

The Skinny French Kitchen



A year ago Harry Eastwood, food writer and presenter for Channel 4's "Cook Yourself Thin", moved to Paris on a mission: to prove that you can create full-flavour French dishes with substantially fewer calories than is traditional. "I've been perched up seven floors in a tiny flat, inviting locals to taste my French food, without them knowing they were eating lighter versions. If they couldn't tell the difference I quietly chalked down the recipe and put a green tick of victory next to it," she says.

The result is *The Skinny French Kitchen* (Bantam Press, March), a sumptuously-illustrated collection of 100 reduced-calorie recipes for classics ranging from confit de canard to chocolate soufflé, which Eastwood thinks are, in many cases, actually better than the originals. "It is a scandalous thing to say in France, but with a smile I can just about get away with it here," she jokes. "The reason for that is simple. Very often fat, in the shape of cream and butter, acts as a dulling element to the flavour. Lowering the fat content makes the other ingredients sing."

NOBLE UNDERTAKING

Describing French food as "one of the great noble cuisines", and recognising how protective the nation is of its traditional recipes, Eastwood admits she found the project intimidating, but decided that if anyone could do it she could.

She lived in Paris from the age of four to 18 dining on snails and smelly cheese, spoke better French than English by the end of her Baccalaureate (not that you can tell from her pristine British accent), and completed a Cordon Bleu diploma in 2001.

Furthermore, Eastwood undertook, what she calls "a thorough apprenticeship for food writing", working as a food stylist in the UK for the first five years of her career for high-profile chefs, including Jamie Oliver, to prepare and enhance their food for pictures in magazines or "here's one I made earlier" dishes on television. "The job is about interpreting recipes and

making them work every time. I understand the chemical structure of food and can use clever tips and tricks to lighten up dishes. It is my real skill in food," she explains.

And it's a knack she has put to good use in all of her projects. The 2007 "Cook Yourself Thin" TV series and cook book tie-in were based on the concept of eating what you want but still losing weight, and her follow-up title *Red Velvet and Chocolate Heartache* was described by *Top Sante* magazine as a "godsend for sweet-toothed bakers who know they should be eating more fruit and veg." It is also at the heart of her latest venture Petit Pois Cakes—a cake manufacturing company she has set up with business partner Ashley Maddox, which will launch its first range of low calorie, gluten-free cup cakes in Selfridges in March.

What underpins Eastwood's approach, alongside this "have your cake and eat it" attitude, is her obvious passion for food writing and enthusiasm for all elements of publishing cookbooks. Just five days after pitching the *Skinny French Kitchen* concept to her editor Doug Young, she set off for France with a one-way ticket to get started. With a new home to set up and some troublesome dishes to tackle (apparently the rum baba gave her some strife) she admits it was not all plain sailing and has documented the challenges in a diary-style blog, which will be published at the soon-to-be-launched harryeastwood.com. But, after six months of intensive testing and writing, as well as art-directing and styling, Eastwood thinks she has pulled it off. "The recipes are practical, quick and easy, substantially lighter in calories yet still have that rich flavour or I wouldn't have got away with it with the French."

And on that note, with one project successfully completed, Eastwood leaves the interview to set off for a cake factory. She is getting stuck in to making a test batch of her Petit Pois cupcakes. "I did have a moment of 'oh my gosh, what am I doing' when I printed off the ingredient quantities: 6.8 litres of lemon juice and 35kg of flour!"

Hannah Davies

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