



Monday 22nd June 2015

Dear Customer,

It's been cold and grey and windy since the last letter. Sum total of warm, sunny days so far this year – one. Just the one since last September in fact - in nine months. The forecast for the next ten days doesn't look any better. It looks worse.

We have switched to new potatoes and the ones in the bags this week are Triplo. As the carrots are new season, we are prepacking them and they need to go straight into your fridge to stop them going bendy. The Mediterranean fruit is flowing. The apricots are delicious - Murciano variety. We also have little Padron peppers in the bags from Padron in Galicia. Traditionally they are fried in olive oil, sprinkled with salt and served as tapas. Most of them are mild, sweet and flavoursome but the occasional one is hot, and there is no way of knowing which short of eating them. They have given rise to the popular aphorism 'Os pementos de Padron, uns pican e outros non', " Padron peppers, some are hot and some are not'. Make what you will of that.

Fried Padron Peppers

padron peppers

olive oil

coarse salt or fleur de sel, to taste

Wash them and pat them dry. Put olive oil in a frying pan to a depth of about 1" on a medium heat. When the oil is hot, grab a handful of peppers and throw them into the oil. Use a lid to stop the oil splashing. Fry them around until they are brown on both sides but not too dark. Remove with a slotted spoon and sprinkle with the salt. Serve them immediately while piping hot accompanied by a sturdy country bread. To eat, hold them by the stem, bite into the flesh and pull, leaving the stems intact.

I am slowly recovering from the 'renovation' of the Garden Centre, trying to 'come down' from it. I seem to have permanent palpitations even when I'm just sitting down trying to relax. The last months since I saw that damned 'to let' sign have been intense to say the least. But it is looking really lovely. Looks like it should be in Islington instead of Brompton but there is a steady stream of customers. Some days better than others but most days are ok. We are still putting finishing touches to it ready for our official opening the week after next. A piano I bought on ebay arrives today (99p). I have not made it up to the moors much lately - no long, stress-busting walks. Just short walks down to the river where I sit on a piece of limestone while Myfa paddles, swims and ferries rocks from the river bed to one of her various dens. She can amuse herself for hours. The pristine Swale curls around Richmond. It really is pristine. We don't do rubbish here – everyone is too in awe of the natural beauty. I walk alongside the river along the footpath through the wild flower meadows teeming with wildlife, looking up at the Norman castle. I'm a few minutes from the town centre, a few minutes from my house. One meets the odd dog-walker and this last week, the odd photographer. There is great interest in a kingfisher's nest in the riverbank. 'Have you seen it?' people say. 'seen what?' I think, then remember. Bright iridescent blue bolting down the river – I've seen it a few times, it's incredible.

There are posters up for another Rubber Duck Race but attention has now turned to the next great event - the Teddy Bear Parachuting. Honestly, this place is really strange.

Every summer as the holiday season approaches, in an attempt to keep the tourists away, the council decide to cordon off the whole market place, the largest Georgian market place in England, and spend three months digging up all the cobbles as they are too dangerous, they dig them all up and then put them all back again exactly as they were. It is what all our council tax is spent on every year. It's the 'keep tourists out' tax. It sends the local businesses up the wall. Where the Lake District lives off Beatrix Potter, Lewis Carroll lived here, went to school here, many of the characters from Alice in Wonderland were derived from here and the places inspired by here but no-one will mention him. No blue plaque, no mention in the tourist information - nothing. Most people who have lived here all their lives don't even know he lived here and how influential it was on him. Heaven forbid, it might bring tourists, outsiders, and then they would see us rubber duck racing in the river and dropping teddy bears off the top of the castle with parachutes on.

I'm a bit concerned as I have been invited and I accepted to write a chapter for a book "Sustainable Luxury and Social Entrepreneurship : Stories from the Pioneers". I felt very honoured of course, but the deadline is closing in. I know it's imminent but I don't know when it is. I have been asked for 8000 words. I have no concept of how many words that is. I know what 10 words look like. I find 10 difficult enough. I have no idea how I can possibly write 8000. If I could just knock off chapters I would have 30 books on my hard drive by now. I've never written a chapter. I've never written 8000 words. I've just this second checked the deadline. It is 15th July. That's nothing, only three weeks away and I am at least three weeks from even being able to think about it let alone write it.

Related to the above, this last week I should have been in Madrid. I was shortlisted for the Global Ethical Luxury Fashion Award and as it is their 5th anniversary, all their short-listees were invited to spend two days being taken to receptions, dinner in a Michelin restaurant, visit to a posh winery in Valladolid, lunch at the President's home, private guided tour of the Thyssen Museum – one of the best art galleries in the world. It would have been very

nice, and to meet the other short-listees from around the world. Alas ! Blacklisted now. After declining the lavish invitation, the least I can do is to write a good chapter..... well, good luck with that Isobel.

On a more serious note, it is my responsibility to write that chapter and make sure that animal welfare and traceability of animal fibres back to the creatures that provide it, is fully present in in any discussion about ethical fashion.

Kind wishes,

Isobel **PS** my friend in St Tropez has her beach house available for 2 weeks from 19th July. It is pricey, it is not luxury but Bohemian, I sort of prefer that - the location is superb - dogs welcome. Email me if you are interested.