



Christmas Craving

By Melissa Tizi

WHAT BETTER WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE CREATION OF ENGLISH CHRISTMAS DISHES THAN TO GO GROCERY SHOPPING WITH HEAD CHEF PAUL LONGWORTH FROM OENO THEQUE BY WINE UNIVERSE? WE MADE A VISIT TO THREE GROCERY SHOPPING SPOTS; JONES THE GROCER, CULINA AND THREESIXTY MARKETPLACE TO HUNT ON THE DIFFERENT INGREDIENTS THAT MAKE UP THE FLAVOURS AND COLOURS OF CHRISTMAS.

breast of duck with violet potato & brussels sprouts in pedro ximenez



Nuts, in general, are a very festive thing to eat but for this recipe I have decided to add pine nuts, they work very well with the dates and give the dish a nice added crunch.

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By Chef Paul Longworth

- 1 duck breast (about 1kg), cut into 4 pieces
 - 400g violet potatoes, peeled and boiled
 - 4 brussels sprouts, outer leaves only
 - 30ml olive oil
 - 30ml pedro ximenez
 - 400ml chicken stock
 - Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- Mash the boiled potatoes in a bowl with a fork and add in the reserved rendered duck fat and season to taste with freshly ground pepper.
 - Blanch the outer leaves of the brussels sprouts in a pot of boiling water. Remove and plunge them in ice water. Drain well. Drizzle the blanched brussels sprouts with olive oil and pedro ximenez and season to taste with salt and freshly ground pepper.
 - Heat a sauté pan until hot and pan-fry the duck breasts skin side down until it turns pinkish on the inside, for about 8 to 10 minutes. Flip the duck breasts over and cook for another 2 minutes. Remove pan-seared duck breasts from the sauté pan and reserve the rendered duck fat.
 - Heat the chicken stock in a saucepan until it coats the back of a spoon, skimming the scum as it rises to the top.
 - Place a pan-seared duck breast onto each serving plate. Add in the potato mash and brussels sprouts in pedro ximenez and spoon the reduced chicken stock around the serving plate. Serves 4

seared hokkaido scallop with smoked chestnut purée, stuffed date & pine nut

By Chef Paul Longworth

- 4 hokkaido scallops
- 120g cured pork belly (optional), sliced
- 80g pine nuts, toasted and chopped, extra for garnishing
- Fresh dill, chervil, parsley and chives, for stuffing
- 4 medjool dates, halved and pips removed
- 400ml chicken stock, reduced

Smoked Chestnut Purée

- 500g chestnuts, blanched
- 500ml ham stock, strained
- 200g cold butter, cut into cubes
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

- Heat a sauté pan until hot and pan-sear the scallops until golden brown, for about 2 minutes on each side.
- Mix the chopped pine nuts with the fresh herbs in a bowl and then stuff them into the date halves.
- For the smoked chestnut purée: Place the blanched chestnuts into a food processor and pulse to a breadcrumb texture. Spread the blended chestnuts onto a flat baking tray and place the baking tray into a larger baking tray. Insert some wood chips in between the gaps of the baking trays and cover with aluminum foil. Burn the wood chips with a blow torch to trap in the smoke. Repeat the steps while stirring the blended chestnuts. Add in the strained ham stock in equal parts and return to heat to soften the mixture. Transfer the mixture to a liquidiser, add in the cold butter cubes and blend until smooth. Pass the smoked chestnut purée through a sieve and set aside.
- Drop a spoonful of smoked chestnut purée with an oval spoon onto each serving plate. Just as the spoon is almost empty, drag the tip of the spoon along the plate to form a teardrop appearance. Place a pan-seared scallop in the middle of each serving plate and arrange the stuffed dates and sliced cured pork belly around it. Drizzle with reduced chicken stock and scatter a few toasted pine nuts. Serves 4



It's that time of the year again where the festive mood and all things merry and cheery get on top list of our year end agenda. Let's face it – Christmas makes us feel all warm and fuzzy inside and when it comes to celebrations, food is the main social element that binds all of us together. It is also the perfect way to break the ice at that Christmas party, when you run out of ideas to talk to that old neighbour whom your mother invited for dinner. After all, what is Christmas without good food and company? Sure, we lack the most Christmassy factor; that is the snow here in sunny Singapore, but we sure do make it up with the glittering lights and good food that adorn our streets and restaurants. And let us not forget the island's melting pot of cultures and backgrounds which dabs vibrancy towards Singapore's culinary tapestry. A former British colony, Singapore definitely acquired traces of British cooking. It also helps that we have great talents like Chef Paul Longworth who lends his culinary touches to Oenothèque. As we made our way to the gourmet grocers to source out the ingredients of the two Christmas-inspired dishes that he had in mind; Chef Longworth, who has been here for about six months, shared on how certain items make him reminisce over the festive season back home in the UK.



Paul Longworth

If you happen to walk along Oxford Road in December, the sight and smell of street vendors roasting and caramelising chestnuts are not to be missed.

