



## Christine Manfield, globally renowned chef and owner of Universal Restaurant, talks about the power of good food and shares three quick and easy recipes from her forthcoming book, *Fire*

Any Australian with a keen interest in food would have heard the name Christine Manfield — the indefatigable chef who took Sydney by storm with her famed Paramount Restaurant in 1993 and followed suit in 2003 by opening the award-winning East @ West in London's Covent Garden. Often referred to as the 'Queen of Cuisine', Christine is constantly drawing on the tastes and flavours of many cultures and coming up with new and exciting ways to tantalise our tastebuds.

Keen to share her knowledge, Christine has published four books to date: *Stir, Spice, Christine Manfield Originals* and *Christine Manfield Desserts*. In September this year, *Fire* will be added to her collection. Published by Penguin Australia, *Fire* is a 700-page tome inspired by all that's fabulous about food and travel in Asia, France, Italy, Mexico and Turkey.

"*Fire* is a massive piece of work and it's basically about the recipes and food stories that have springboarded out of my travel to various countries and regions," Christine explains. "I spent four years writing the book and it was this project that gave birth to the concept for Universal Restaurant."

Situated in Darlinghurst, Universal Restaurant

has provided Christine with the perfect space to realise her vision for a new style of dining in Sydney. "What sets Universal apart from other restaurants is its global perspective. We refuse to be defined by any one tradition or any one type of cuisine," says Christine. "The concept for the restaurant is all about breaking down the rules and creating what I call 'food without borders.'"

Those dining at Universal can expect a menu that eschews the traditional entrée and main, along with Sydney's current obsession with the seven-course degustation menu. The menu is unstructured and listed by the "weight of the palate" — from raw dishes to salads and soups, then onto more complex dishes featuring fish, meat and game.

All dishes are the same size and it is recommended to choose two or three in order to enjoy a range of tastes and textures. Ingredients are sourced from a diverse array of first-rate suppliers from all over Sydney and each dish on the menu is matched with wines from Universal's carefully selected global cellar.

"I have an innate understanding and appreciation of flavour and my real forte is

in knowing how to put flavours and textures together," says Christine. "Travelling extensively has introduced me to new ingredients and new ways of doing things and I've adapted what I've seen to my own style."

The restaurant's location is as edgy as the menu — it sits within a courtyard in the urbane Republic block and, though modest in size (it seats 100), is alive with colour and atmosphere. It's little wonder the rave reviews have been pouring in since the restaurant opened in August last year.

### Easy entertaining

When cooking for friends at home, Christine tends to go down the more traditional path. "I sometimes decide on a theme and might do, say, Sicilian food and play with traditional recipes. Or for Sunday lunch I'll create a one-pot meal, such as a curry or fish tagine," she says. "At home it's all about having a good time and keeping things simple."

Describing her home kitchen as "small and slick", Christine admits it has all the finishes you'd expect to see in the kitchen of any top-notch



restaurant. "The entire kitchen is stainless steel. It's a very compact yet functional galley with a pull-out pantry and everything in its place."

The one piece of kitchen equipment this busy chef says she couldn't live without is a good mortar and pestle: "I collect them and they're used for different jobs — I use one to mix pesto, another for spices and a different one again to make pastes. I also rely on my electric blender."

Christine advises that anyone looking to update their kitchen should focus on two things — good storage and plenty of bench space. "Having good storage and a decent amount of bench space affects the way you move around the space," she explains. "The idea is to take the minimal amount of steps as you prepare and cook food."

It's hard to believe that between travelling, writing, presiding over Universal and cooking for friends, Christine has time for much else, yet she seizes every opportunity to promote the pleasures of great food. She has, for instance, created the Spice Collection, a range of 18 Asian and Mediterranean pastes and spices for the home cook, and she runs cooking classes each month. These projects allow Christine to focus on her uncompromising belief in the complementary and sustaining nature of good food, wine, people, pleasure and learning.

"For me, a life built around food and its endless potential is something I thrive on," she muses. "After all, life's too short to eat bad food!"

