



foodfile

Louise McCrimmon

The Second Floor Restaurant at Harvey Nichols has maintained consistently high standards (and two AA rosettes) since it opened. Leading the kitchen is head chef Louise McCrimmon, with one of the most demanding jobs in the store. Louise talked to Monica Shaw.



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You run an all-day dining venue in a luxury department store. What's the biggest challenge?

Overcoming people's preconceptions. People know that Harvey Nichols specialises in exclusive, high-end fashion. If that isn't for them, then they might think the restaurant isn't for them either. So we work hard to convey that our product is for everyone. We're priced competitively with our set lunch and dinner menus - £15 for three courses - and the quality is superb. You can come for a relaxing lunch, afternoon tea or dinner. We make everything from the bread to the ice cream ourselves.

Sounds like more than a full-time job - how do you do it?

I do spend a large chunk of my life at work - but I try to balance it. I have a very supportive husband who is also a fantastic cook, so that helps at home. We're settled in Bristol, have a house, a lovely garden, and try to get out whenever we can. That's the key to dealing with pressure - making the most of the time off that you do have.

Where do you go to eat out?

We've had great meals at Casamia and Berwick Lodge but also love the Mayflower Chinese restaurant. We like to try what's out there and see what other people are doing, but more than anything, have a great time being cooked for by someone else.

Early food memories?

Cooking with my mum. I was always there, always encouraged, and joined her in cooking from an early age. I remember starting very young and finding it fascinating. I loved the fact that a soft bit of dough that went into the oven came out completely different. It's a fascination that has never stopped.

Fine dining or pub grub?

I don't think you can choose. It depends on what you're doing, what you're spending and what experience you're after. The best might

simply be due to how you stumble upon it.

One of my top meals was a perfect omelette and salad in a tiny hamlet in the mountains in France. It was sensational, and very simple. Ironically, we went to a three-star Michelin restaurant on the same day that was equally superb but for different reasons. The range of emotions that comes into eating is wide - it's the sum of the parts that makes the experience.

What would you happily never eat again?

I've had intestines in a Sichuan Chinese restaurant that I wasn't fond of, but I'll give everything a whirl. The worst that will happen is you don't like something. At best, you're going to find something that you really love.

Who or what are your foodie inspirations?

It's constantly changing. At the moment, lots of modern chefs - the boys at Casamia are fantastic in their approach to cooking. On a solid basis, Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson are both great writers and advocates of good, simple food. Their books still stand the test of time.

Wednesday evening fail-safe dish?

I'd get someone else to cook for me! Otherwise, I always keep pasta, olive oil, parmesan and garlic, and if you've got lots of chopped parsley, that's supper.

The Second Floor Restaurant and Bar at Harvey Nichols

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