

## cooking

# Course you can

From food novice to dinner party princess. A new cookery school in North Yorkshire will help you get to grips with your inner gourmet. Kathryn Armstrong gets the apron on.

It's only when someone starts to scrutinise your chopping technique that you begin to feel uneasy.

No matter that for the past twenty-odd years you've been chopping your way through a thousands of spag bols, chillies, Sunday roasts and more.

It's just that thing about experts watching you, the amateur, do something they excel at. And I am just chopping a mushroom. Panacotta looms. My god!

Ten of us are placed around a chunky beech block worktop with very sharp knives experiencing Lady G's residential cookery workshops in the mighty fine surroundings of Middleton Lodge between the A1 and Darlington.

We have our Lady G aprons on and are raring to go. The subject for the day is canapés and a dinner party main course and dessert.

At the helm are the Lady G's people. Lady Georgina Anderson and Caroline Whalley. They have in front of them a mix of skills in their ten students. I consider myself a reasonable cook. I like creating in the kitchen but in a beforehand kind of way - I like to make things that can be left once people arrive and hate the pressure of six dinner party main courses to execute while guests are sat at the table. Consequently, the ethos of cooking with confidence for exactly those situations is appealing. Not to mention being able to do it in a way that says you are actually a 'wow' of a cook. Showing off in other words.

Caroline and G, as she is known, are perfect tutors. Thoroughly capable, effortlessly efficient and nice with it. They are both experienced chefs having worked as private caterers for

weddings, film catering, shoots and lunch parties.

G trained at a cordon bleu cookery school and Caroline has worked in the restaurant trade as a head chef as well as running a wine bar with her husband.

Their cookery school will be aimed at all levels and includes courses for students and gap year teens who have yet to embark on their own culinary journeys!

They will be taught the basics of food preparation by celebrity chef Tiffany Goodall who will be demonstrating at the student courses. Other specialist sessions will include a more advanced course for chalet chefs.

Their experience means they are great at passing on tricks of the trade and their aim is most definitely to instil confidence in their students.

Says G: "It is about making it easy. Make substantial canapés and you do away with the need to make a starter. You can make them the day before so you are freed up when people arrive.

"Canapes also serve as a great way to get people mingling and talking which is always good."

Both G and Caroline urge their students to

make friends with the experts: "Make your local butcher your friend. It is worth it to get good deals but also so you know you are getting the best product possible and that will be reflected in the food you serve. It also means that you can get the right cuts and amount of food you need."

As we sit in the kitchen, G and Caroline demonstrate the dishes they will be making. Every place around the bench has a couple of sockets for blenders and other food gadgetry. We are all given a set of utensils and some chopping boards - and lessons on food hygiene. The canapés include Cajun salmon skewers with lime and yoghurt dip. So easy - and miles better than the even the best shop bought versions. Ditto mushroom tartlets with Parmesan crisps. The words 'one pack of ready-made tartlet cases' always good to read on a recipe sheet. The difference is that it's easy to create a fresh and home-made mushroom filing (this is where my expertly chopped mushrooms come in) that raises the humble tart case to a greater thing. And at the risk of getting over excited - Parmesan crisps. Pop some grated cheese in a circular biscuit cutter on a baking tray. Oven for five minutes then leave to cool and you have a very 'wow' topping for your tart.

Definitely in the swing of it, the stuffing of a lamb fillet became easy as pie with a knife that really works. The creation of Deconstructed Lamb Wellington something to behold. A Masterchef moment if ever there was one. Perhaps more so the de-mystification of lavender panacotta which should be very tricky you'd think. One of those desserts you would only have in a restaurant because it seems so complex. Once you see how to handle gelatine leaves and infuse

**The words 'one pack of ready-made tartlet cases' always good to read on a recipe sheet**



some double cream then it all seems so straightforward. Bit of a revelation all round. We later got to eat our prepped food over dinner in Middleton Lodge's sparkly dining room. For residential courses this definitely one of the highlights. The Lodge is a private house that's usually rented for weddings or corporate functions. James Allison runs it with sister Fiona and he lives there, acting as host for weddings and managing all the events that take place there.

He and Fiona have overseen a big refurbishment recently making the most of the Georgian mansion's stunning proportions. Public rooms are a comfy mix of contemporary, shabby chic and antique. There's a new bar and beautiful reception hall in the middle of the grand circular staircase. Bedrooms are elegant and mix contemporary heritage paint colours with modern bathrooms and lovely textures and furnishings to make for a very luxurious and pampering stay.

The courses all end with dinner and a stay followed by a hearty breakfast, recipe folder and goody bag. The perfect ingredients.

**fq** Lady G's at Middleton Lodge one day residential course includes full day tuition and hands-on experience. Overnight, dinner and breakfast, £195 per person. The schedule includes student, chalet and gap courses for 2010. Details on [www.ladygscookeryschool.com](http://www.ladygscookeryschool.com)