



Cooking for comfort

PETER CASSIDY

Chef James Martin talks about his life and his new book, *More Home Comforts*

By Gordon Craigie

THERE'S NO MISTAKING where celebrity chef James Martin's priorities lie. In his BBC TV series *Home Comforts*, he says, "The heart of my home is the kitchen and it's here that I love to cook delicious meals for my nearest and dearest."

Martin has recently released a new book, *More Home Comforts*, the second companion book to his TV series. "None of us wants to spend hours behind the stove sweating to make lunch and supper," he tells *The Connection*. "*More Home Comforts* is all about making life easier, and the food is accessible to all. It's full of the foods I really love to cook at home."

"Ever since I watched my grandparents making pastry in front of the telly, I've wanted to cook," Martin says, of the origin of his passion for food. "There was never really a plan B; I have always focussed on trying to get plan A right."

And get it right he certainly has, though plan A has taken some unexpected twists along the way. Through a happy circumstance, Martin appeared on the BBC's celebrity dance series *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2005, which kick-started his TV career. "Without me knowing, my PA [personal assistant] had said yes to *Strictly* when I was working [in a restaurant] on a ship in the Mediterranean," Martin laughs. "I went mental when I found out, but I'd been signed up. I made it to the semi-finals, and it

got me noticed. I did the tour, which finished in February, and by March I'd been offered *Saturday Kitchen*. I had done a few bits and pieces before, but after *Strictly* everything went mad."

Since then, Martin has been a mainstay chef on TV, a presenter and a journalist, as well as an author. Fans are also well acquainted with his enthusiasm for cars, bikes, planes and helicopters. However, Martin's core passion is still food. It's clear that he's keen on sourcing fresh local produce because of the difference it can make in his dishes.

"The art of making great food was taught to me at a young age as I watched my mum cooking great food that we produced on the farm," he explains. "Good ingredients are still really important to me—you should source the best quality-meat and vegetables you can afford. I have used some great British suppliers in the recipes in the book, and my vegetable garden has got a lot of use, too."

As if the restaurant, writing and TV commitments were not enough, Martin is working on something under wraps. "I'll be unveiling a new skill which I've been learning," he teases. So, what's up next for James Martin is anyone's guess. ☞

Gordon Craigie (gordoncraigie.com) is a Dundee-based freelance writer.



Cauliflower Cheese with Crispy Maple Syrup Pancetta

To be honest, I wasn't sure whether cauliflower cheese should make it into *More Home Comforts*, as it's left many people scarred for life, due to overcooked cauliflower with lumpy cheese sauce. When it's made properly (so easily done: blanching the cauliflower, then dipping it into iced water, then reheating it in the oven), it can be a fantastic dish. The crispy maple pancetta turns it into a certain favourite in my house.

- 1 cauliflower, cut into florets
- 100 g unsalted butter
- 40 g flour
- 500 ml milk
- 15 ml Dijon mustard
- 300 g extra-mature Cheddar cheese, grated
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 slices of brioche, processed to make crumbs
- 20 rashers of pancetta or streaky bacon, bacon rinds removed
- 30 ml maple syrup

Preheat the grill to high. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the cauliflower and cook for 5 to 6 minutes until tender.

While the cauliflower cooks, melt 50 g of the butter in a large saucepan, then whisk in the flour and cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Whisk in the milk slowly until you have a thick sauce, then add the mustard and half the grated cheese; whisk until smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

Drain the cauliflower and place it in a bowl of ice-cold water to stop it cooking. Drain again and tip it into an ovenproof dish. Pour the sauce over the cauliflower, top with the rest of the grated cheese, then place under the grill for 5 minutes until golden and bubbling.

While the cauliflower is under the grill, heat a frying pan until hot, add the rest of the butter, and when it's foaming, add the brioche crumbs and fry, tossing occasionally until golden-brown and crispy. Tip out into a bowl, then wipe out the pan and add all the pancetta or bacon. Fry until golden brown and crispy, then add the maple syrup and toss until sticky.

Scatter the breadcrumbs over the top of the cauliflower cheese and top with the pancetta and any remaining maple syrup. Serve straight away. Serves 4.

Beer Can Piri-piri Chicken with Garlic Butter Jacket Potatoes

Cooking over a beer can is nothing new; in Australia they've been doing it for years. The secret is that the beer keeps the inside of the chicken nice and moist while it's cooking on the barbecue. You'll need a barbecue with a lid, and you can cook the jacket potatoes in foil alongside the chicken. With the extra garlic butter added to the chicken at the end, this makes a truly delicious summertime meal.

You can also cook the dish in a roasting pan in the oven; you will probably need to place the chicken on a low shelf to fit it in. Heat the oven to 200 C/400 F/gas mark 6; cook the garlic in foil for 15 minutes and the chicken and jacket potatoes for 45 to 60 minutes.

- 22 g smoked sweet paprika
- 7 g smoked hot paprika
- 3 g chilli flakes
- 30 ml Dijon mustard
- 15 ml red wine vinegar
- 3 limes
- 3 lemons
- 75 ml olive oil, plus extra to drizzle
- 2 kg whole chicken
- 4 baking potatoes, scrubbed
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 garlic bulbs
- 1 can of beer, half full
- 45 g finely chopped chives
- 250 g unsalted butter, softened
- 1 head of lettuce, core removed, leaves separated
- 4 ripe tomatoes, cut into chunks
- ¼ long cucumber, cut in half lengthways, then into slices
- 30 ml extra-virgin olive oil

Put both types of paprika, the chilli flakes, Dijon mustard, red wine vinegar, the juice of one of the

limes and the juice of one of the lemons into a bowl and mix to a paste. Pour the paste into a large plastic bag, then add the olive oil and the chicken. Seal at the end and shake around so that the chicken is covered in the paste.

Prick the potatoes with a fork; rub them with a little oil, salt and black pepper; then wrap each one in foil. Place 1 garlic bulb on another sheet of foil and drizzle with oil, then twist tight.

Cut the second garlic bulb in half and place it inside the chicken. Then manoeuvre the half-full beer can into the bottom of the chicken.

Put the potatoes and garlic on the barbecue, then add the chicken, placed upright on the beer can, in the centre. The beer will bubble up and create steam inside the chicken, keeping it moist as it cooks, but the can must be only half full otherwise it will spill over during cooking. Make an aluminium foil collar for the base of the chicken to protect it, then cover with a lid and roast for 15 minutes. Remove the garlic bulb and roast for another 30 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through and the potatoes are tender.

Remove the cooked garlic from the foil, discard the foil and allow the garlic to cool. Cut the top off the bulb and squeeze the cooked garlic out into a bowl. Add the chives and softened butter, and mix well.

Toss the lettuce, tomatoes and cucumber together in a large serving bowl, and drizzle with a little extra-virgin olive oil. Cut the remaining limes and lemons into quarters or eighths.

Place the cooked chicken with the beer can inside it in the centre of a serving platter. Loosen the foil from the potatoes, cut a cross in the top of them, squeeze gently and spoon the garlic butter on top. Place them around the chicken and garnish with the lemons and limes. Serves 4.



Recipes and photos reprinted with permission from *More Home Comforts*, by James Martin (Quadrille Publishing Limited, 2016). All rights reserved.



The Costco Connection

You'll find copies of James Martin's *More Home Comforts* at your local Costco warehouse, as well as a variety of fresh meat, fish, poultry, veggies and other ingredients for preparing these recipes and more.