## RECIPES

### Spice braised duck with spinach and basil

**Serves 4**

#### Ingredients

- 2 tbsp** (CM brand) laksa paste
- 1 tsp** (CM brand) chilli jam
- 2** duck breasts
- 2** banana leaves
- 200ml** coconut cream
- 100ml** white chicken stock
- 1 tbsp** palm sugar
- 2 tsp** lime juice
- 1 tbsp** fish sauce
- 50g** baby spinach leaves
- 100g** bean sprouts
- 40g** snow pea sprouts, trimmed
- 1 punnet** radish or mustard cress, snipped
- 3 tbsp** pickled green mango strips
- 1/2 cup** fresh coconut, shredded
- 1/2 cup** Thai basil leaves
- 2 large** red chillies, sliced
- 4** shallots, finely sliced
- 2 tbsp** fried shallot slices

#### Method

- 1** Mix together the laksa paste and chilli jam. Spread half the paste over the duck breasts and wrap the duck in banana leaves. Lay the wrapped duck in baking tray and cover with alfoil.
- 2** Bake in a moderately hot (180°C) oven over a water bath for 25 minutes until duck is cooked but still pink in centre. Remove duck from oven

### Smoked ocean trout, smoked eel & pomelo salad

**Serves 4**

#### Ingredients

- 8 slices** Woodbridge smoked ocean trout
- 100g** smoked Silver Lakes Oss eel fillet, flaked
- 4 thin slices** granny smith apple, cut into matchsticks
- 2 tbsp** ruby pomelo segments
- 2** green onions, finely sliced
- 2** Makrut lime leaves, finely shredded
- 4** lime segments, chopped
- 1 tbsp** shredded coriander leaves
- 1 tbsp** shredded fresh ginger
- 1 tbsp** fried ginger shreds
- 1 tbsp** pickled green mango
- 1/2 punnet** snipped micro watercress
- 2 tsp** ocean trout roe

#### Sweet & sour dressing

- 1 small** red chilli, chopped
- 1 small** clove garlic, chopped
- 25ml** vegetable oil
- 30ml** light soy sauce
- 50ml** cider vinegar
- 75ml** sugar syrup

#### Method

- 1** To make the sweet and sour pickle, gently simmer all ingredients in a saucepan for 15 minutes. Strain, then discard solids and cool. Refrigerate until ready to use.
- 2** Line four 6cm ring moulds with 2 slices of smoked ocean trout.
- 3** Mix the flaked eel with all remaining salad ingredients in a bowl and add 80ml of the sweet and sour dressing. Toss to combine.
- 4** Fill each mould with the salad — the trout forms a collar around the outside. Remove the mould. Spoon the trout on top of the salad and serve.



- and rest for 10 minutes before unwrapping.
- 3** Meanwhile, heat the coconut cream in pan and, when boiling, add the remaining paste. Stir and cook for a few minutes then add the stock and bring to boil. Cook for another three minutes. Remove from heat and add fish sauce, lime juice and palm sugar. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. Allow to cool for five minutes before serving.
- 4** To make the salad, mix the spinach, sprouts, cress and remaining ingredients in a bowl.
- 5** Shred the duck meat, discarding bones and fat. Add the sauce to the duck meat and mix through the salad mix to incorporate all ingredients. Arrange on plates, spooning any extra sauce around the salad. Sprinkle over the fried shallots.

### Chocolate brownie fudge

**Makes 15 pieces**

#### Ingredients

- 170g** unsalted butter
- 340g** castor sugar
- 3 large** eggs, lightly beaten
- 75g** cocoa powder
- 1 tsp** vanilla essence
- 75g** plain flour, sifted
- 270g** dark couverture chocolate, coarsely chopped
- Chocolate cream**
- 125g** dark couverture chocolate
- 100ml** cream

#### Method

- 1** To make the brownies, melt the butter over low heat. Whisk the sugar into the lightly beaten eggs then add the melted butter, cocoa and vanilla and mix well. Stir in the flour with a spatula, and then stir in the chopped chocolate. Pour into a greased 20cm square slice tin, lined with baking paper and bake over a water bath in a 160°C oven for 25 minutes or until just set. Allow to cool in the tin.
- 2** To make the chocolate cream, shave the chocolate into a bowl. Heat the cream in a pan to simmering point and pour over the chocolate. Stir until glossy and smooth. Allow the cream to set in the refrigerator for 2 hours so it is firm enough to spread.
- 3** Turn the brownie slab out onto a chopping board and spread the top surface with a thin layer of the chocolate cream. Slice into small squares and serve. **SL**

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### UNIVERSAL RESTAURANT

Republic 2 Courtyard  
Palmer Street (between Burton and Liverpool Streets),  
Darlinghurst NSW 2010

**Tel:** 9331 0709

**Email:** eat@universalrestaurant.com

**Website:** www.universalrestaurant.com

### THE SPICE COLLECTION AND SPICE TOURS

**Website:** www.christinemanfield.com