

One to *watch*

Anna Tobias

Rachel Walker meets the young head chef whose menus are already making waves on the awards circuit



There's a big difference between slick service in professional kitchens and the demanding logistics of events catering, but that doesn't stop Anna Tobias from having a foot in both camps. Since becoming head chef at Rochelle Canteen, in east London, she has slow-roasted a young goat in the oven of a rural Spanish bakery, catered a rolling banquet for 250 in New York and recently found herself cooking wild boar at a gallery launch in Vienna. Back

at the acclaimed restaurant, the 29-year-old chef writes a daily menu that is a celebration of British food: game terrine, smoked-fish pies and quince crumbles — dishes that this year saw her being shortlisted as the young British foodie chef of the year. Nose-to-tail and root-to-shoot style resourcefulness are also part of each dish. "We try to use everything," she says. "Meat trim gets turned into mince, and we freeze leftover offal until there's enough to make faggots."

The restaurant is tucked away behind playground walls in a converted bike shed. It operates as part of a larger events company founded by Melanie Arnold and Margot Henderson, the wife of Fergus (of St John fame). During the week, Rochelle Canteen is a breakfast and lunch spot for those in the know, but as night falls, Tobias often loads up vans and helps Arnold and Henderson cater the private parties and launches generated by the pair's heaving black book of clients, which range from Aquascutum to Zaha Hadid.

It wasn't until Tobias finished a languages degree at Oxford University in 2008 that she started thinking properly about her future. She sent letters to half a dozen chefs she admired. Jeremy Lee wrote back, and she started in his kitchen, before doing a three-year stint at the River Cafe. So, when her restaurant dreams do become a reality one day, expect to see inspiration from each chef she has worked alongside, as well as from her Serbian heritage and the summers spent visiting grandparents in north Italy and Normandy. "I'd never want to be limited by frugality, though," she says. "It's a great ethos, but it wouldn't work if I couldn't buy delicious wild mushrooms." So for a trademark dish that is almost frugal, here's her pumpkin and porcini panade. ■

Rochelle Canteen, Rochelle School, Arnold Circus, London E2; arnoldandhenderson.com



Pumpkin and porcini panade

This is one of those great, frugal peasant dishes that turns leftovers into something delightful. I am cheating by adding dried porcini, but these are optional.

Serves 4

- 1 loaf of stale white bread (country or sourdough, about 500g), crusts removed and cut into 1cm-thick slices
- Olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic (1 left whole, 1 sliced)
- 50g dried porcini (optional)
- 8 shallots, thinly sliced
- 125g unsalted butter
- 15g thyme, leaves picked and chopped
- 300ml chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 tsp tomato purée
- 1 small sweet pumpkin (such as delicata or crown prince), peeled, deseeded and sliced to a £1-coin thickness
- 150g parmesan or grana padano

Heat the oven to 175C (non-fan 195C). Lay the bread in a single layer on a baking tray and drizzle with oil. Bake for 10-15 minutes, until golden, then rub the slices with the whole garlic clove. Soak the porcini (if using) in a teacup of boiling water, cover and put to one side. Sweat the shallots in 100g of the butter and 2 tbsp oil, add the thyme and sliced garlic, then season. Remove the porcini from the liquid, roughly chop them and add to the shallots.

In a separate pan, heat the stock and stir in the tomato purée, then butter a deep baking dish (28cm x 18cm x 5cm deep) with the remaining butter. To assemble, start with a layer of bread and cover with half the shallots. Then add half the pumpkin in layers. Lightly season and sprinkle over a third of the cheese. Repeat this process and top with a final, neat layer of bread. Ladle over the stock in stages, so it barely comes to the top when you press down with your hands, and sprinkle over the last of the cheese. Cover with foil and bake for 40 minutes. Remove and poke with a skewer to see if the pumpkin has cooked, then return to the oven, uncovered, for 10 minutes, so the crust goes golden and crunchy.

Bin it

The fads we're already over

Unisex loos

This is an unwelcome trend emerging in new restaurants. Presumably, it's a money-/space-saving trick, but does anyone prefer a unisex setup to the breather offered by separate loos? Every woman knows that a trip to the ladies represents far more than a pee. It's a moment to apply foundation, call a friend about a disastrous date, rearrange one's Spanx or do some pensive hair "bouffing". All of the above really depend on a single-sex loo if they're to be carried out in comfort.



And it's not just women who prefer their own space. In the interests of equality, I quizzed several men on the subject. Responses included: "I love urinals! They're the easiest thing. I'd have one at home, if I could", "It's awkward when a woman walks into the loo you've just walked out of" and "Mixed toilets make me self-conscious, especially about looking in the mirror."

Joan Collins said that the key to a successful marriage was separate bathrooms. Perhaps it's the key to a successful restaurant, too.

Francesca Hornak