



The IMPERMANENCE of good food

WITHOUT THE DISTRACTION OF CONVERSATION, ANDREW BROWN DISCOVERED A HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF HIS FOOD – ITS TEXTURE AND AROMA, AND ESPECIALLY TASTE

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A stellar meal is almost always accompanied by lively conversation and a bit of arm flapping that's inversely proportional to the amount of tipple left in the bottle.

Inevitably, at some point of the meal, the food taste and quality will be alluded to, dissected and perhaps even debated as tastes collide. Imagine then, if you will, enduring a (delicious) repast in stoic silence, a silence that's made even more resounding by the almost too loud clinking of cutlery and crockery; shifting of chairs and the quiet whisper of footsteps by your fellow mute diners. Without the distraction of conversation, you'll find

that a keen awareness of food – its texture, aroma and especially taste – is heightened. With the quality of food served at the Buddhist Retreat Centre just outside Ixopo in KwaZulu-Natal, the act of eating, while observing silence, becomes a feast of the senses.

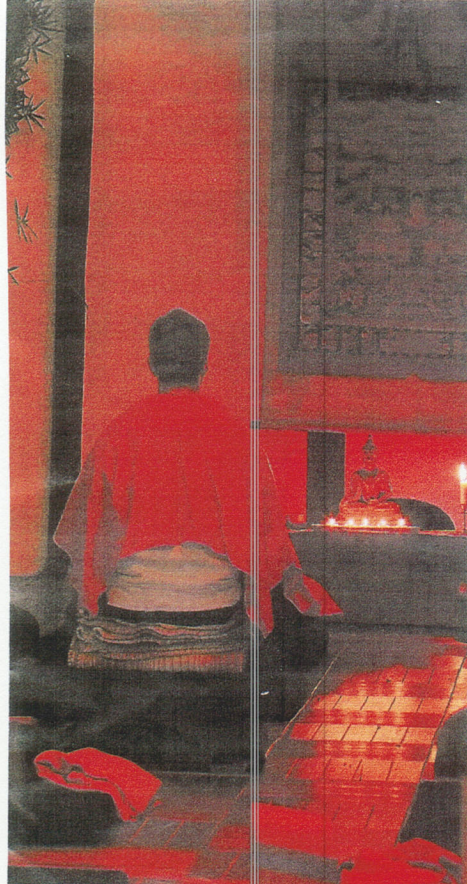
At the retreat, 'Noble Silence' is observed each morning until after breakfast, irrespective of whether you are attending a guided retreat or not. For a first timer this rite can be a tad daunting. But my unease doesn't last long, and soon I'm caught up in a peaceful awareness of both my surroundings and myself.

As a long-time vegetarian who isn't easily impressed by vegetarian fare not of my own making, I'm completely blown away by the look and taste of the food. When I find myself slowly shuffling back for seconds, I need to remind myself to

savour each mouthful in the moment.

It's fascinating to watch the carnivores partake of this superb veggie fare without being able to dissect the experience over genial dinner banter. Gestures, thumbs up, knowing smiles and nods of the head take on increased significance in the silent dining room. Mealtimes shatter many preconceptions of what 'vegetarian retreat food' tastes like, and the delicious fare is one of the reasons many become dyed-in-the-wool repeat clients of the BRC.

True to the Buddhist belief of doing the least harm to all beings, Louis van Loon, who founded the centre over 30 years ago, decided on a vegetarian menu. When visitors started to ask for the recipes to take home with them, the idea of a cookbook germinated. So the Van Loons began the painstaking process of gathering all the popular recipes, some on scrappy bits of paper, others on Post-its,



and conjuring a collection in *Quiet Food* (published by Jacana Media) from the recipe debris.

Together with the creative cooking talents of ex-chef Daniel Jardim, a second, even more popular book, *The Cake the Buddha Ate* (Jacana Media) was then published. More than just recipes, this book includes snippets of the intertwined history of the BRC and some evocative photography.

I asked Louis and Chrisi to share a little about the history of the chefs who have worked at the retreat.

"In the early days the 'chefs' were talented amateurs who had embraced vegetarian cooking, creating quality dishes for which guests often requested the recipes. These were hand-written on paper napkins until Chrisi started printing them for both the kitchen staff and guests. After these early efforts, the

chef who made the most impact was John Strydom, a university lecturer and master breadmaker looking for a lifestyle change. He collated all the existing recipes and added some of his own, leading to the publication of the first BRC cookbook. He was followed by Daniel Jardim, a gifted individual with experience gained in the UK, who brought yet more professionalism to the BRC kitchen. As a result of his experiences, Daniel now runs his own series of popular and successful 'cooking retreats' around the country.

