

- 8 fresh lemons, washed.
- 4 pints of water.
- 8 tablespoons of caster sugar (adjust according to the sweetness of your tooth).

PREPARATION

- Squeeze the lemons into a large saucepan.
- Cut the lemon skins in quarters and put them in with the juice.
- Add the water and sugar.

COOKING

- Place over a medium heat and bring to the boil.
- Simmer for no more than 5 minutes, stirring constantly.
- Take off the heat, put a lid on the saucepan and allow to cool (this ensures that all the flavours from the lemon infuse into the liquid).

Pour into a suitable glass flask, and put into the fridge to chill. I prefer to leave the skins in the lemonade, as this adds to its aesthetic appeal. However, if you prefer you may wish to strain it.

TIPS

Absolutely gorgeous on a summer's day in a highball glass with vast quantities of ice. Add a drop of gin or vodka if you want to give it a belt.

Pink Gin

PREAMBLE

This cocktail is popular with those who have served in the navy, and is one of my father's favourite drinks.

INGREDIENTS

- A good sized measure of gin.
- Angostura bitters.
- Water.

PREPARATION

- Pour two drops of the bitters into a short whisky tumbler. Angostura bitters have a very strong flavour, and in no way should be overused.
- Swirl the bitters around the glass, then tip them out (do not leave them in the glass, they will overpower the drink).
- Add the gin.
- Add the water, according to preference. The mixture will turn a light shade of pink.
- Add a couple of ice cubes.

TIPS

Drink.

Quick Protein Fix

PREAMBLE

This is an “ultra rapido” way to fill an empty stomach, and give yourself a protein boost. An ideal start to the day if you don’t have time for a cooked breakfast.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 1 person.

- ½ a pint of milk
- 2 teaspoons of granulated sugar.
- 1 egg.

PREPARATION

- Break the egg into a high ball glass, add the sugar then pour in the milk.
- Stir vigorously with a fork, or use a hand blender.

TIPS

You can give this a punch by adding a glass of sherry.

Tequila Sunrise

PREAMBLE

Eva and I spent many an evening enjoying the odd glass of this in Bar Riche, in Stockholm. Here is my quick and simple version; which I had to demonstrate to the barman of the Barclay InterContinental hotel in New York who, inexplicably, had never heard of it.

INGREDIENTS

- Tequila.
- Grenadine.
- Fresh orange juice (**not tinned, bottled or frozen!**)
- Slices of fresh orange.

PREPARATION

- Take a highball glass and fill with ice.
- Pour in a generous double shot of tequila.
- Pour in the orange juice, up to an inch from the top of the glass.
- Pour in the grenadine, this will sink to the bottom...hence the name sunrise.
- Garnish with a slice of orange.

TIPS

Ideal for a summer's evening. The large amount of orange juice in each drink means that you are doing yourself a power of good by ingesting your RDA of vitamin C in each drink; this should counteract the effect of the alcohol, which lowers your body's vitamin C levels.

The Detox Emulsion

PREAMBLE

There are times in our hectic social and business lives when our bodies tell us that we have been overindulging, and that a little rest and “internal cleansing” is required. The fashionable phrase used these days is “detox”.

Certain well known chains of chemists offer kits of pills, potions and lotions that claim to aid your body in doing what it does quite naturally anyway; namely excrete toxic elements through the normal respiratory processes of sweating etc.

I have a little potion of my own, which uses fresh ingredients and is considerably cheaper than those offered by the snake oil salesmen. Whether it really works or not I leave up to you. However, unless you have an allergy to any of the ingredients (or medical condition) I doubt that it will harm you. So don't be lazy, save your money and do it yourself with a hand blender.

INGREDIENTS

- A generous handful of fresh parsley.
- A generous handful of fresh mint.
- A few fresh basil leaves.
- 1 clove of fresh garlic, peeled.
- 1/2 inch chunk of fresh ginger.
- 1/3 fresh carrot, peeled and diced.
- 1/2 medium tomato, quartered.
- The juice of 1/2 a fresh lemon.
- Mineral water, chilled (sparkling or still up to you).

PREPARATION

- Place all the ingredients, with a little of the water, into a highball glass.
- Blend with a hand blender until smooth.
- Add more mineral water and blend until mixed.
- Top up with the water and stir.

TIPS

Drink this in the morning, it will pick you up.

Incidentally, if you really need the “hair of the dog” then add a shot of vodka.

Whisky Hot Toddy

PREAMBLE

A splendid drink to have if you have a cold, or indeed on a cold night in Stockholm. I recommend the Diplomat Hotel bar which used to prepare an excellent version of this.

INGREDIENTS

- Good quality whisky.
- Juice from 1 freshly squeezed lemon
- Sugar, to taste.
- 2 cloves.
- Ground nutmeg.
- Hot water.

PREPARATION

- Pour a good sized measure of whisky into a tumbler.
- Add the sugar, lemon juice and cloves.
- Pour in the hot water, stirring as you pour.
- Sprinkle a little nutmeg on the top.

TIPS

Rather nice with a bacon sandwich, in my experience.