

London: cooking classes at the l'atelier des Chefs

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L'atelier des Chefs cookery school, London

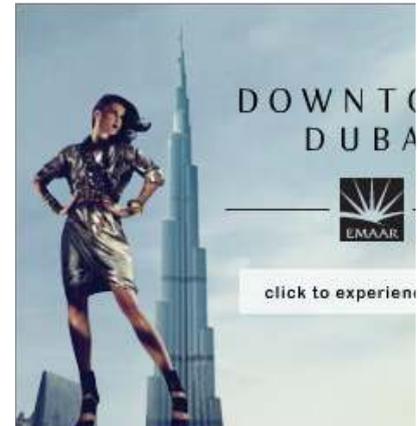
The lunch hour was, let's face it, originally designed for lunch. So instead of wasting that precious hour Facebook stalking or chore chasing, you could be whipping up and eating a home-cooked meal and still have time to make that 2.30 meeting.

Cookery school L'atelier des Chefs is all about getting people to (re)discover the joy of cooking and, just as importantly, the joy of eating. Sounds good to me. The school prides itself on promoting uncomplicated, reasonably priced, yet sophisticated dishes. And, from a swift half hour to a gourmet four-hour fest, cookery master classes are tailored to appeal to every level of chef, from those hoping to move on from pasta with pesto to full-on foodies.

With well-established schools in France and Belgium, L'atelier des Chefs took up residence in London's West End a couple of years ago, and I recently peeled myself from my desk in my lunch break and headed to the Wigmore Street venue to see what I could rustle up in 30 minutes.

The most popular class on offer at L'atelier is the appealingly named 'Cook, Eat and Run'. Doing exactly what it says on the tin, the session is perfect for busy, time-pressed Londoners wanting to hone their cookery skills during their lunch hour - and have a slap-up meal to boot. L'atelier's shortest (and cheapest) class, it's also a good starting point for cookery school *ingénues*.

Seven other hungry students and I were led past shelves stacked with a baffling array of



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culinary gadgets to one of the two state-of-the-art kitchens, where we were delivered into the capable hands of professional chef Andre Dupin, who's done stints at Chez Bruce and Gordon Ramsay at Claridge's.

Plastic pinnies on, we gathered like small children around Andre as he guided us through the preparatory steps for our recipe of Duck with Teryaki and Soba Noodles (see below). Effortlessly demonstrating how to chop an onion into those tiny squares like they do on the telly and, importantly, without crying (it's all in the chopping action), he also showed us how to keep fingers intact by adopting a claw-like grip on the veg. Clever stuff.

Points noted, we took to our chopping boards to put our newly learned skills into practice, attentively slicing our vegetables horizontally, vertically and horizontally again as we'd been shown.

Over at the stoves, Andre taught us how to pan fry our duck breasts (skin side down first to release the fat) and stir-fry our vegetables (garlic last to avoid burning), all the while encouraging us to muck in.

Duck breasts cooked and glazed to perfection, we combined our noodles and vegetables and proudly plated up our food. At this stage, you are given the option to take your food away or stay and enjoy the fruits of your labour around a communal dining table. We all opted for the latter. I dined enjoyably with a couple of solo foodies, a woman who had just moved to the UK and wanted to see what Londoners were cooking/eating, a couple who had received a voucher as a birthday present, and two chirpy twentysomething girls.

In fact, the social aspect is all part of the L'atelier experience, explained Tom McNeile, managing director of the school: 'By demonstrating what you can achieve in a lunchbreak, we hope to show that cooking isn't always time consuming — leaving more time to eat and socialise.'

And as we tucked into the mouthwatering lunch, sipping wine and engaging in small talk, we had to agree that he's got the right idea. And, with the menu changing daily, I could get used to this.

A 30-minute 'Cook, Eat and Run' class costs £18pp (wine is a £3 supplement). Receive a 20% discount off kitchenwear when you attend any class.

L'atelier des Chefs, 19 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1PH (+44 (0)207 499 6580; atelierdeschefs.co.uk)

Duck with teriyaki and soba noodles

For six people

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

Soba noodles : 400 gram(s) duck breast(s) : 6 whole

Soy sauce : 2.5 centilitre(s) dry white wine : 2.5 centilitre(s)

Orange(s) : 1 whole bay leaf (-ves) : 1 whole

Water : 1 centilitre(s) Fresh ginger : 30 gram(s)

Spring onion(s) : 4 whole white mushroom(s) : 300 gram(s)

Shallot(s) : 2 whole fresh coriander : 1/2 bunch(es)

Recette:

Peel the orange, discard the flesh and place the skin in a saucepan. Add the soy sauce, sugar, bay leaf, ginger root, white wine and the water. Reduce by four-fifths over a medium heat.

Place the soba noodles in a large bowl and cover with boiling water. Cover with a lid and

leave for 5 minutes. Once tender, refresh the noodles in cold water and set aside.

Peel the mushrooms and the shallot. Finely dice the shallot and cut into slices. Pick the coriander leaves.

Cut the excess fat from the duck and then gently score the skin without cutting into the flesh. Season with salt.

Heat a frying pan and sear the duck skin side first for 2 minutes. Pour away the grease and then turn the duck over. Sear for another minute and then remove from the pan. Reduce the heat and then roll the duck through the teriyaki and return to the pan for another minute. Repeat this glazing under the duck is cooked to perfection.

Sweat the shallot and the spring onion in hot olive oil with a pinch of salt. Once they are transparent, add the mushrooms, season and cook for 3 minutes. Now add the noodles and stir-fry for 2 minutes.

Cut the duck into slices. Serve the noodles in the centre of large dinner plates and top with the sliced duck. Finish with a drizzle of the teriyaki sauce and the chopped coriander.

Le plus du chef :

Don't add any oil to the pan when cooking the duck, simply place the fillets in the pan and allow them to release their own grease - this will help the cooking process and then you can drain away the excess.

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