"Most recently, Lynne Maccallum – with her extensive experience and teamed with the 'fabulous four' permanent senior cooks – has further enhanced the retreat's reputation as a destination of vegetarian culinary excellence."

It was Lynne's superb summer recipes that we enjoyed during our stay. Combining gourmet food with her

nutritional knowledge, we were treated to an amazing array of delightful seasonal dishes. Our first dish, chilled soup, was a subtle tasty blend of carrot, apple and celery. The sourdough bread and dips, an inspired choice of side dish, set the scene for what was to come. The main dishes had several of us returning for seconds and even thirds. My personal favourite was the beetroot and potato gratin.

At the centre, the Buddhist philosophy of living in the moment begins to make more sense – mindfulness and awareness are heightened by the peaceful surrounds, and there is a sense of being at one with nature. There's a Spanish proverb that says, 'How beautiful it is to do nothing, and then rest afterward'. I think those Spaniards might have actually been Zen Buddhists.
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Melon and kiwi juice

Serves 2 **EASY** 10 mins

1 honeydew melon
3 kiwifruits
lemon zest, to serve

Peel and dice the fruit and blend in a juicer. Pour into glasses and garnish with fresh lemon zest.

Fresh asparagus, goat's cheese and polenta tart (gluten-free)

Serves 6 **EASY** 35 mins

CRUST

750ml (3 cups) vegetable stock
120g (½ cup) polenta

FILLING

175g asparagus
1 log goat's cheese, sliced
125ml (½ cup) Parmesan, grated
80g sun-dried tomatoes
4 free-range eggs
125ml (½ cup) cream or milk
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C. Grease a fluted quiche dish.
- 2 Bring the stock to a boil in a saucepan, pour in the polenta and stir continuously. Simmer until the polenta starts to pull away from the side of the pot, about 10 minutes. Spread the polenta over the quiche dish evenly with a spatula.
- 3 Blanch the asparagus and place over the polenta. Sprinkle with the cheese and sun-dried tomatoes.
- 4 Whisk the eggs and cream or milk together and pour over the vegetables. Season.
- 5 Bake in the preheated oven until golden brown, 25 – 40 minutes.

Dill tzatziki

Serves 4 **EASY** 1 hr 15 mins

250ml (1 cup) grated cucumber
500ml (2 cups) Greek yoghurt
1 garlic clove, mashed
15ml (1 tbsp) fresh dill, finely chopped
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

- 1 Squeeze the excess moisture from the cucumber.
- 2 Combine the ingredients in a bowl. Adjust the seasoning. Allow to chill for at least 1 hour before serving.

Sourdough bread

To make this recipe you need a 'starter' that takes the place of yeast. Ask your local artisan bakery; alternatively, you can use dry instant yeast

Makes 2 loaves **A LITTLE EFFORT**
1 hr 30 mins + proving

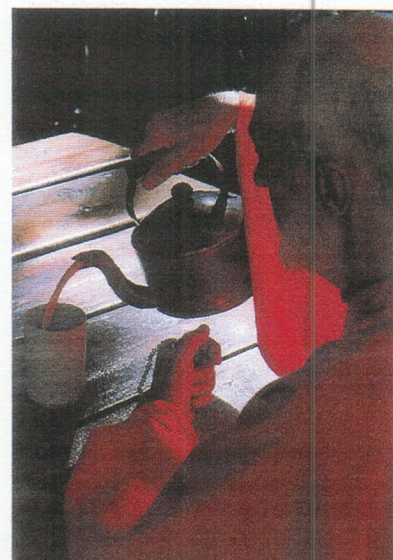
500g unbleached white bread flour
300g sourdough starter or 1 packet instant dry yeast
250ml (1 cup) water
11ml brown sugar
8ml salt
flavourless oil, for greasing
30g Parmesan
sage leaves, to garnish

- 1 Mix together the flour, sourdough starter (or yeast) and water in a bowl. Add the sugar and salt. Turn out on a clean work surface and knead for 10 minutes or until the 'windowpane effect' is achieved (where dough can be stretched until it is so thin that it becomes transparent).
- 2 Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a damp tea towel and let it prove for 2 – 3 hours. If using yeast, this time will be less.
- 3 Turn out the dough on a clean work surface and knock back. Divide into two and shape into two ball-shaped loaves. Flour generously and place each loaf seam-side up in a bowl lined with a heavily floured tea towel. Leave to prove for another 2 hours.
- 4 Preheat the oven to 200°C and put a few ice cubes or cold water into a baking tray and place in the bottom of the oven to create steam.
- 5 Sprinkle the grated Parmesan over the top of the loaf, together with the sage leaves. Place the loaves on a greased baking tray or hot baking stone. Bake until a good crust has formed and the loaves sound hollow when tapped, 35 – 40 minutes.

