

# FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH

Food & Wine editor **Myles McWeeney** meets Martijn Kajüter, Executive Chef at Cliff House Hotel in Co. Waterford

**T**he 39-room boutique **Cliff House** hotel in **Ardmore**, Co. Waterford has only been open for just over a year, but even in these straitened times it is making big waves in the hospitality industry. Signs on, the prestigious Georgina Campbell Ireland Guide named it Newcomer of the Year 2009, and the guidebook raves about the cooking of its Dutch Executive Chef, Martijn Kajüter.

Kajüter is 35 and grew up in the countryside in the northern part of Holland. His parents owned a small café and ran an outside catering company, but he's quick to point out they didn't cook high-end food. In fact, he says, he had little interest in cooking as a child, and it was only when he went to secondary school – the Dutch have a sort of 11+ and he qualified for the academic gymnasium stream – that he realised he hated Greek and Latin and all that stuff and really wanted to work with his hands. He changed streams and went to catering college.

He did extremely well, and at 17 was cooking in Michelin-starred restaurants in Amsterdam; Les Quatres Canetons to start, and then the Vermeer.

By 1995 his horizons had broadened and he moved to London to gain experience. Over the next few years he worked at one time or another with some of the biggest names in England's restaurant world – John Burton Race of L'Ortolan fame, Michel Roux of the Waterside Inn, Pierre Koffman of Tante Claire and Marco Pierre White. Then it was back to the Netherlands where he became Head Chef at a restaurant called De Kas, which occupied a beautiful

conservatory that had previously been part of Amsterdam's municipal nursery. It served only the freshest organic produce, much of which Martijn and his team grew themselves on site.

When he was recruited by Cliff House hotel manager Adriaan Bartels in 2007, Martijn brought this same philosophy to the spectacularly situated dining room, and from the start his unusual style of cooking and presentation won influential fans, among them John and Sally McKenna, whose Bridgestone Guides give him and the hotel rave reviews. Martijn describes his food as "local and vegetarian", but the McKennas describe it as "complex but simple".

Just about everything he cooks has been locally sourced – when he arrived here in 2007 with his wife Wendy and two small children, Tygo and Floyd, his first task was to seek out and encourage local organic producers to grow especially for him the kinds of things he needed. Now that everything is in place, it's what he does with these fresh ingredients when he gets them into his kitchen that marks out this giant of a chef – he's 6'8" in his socks – as a real original.

The salmon dish featured here is a prime example. Each of the elements is really simple, but they all come together to form a harmonious whole, and the presentation is spectacular. When it comes to the table the plate is covered with a glass cloche which appears to be filled with swirling clouds of smoke. And it really is smoke – the idea is that when the cloche is lifted you get the impression that the salmon is actually smoked salmon. It's a clever piece of, shall

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we say, trompe de nez.

A simple dish of fresh Helvick Black Sole was presented so simply you knew immediately that Martijn was saying: "This is so fresh and so good it doesn't need adornment."

He's passionate about desserts too, so it's wise to leave room for some. I would never have dreamed of eating a 70 per cent dark chocolate mousse with olive oil and salt, but now that I've tried Martijn's version I'm not sure I can eat dark chocolate again without them.

This is a guy heading for the stars. 📧

## BALLOTINE OF CLARE ISLAND SALMON, CUCUMBER, HERB CREAM & SALMON

### RECIPE

#### BALLOTINE SALMON

*1 organic Clare Island salmon, filleted, deboned, with skin on*

*1 tbsp chopped watercress*

*Zest of 1 lemon*

*Black pepper*

*Orange sea salt (100g coarse sea salt infused with the zest of 2 oranges and the juice of 1)*

#### CUCUMBER

*2 cucumbers*

*Gelatine leaves*

*80ml white vinegar*

*20g sugar*

*Lemon zest and grated horseradish*

*Salt and black pepper*

#### HERB CREAM

*150 ml cream*

*2 tbsp mixed chopped herbs (chervil, parsley, tarragon, dill)*

*Zest of ½ lemon*

*Pepper and salt*

#### SALMON CAVIAR

*50g Keta salmon eggs*

### PREPARATION

#### SALMON

- Season the sides of salmon with the

*watercress, orange salt, black pepper and the lemon zest*

- Fold the two sides together so the shape of the salmon returns, cut in half and wrap each very tightly in three layers of cling film
- Heat a pot of water till it barely simmers then place the two wrapped pieces of salmon in the pot and leave to simmer for 5 minutes. Turn the heat off and let it cool off in the water. When cooled, completely leave in the fridge for at least 4 hours

#### CUCUMBER

- Peel 1 cucumber and dice it in very small cubes. Marinate with vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper, then grate in fresh horseradish to taste and the zest of ½ lemon
- Juice the other cucumber with the skin on and season to taste. For every 100ml of juice, use 1 leaf of gelatine to set it. Soak the gelatine in cold water for 5 minutes. Heat half of the juice and dissolve the softened gelatine leaves in it. Mix in the rest of the juice and pour it into a suitable container and leave in the fridge to set

#### HERB CREAM

- Season and whip the cream until fluffy. Fold in the mixed herbs with lemon

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*zest and let it set in a food container  
in the fridge*

**PRESENTATION**

*Remove the cling film from  
the salmon, carefully slice into  
nice steaks and arrange each on the  
middle of a plate, then sprinkle with  
orange salt and pepper*