"Dates and chestnuts are very common in the UK during Christmas time and I certainly grew up with them. I remember my Dad bringing home fresh chestnuts and we would prepare them by making a little slit in the shell and dry roasting them. I can never explain the smell that came from them when they are cooked," said Chef Longworth. Indeed, this is also the time where I find myself craving for roasts, divine chocolatey desserts and also getting an overdose from the highly addictive Christmas carols and songs that accompany the crowd down Orchard Road. Of course, the customary decorations that give the heart of town its added charm and glamour are also a sight to behold. For the chef, Oxford Road back home gives him a

lasting memory of Christmas. "If you happen to walk along Oxford Road in December, the sight and smell of street vendors roasting and caramelising chestnuts are not to be missed," added the chef. In between sharing sessions of past Christmas, Chef Longworth also told me that for his first dish, the seared Hokkaido scallops with smoked chestnut purée, dates and pine nuts, puréeing the chestnuts was part of a logical cooking process, which results in a starchy and velvety feel to the consistency of the purée. "They are extremely starchy and lend themselves to incorporate butter and become velvety. This works very well with the scallops as it's sweet and juicy, thus requiring a more savoury and earthy flavour. Nuts, in general, are a very festive thing to eat but for this recipe I have decided to add pine nuts, as they work very well with the dates and give the dish a nice added crunch." There is also the optional pieces of pork belly that can be added to the seared Hokkaido scallops. In the true words of a chef, our kitchen maestro added; "The fattiness and flavour from the pork is the perfect marriage when paired with scallops." Chef Longworth usually makes his purchase of ingredients for his restaurant via fresh food suppliers like Fresh Direct, Indoguna, Classic Fine Foods, Euraco and Huber's Butchery. However, these supplies can also be purchased at your gourmet grocery stores like Culina, ThreeSixty Marketplace and Jones the Grocer which offer a variety of fresh, quality produce.

The second dish explores the colours and balance of all the ingredients used. Violet potatoes, with its royal hues, are aptly festive and add life to the look of the dish. Chef Longworth commented that while these potatoes are available in England, the best that he had used so far are from France. "One thing to bear in mind is that this kind of spud (small potato) is very dry and floury. It requires a lot of added moisture, such as butter or oil, but in this recipe, I have kept all the rendered duck fat and have used this instead." Turkey, as it is with all birds, is no stranger to the dining table when it comes to Christmas. Chef Longworth shared that while typically, the turkey is a staple for Christmas dishes; he added the twist to the second dish by using the duck instead. One of his favourite poultry, the duck is also readily available here although other birds such as the goose, partridge and pheasant are widely used for Christmas. Chef Longworth recalled how it was like to eat the brussels sprouts during Christmas, which was typically overcooked. But being a chef, he innovated the appeal and presentation of the brussels sprouts. Using just the outer leaves which are not as bitter as the inner core, the brussels sprouts were blanched quickly to retain its colour and crunch. "As I have grown up, I have been using them more and more, trying to make them a joy to eat rather than a feared nightmare. They have been blanched very quickly to retain the colour and crunch. Sherry was always drunk at Christmas, so I decided to use one of the finest sheries which contain pedro ximenez. It is simply a drizzle of both the sherry and olive oil over the brussels sprouts leaves before serving."

For those who are eager to get a tip from Chef Longworth, he also let us in on his technique when using salt and pepper in roasting, pan-frying and searing. "Being resilient to heat, salt needs a bit of time to penetrate and to evenly season. However, freshly milled pepper is something that will burn very easily, so I use salt at the beginning of the cooking process and pepper, at the end." Looking at the dishes made me feel like humming George Michael's *Last Christmas* (who, by the way, hailed from London), which to me, is a must-have song during this period. That said, it is never convincing enough to try English Christmas dishes unless they were prepared by a native. Be it traditional, contemporary or even quirky Christmas dishes, the fun, nostalgia and festive association in all, contribute to the celebratory mood we all yearn during this time of the year. MT

- Culina, 8 Dempsey Road, #01-13, Singapore 247696, Tel: (65) 6474 7338
- Jones the Grocer, 9 Dempsey Road, #01-12, Singapore 247697, Tel: (65) 6476 1512
- ThreeSixty Marketplace, 2 Orchard Turn, ION Orchard, #04-21, Singapore 238801, Tel: (65) 6509 8434



❄️ yellow onions
S\$1.80
per 750g



❄️ violet potatoes
S\$0.42
per 100g



❄️ pine nuts
S\$7.35
per 100g



❄️ violet potatoes
S\$13.50
per 100g



❄️ medjool dates
S\$9.90
per 330g



❄️ brussels sprouts
S\$1.62
per 100g



❄️ bay leaves
S\$4.95
per 3g



❄️ thyme sprigs
S\$1.80
per 100g



❄️ pork belly
S\$2.69
per 100g



❄️ fresh herbs
S\$3.50
per 10g



❄️ carrots
S\$0.22
per 100g



❄️ gourmet ham
S\$5.50
per 200g

SHOPPING WITH CHEF PAUL LONGWORTH FOR A CHRISTMAS MEAL



One thing to bear in mind is that this kind of spud (small potato) is very dry and floury. It requires a lot of added moisture, such as butter or oil, but in this recipe, I have kept all the rendered duck fat and have used this instead.



potatoes vitelotes
S\$12.60
per 100g



green bean haricot
S\$3.20
per 100g



cos lettuce
S\$1.90
per 100g



breast of duck
S\$14.05
per 380g



thyme
S\$1.95
per 100g



pine nuts
S\$22.50
per 150g



hokkaido scallops
S\$59.90
per kg



chestnut purée
S\$9.35
per 435g