

Monday 2nd June 2014

Bonjour,

I hope this finds you well. The fruit is perking up with peaches and watermelons in most of the bags and apricots from Provence and nectarines in large fruit bags. We are still a bit Mediterranean in the vegetable bags but the English season will be kicking off soon. Here are a few recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Butternut Squash, Red Pepper and Lentil Soup

900g butternut squash	1 large red pepper
1 large onion	2 cloves garlic
½ tsp mixed spice	600ml vegetable stock
dollop yoghurt to serve (optional)	

Chop the onion into chunks, chop the garlic and cut the pepper into rough squares. Peel and deseed the squash and cut into chunks. Heat a little oil in a large pan and sauté the onion and squash for a few minutes until caramelised around the edges. Add the spice and continue to fry for a couple of minutes. Add the garlic and fry for a minute but don't let it burn. Add the red pepper and season with salt and pepper. Add the hot vegetable stock, bring to the boil and turn down the heat to a simmer. Add the lentils, stir and simmer for 30-40 minutes stirring occasionally so nothing sticks to the bottom of the pan. Blend and serve with a swirl of yoghurt and fresh crusty bread.

Zesty Broccoli and Courgette Spaghetti

2 courgettes, trimmed	200g broccoli
450g dry spaghetti	6 tbsp olive oil
25g walnuts, roughly chopped	zest of a lemon
pinch of dried chilli flakes	salt and black pepper
4 tbsp freshly grated Parmesan (optional)	

Coarsely grate the courgettes then place them in a clean tea towel and squeeze dry. Meanwhile, chop the broccoli into small florets including stem. Heat the oil in a large frying pan, add the courgettes and fry for 7 minutes on a medium heat. Stir occasionally. Add in the broccoli, chilli flakes, walnuts and lemon zest and continue to cook for a further 3 minutes. Season with salt and stir. In the meantime, cook the pasta in a large saucepan of salted water for 8-10 minutes or until just tender and 'al dente'. Drain in a colander. Add the spaghetti to the frying pan and toss all together on a medium heat for 30 seconds. Serve immediately, scattered with cheese if using.

I am still in lounging and pottering in France, still in Saint Tropez but returning this week. I am vaguely tanned, charged with vitamin D, and my brain has been reconfigured – for the moment at least.

Last week I was stupefied to get an email from the office to say a postcard had been received from Brigitte Bardot:

“Dearest Isobel, what a surprise when I receive the beautiful wool shawl done with your sheep's wool !! Thank you with all my heart for that gift, you are a fantastic animal welfare and I'd like that my foundation can work with you. We are thinking like you that humans is so cruel that it should leave the planet – I am sorry my English is very bad when I speak but worst when I write – but it's like with my heart – and from my heart – kiss for me your animals you save from slaughter (the hell !) and all the others – for you all my love. Brigitte Bardot”

I almost threw my laptop in the air and called Dawn and Ingrid out to read them the message. BB was sending me her love and hopes I can work with her Foundation !!! It wasn't 'merci beaucoup et au revoir'. And to receive this in a place where her image is literally, everywhere. I thought I would write to her on my return. In the meantime, I started thinking of ways I could work with her, collaborations to benefit her Foundation.

Even though she lives here at La Madrague, her beautiful Bohemian home, bordering the sea and hidden behind a high blue gate and giant marine bamboo, BB hasn't been into Saint Tropez for ten years. I don't know if she had a spat with the town which thrives on her legend or whether it's because she hates what it has become - but she says she will never go there again for anything – or on second thoughts, maybe, but only if the government banned religious slaughter and horses were no longer food but treated as companion animals – her two major battles.

On Saturday, after a long, deep trance I had four good ideas to put to her so decided to write straight away, a long letter, in French. I put a hole in the envelope, attached a piece of string which I attached to a big asteroid-shaped piece of driftwood. She couldn't possibly have a post-box. We drove over there, walked up the sandy track and waited for a window between groups on the pilgrimage, having their photos taken outside. I covered the envelope in a small M & S carrier bag in case it rained, lobbed it over the gate, waited for the thud, hoped it didn't land on her cat, and walked quickly away.

At midday on Sunday the phone rang with 'unknown number'. I answered it "Allo, it's Brigitte". "Hello Brigitte" at which point Dawn and Ingrid's mouths fell open and they scurried away to fill up with rose and settle down in the room next to me to tune into the long conversation. Brigitte asked first how Myfa was and we laughed, I had told her in the letter about her enjoying her swims on Pampelonne beach before the sunbathers arrived. She kept saying how fantastic she thought I was and we talked about animal welfare and she said she really wanted me to get involved in her 'foundation'. She said she has a lot of pain with arthritis and has to be 'serene', I told her I was sorry and I understood that completely. She said it was a shame I was leaving so soon but that she was going to send a little present of one of her Foundation t-shirts for me to collect from a bar and would call me back. She finished the conversation by saying "I love you, I love you". I knew Dawn and Ingrid were still listening in. "I love you too" I said muffling it into my hand, hoping they wouldn't hear me. God knows what they were thinking ! She said she would call me back, she was asking her gardener to run the errand.

As promised, an hour later, she rang and could I collect her present at the bar Clemenceau on the Place des Lices. She told me to kiss Myfa from her, I said I would, she said "you must, you must" and she sent me more kisses. After the call I gave Myfa a big kiss and said "that is from Brigitte Bardot", she gave me one hell of a look.

We later drove into town and I went into the bar – the barman shrugged then remembered there was a package on the shelf. As I crossed the bar the waiter, the one in the know, smiled and winked at me “ Ah Brigitte’ he said.

Brigitte Bardot – the holiday twist !

Kind wishes,

Isobel