



press clip

Cheeky approach pays off

MEISHA PERRIN

COOKING, teamwork and the corporate market come together in an innovative blend in Surry Hills where Leona Watson brought her Cheeky Food Group five years ago.

Ms Watson, who has a background in marketing and experience in the corporate world, created the group nine years ago based on the idea of an interactive and hands-on team-building cooking experience.

She believes adults often get bored with traditional cooking classes where they watch the chef before they get to try.

"It is not as engaging," she said.

The idea behind Cheeky is to bring together people who are interested in cooking in a non-traditional environment and keep them entertained while they learn.

"Our idea is to make them feel like the celebrity," she said. "Not us."

It has proven to be a hugely successful endeavour.

Ms Watson says she has taught 35,000 budding chefs so far. Two years ago she began individual and weekend classes, limited to 25 people.

The company participates in 400 events per year; 200 of them held

at the Cheeky HQ and the others around Australia.

Cheeky has also been involved in the community, providing a free class to teens from the Salvation Army Oasis Youth Centre.

Watson is also taking part in the Vinnies CEOs' sleepout at Luna Park tomorrow.

■ Available weekend classes: Totally tapas/Tapas too; Modern Fijian-Indian; Sexy Spanish paella and dessert; Oh so relaxed Sunday lunch; Healthy, easy and delicious; Magic of the Middle East; BBQ Feast. Phone: 8217 6900.



Leona Watson runs a different sort of cooking class.

Picture: JOHN APPELYARD

MUSSELS WITH CHORIZO

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp Pukara Estate extra virgin olive oil
- 1 Spanish-style chorizo sausage, cut in half lengthways then into medium-thin slices
- 2 medium size garlic cloves, sliced
- 1/2 can of tomatoes
- 1/2 tsp Masterfoods chilli flakes (or to taste)
- 1/2 cup prawn or chicken stock
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 1 small pinch of Masterfoods saffron, pulverised in a mortar and steeped in 2 tbsp very hot water (optional)
- Splash best-quality red wine vinegar
- Saxa salt
- 300gm of black mussels (the smaller the better), scrubbed well and debearded
- 1 tbsp minced fresh flat-leaf parsley, for garnish
- Country bread, for serving

METHOD:

1. Heat the olive oil in a wide, heavy pot over medium heat. Add the chorizo and cook stirring, until lightly browned when just beginning to crisp, 3 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until golden and crisp, 2 to 3 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer chorizo and garlic to a bowl.
2. Spoon off all but 1 tablespoon of oil from the pot then add the tomatoes and chilli. Cook over medium-low heat until the tomatoes are well reduced and lightly caramelised (about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally).
3. Add the stock, increase the heat to medium-high, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, add the saffron, cover and simmer (about 10 minutes). Add the vinegar, chorizo and garlic.
4. Add the mussels to the pot, cover and cook over medium-high heat, shaking the pot occasionally, until the mussels open, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove and discard any of the mussels that don't open.
5. Transfer to an earthenware cazuela or another rustic serving dish, sprinkle with the parsley, and serve with slices of country bread. Serves 3 to 5 as tapas.