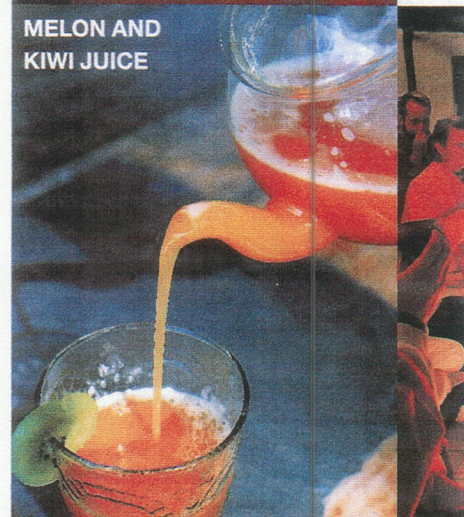
Sun-dried tomato dip

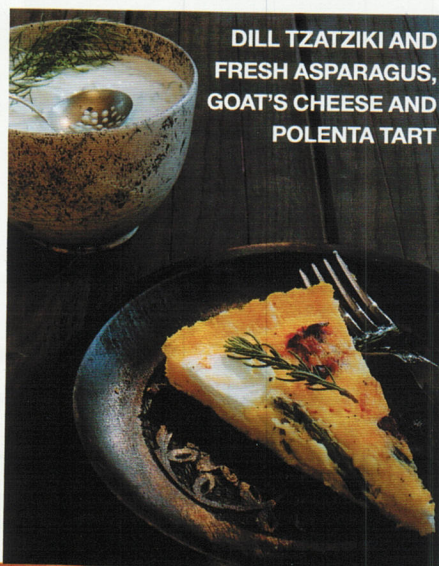
Serves 4 **EASY** 10 mins

125ml (½ cup) sun-dried tomatoes in



MELON AND
KIWI JUICE





DILL TZATZIKI AND FRESH ASPARAGUS, GOAT'S CHEESE AND POLENTA TART

oil, drained and chopped
250g cream cheese, at room temperature
125ml (½ cup) sour cream
10 dashes Tabasco sauce
5ml (1 tsp) salt
freshly ground black pepper, to taste
herbs of your choice, eg rosemary, oregano, basil

Blend all of the above until smooth, but still chunky.

Black bean dip

Serves 4 – 6 **EASY** 1 hr + overnight, to soak

100g dried black beans, soaked overnight and rinsed well and then cooked until soft (approx 1 hr)
15ml (1 tbsp) fresh lemon juice
1,25ml (¼ tsp) onion powder
1,25ml (¼ tsp) garlic powder
2,5ml (½ tsp) coriander
1,25ml (¼ tsp) cumin
5ml (1 tsp) cayenne pepper
5ml (1 tsp) salt
fresh coriander or mint, to garnish

Blend all of the above until smooth, but still chunky.

Chilled carrot, apple and celery soup

Serves 4 **EASY** 1 hr

10ml (2 tsp) vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped
2 leeks, chopped
6 carrots, scrubbed and chopped
1 bunch celery, chopped
30ml (2 tbsp) ginger, grated
30ml (2 tbsp) parsley, chopped
2 apples, peeled and chopped
2 potatoes, peeled and chopped
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Heat the oil in a saucepan and sauté the onion. Add the leeks, carrots, celery, ginger and parsley, and stir over low heat, 2 – 3 minutes. Add a little extra water if necessary.

2 Add the apples and potatoes. Cover with water and simmer until the vegetables are tender.

3 Blend until smooth and silky. Chill and adjust seasoning before serving.



CHILLED CARROT, APPLE AND CELERY SOUP WITH SOURDOUGH BREAD, SUN-DRIED TOMATO DIP AND BLACK BEAN DIP



The BRC was recently voted one of CNN's top 10 meditation retreats in the world!



