



Monday 7th March 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well.

What is an ingrowing toe nail ? I started typing it into Google then thought 'no, I'm not doing it'. Nor am I going to go to the doctor to tell him my toe hurts. It's red and feels hot, I wondered if the tooth abscess I had the other week could have made its way to my toe. Was my toe nail was growing into my toe instead of out of it, it's hard to tell. I covered it in Savlon and I wrapped it in a cold flannel to draw the heat out. I'd helped my friend turn her horses into a field a few days ago and have a very vague recollection that I may have dragged the gate shut over my toe, I remember that I got the halter lead caught under it. I have a poor memory these days.

With the business restructuring, I wondered whether I should be restructuring. I don't want to leave my house but I know that to downsize and go mortgage-free would be the sensible thing to do. I'd been looking at Prime Location to see what's on the market here. It was disappointing. There was nothing whatsoever that I could possibly live in, not in any price bracket. Nothing compares to my house. I viewed about 40 properties here before I head-hunted this one with a letter through its door 12 years ago. The house was difficult inside, built by jewellers in 1926. They were very small people and the rooms were tiny and oddly shaped, but it had the location, the charm, the 'je ne sais quoi'. I bought it for £290,000 but would have paid far more. I spent the same again knocking walls out, doubling its size, new everything, creating terraces to take in the magnificent views. So it cost me £580k and adding on 12 years of appreciation, even in the North, I was expecting it must be worth £750k. I sold my London house for £400k and it is now worth £1.4 million.

Having seen nothing in Richmond I could live in, there was only one other place I'd want to be and I found a beautiful little house near La Croix Valmer, above la plage Gigaro, an area normally unaffordable, 'hors de prix', being so stunning and just 10 miles from Saint Tropez. It had a bougainvillea-covered terrace and fig and lemon trees in the garden. I could see myself on the upstairs living room balcony overlooking the garden, sipping fresh orange juice, writing my book and writing my letters to you telling you how wonderful the world is. So I decided I'd buy that and just rent something in Richmond. Perfect – and no more long, vitamin D starved winters worrying about my big toe.

I called the Richmond agent round. I gave him the tour, he raved about the house and then opened up his briefcase to show me what they had on the market to show me how he was arriving at the valuation. He showed me ones from 400-500k but they were nothing like my house. He started talking round the £500k mark which I said was ridiculous, we had a difference of opinion of £250k. He said it only has 3 bedrooms. Yes I told him but it only had 3 bedrooms because I knocked walls down to make them 30ft wide to capture the panoramas and it is the size of a 5 bedroom house. He said that it didn't work like that, not like in France where it is based on square meterage. He told me it wasn't London either as I'd argued how I broke the price barrier for the area with that house. My house just doesn't compare – the quintessential English lane, the views, if you turn right you can walk to oblivion without seeing another soul and if you turn left you're 5 minutes down a quintessential English lane into town, not to mention my interior design and architectural flair. I mean the 'je ne sais quoi' on its own must be worth £250k. It's certainly the best house in Richmond. His last word on it was that it is more than £500k must not as much as £600k. Well that was Gigaro out the window then.

I emailed my brother to tell him the valuation and he didn't respond. He's been arguing for a long time that I should sell the house, refinance myself and go mortgage free. He was probably shocked too by the valuation. He can't talk to me at the moment as he finds it all too harrowing.

So there we have it and I am stuck here. Will have to get on with writing my best seller.

Anyway, more importantly, here are some quick and delicious side dishes you could try this week with your cabb and brocc:

Creamy Ginger Savoy Cabbage

2 tbsp butter

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 medium cabbage, cored and thinly sliced

salt and black pepper to taste

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1 heaped tbsp grated fresh ginger

200ml double cream

In a large pan heat the butter over a medium heat until it is melted and starting to bubble a little. Stir in the onion and garlic and cook for about 5 minutes, until softened. Stir in the ginger and cook for about a minute. Then, add the cabbage, stirring well to coat it with the butter and other flavours. Cook, stirring occasionally, for about 15-20 minutes, until the cabbage is soft and caramelised. Turn the heat down to low and stir in the cream. Cover and continue to cook over a low heat for about 10 minutes. Uncover, add the salt and pepper to taste then continue to cook over a low heat for about 10 minutes. Uncover, add salt and pepper to taste. Cook for a few more minutes allowing some of the liquid to evaporate, adjust seasoning and serve.

Charred Broccoli with Lemon, Chilli, Honey and Garlic

1 head broccoli

1 tsp sea salt flakes

zest of 1 lemon and juice of ½

1 tbsp honey

3 tbsp olive oil

1 garlic clove, sliced thinly

1 thumb-sized red chilli, seeded and diced

Preheat the oven to 220c/425F/Gas 7. Use a carrot peeler to remove the tough outer skin of the broccoli stem then trim the edge of the bottom. Slice the broccoli in half then cut into 25mm slices. Toss with 1 tbsp olive oil and some salt. Place on a large baking tray and roast for 30 minutes, or until browned and charred at the edges. During the last 10 minutes of cooking, add the garlic and toss again. While it is roasting, whisk the lemon juice, zest, honey, chilli, 2 tbsp olive oil and some salt in a bowl. When the broccoli is done, drizzle the dressing over it and give it a gentle toss. Serve.

Kind wishes,

Isobel