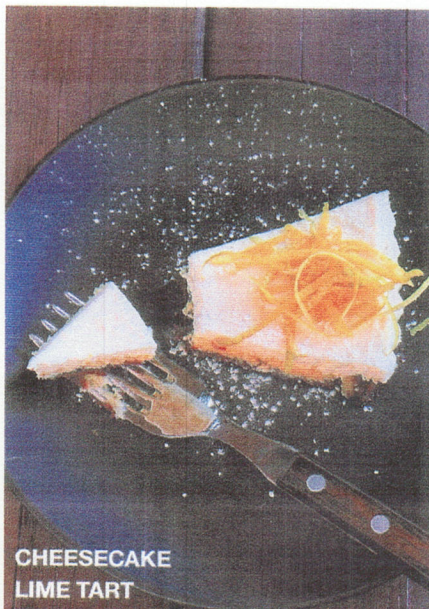
**BEETROOT AND
POTATO GRATIN**

Beetroot and potato gratin

Serves 6 **EASY** 1 hr 45 mins

500ml (2 cups) double cream
1 medium onion, peeled and quartered
20g fresh thyme sprigs + extra leaves, for layering
2 bay leaves
6 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
shaved peel of 1 large lemon
8 whole cloves
5ml (1 tsp) salt
5ml (1 tsp) white pepper
4 – 5 (700g) medium beetroots, boiled, peeled and sliced 2mm thick
4 – 5 medium potatoes, boiled, peeled and sliced 2mm thick
100g hard mozzarella, grated
150g extra mature Cheddar, grated

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- 2 Pour the cream into a medium saucepan and add the onion, thyme, bay leaves, garlic, lemon peel, cloves, salt and white pepper. Gently bring the cream to a boil and remove from the heat. Set aside to infuse for at least 10 minutes, then strain.
- 3 Scatter one-third of the beetroot and potato on the base of a 27cm x 18cm baking dish. Pour over a few spoonfuls of cream and sprinkle one-third of the cheese and thyme leaves on top. Arrange another layer of vegetables followed by a little cream and another third of the cheese and thyme. Place the final layer of vegetables on top, pour over the remaining cream, holding back the last of the cheese and thyme leaves.
- + Cover tightly with foil and bake for



**CHEESECAKE
LIME TART**

40 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for 10 more minutes. Sprinkle over the last of the cheese and thyme, and bake until the cheese is golden brown and the vegetables are cooked through, another 15 minutes. Set aside in a warm place for 5 – 10 minutes before serving.

Cheesecake lime tart

Serves 8 **A LITTLE EFFORT**

45 mins + 2 hrs, to chill

CRUST

1 packet digestive biscuits, crushed
55g (¼ cup) butter, melted
15ml (1 tbsp) cocoa powder

FILLING

FIRST BAKED LAYER

1 tin condensed milk
125ml (½ cup) fresh lime juice
3 egg yolks

SECOND LAYER

250g cream cheese
½ tin condensed milk
60ml (¼ cup) lime juice
30ml (2 tbsp) sugar
5ml (1 tsp) vanilla essence

- 1 For the crust, mix all of the ingredients in a food processor and spread into a greased 28cm tart dish.
- 2 For the first layer of the filling, place all of the ingredients in a food processor and blend until smooth. Pour into the biscuit crust and bake at 180°C until set, about 25 minutes. Allow to cool.
- 3 For the second layer, place the ingredients in a food processor and

66 The secret ingredient in all these recipes: served with love from the Buddhist **99** Retreat Centre.



VEGAN CHOCOLATE CAKE

blend until smooth. Pour on top of the cooled baked layer. Place in the fridge to set, about 2 hours.

Vegan chocolate cake

Serves 8 **A LITTLE EFFORT** 45 mins

420g (3 cups) self-raising flour
400g (2 cups) sugar
30g cocoa
10ml (2 tsp) baking powder
5ml (1 tsp) salt
180ml (¾ cup) vegetable oil
30ml (2 tbsp) vinegar
10ml (2 tsp) vanilla essence
500ml (2 cups) cold water
icing sugar, to dust

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- 2 Mix the dry ingredients together. Add the wet ingredients and stir until smooth.
- 3 Pour into 2 greased 23cm cake tins and bake in the preheated oven, 30 minutes. Allow to cool in the oven.
- + Dust with icing sugar or ice with an icing made by mixing 50g (½ cup) cocoa, 125ml (½ cup) agave or honey and 60ml (¼ cup) coconut oil.