



DATE: 3rd June, 2008
PUBLICATION: Not Quite Nigella
PAGE: online
AUTHOR: staff reporter

<http://www.notquitenigella.com/2008/06/03/cheeky-foods-team-building-cooking-classes/>



Cheeky Food Group's Cooking Classes
June 3, 2008 - 8:00 am | Not Quite Nigella

Cheeky Food Group cooking class signs

Team building at work is a necessary evil. You need a cohesive workplace and in most offices people have a closer relationship to their computer than they do to a colleague (myself included). A friend told me recently that her workplace had started organising some team building exercises but I was shocked to find out that they were actually Pole Dancing lessons! Of course, most of the female population at work opted out and of course the male population who weren't invited to attend were the ones that expressed the most interest but only as part of the audience and not the actual pole dancing (men on poles? Hmmm ...). Another friend told me that her group head had actually arranged for the group to go to a Korean sauna together for a scrub down and massage and that the Korean sauna in question was a nude only sauna. Call me crazy or conservative but I don't need to see that much of my colleagues...

Cheeky Food Group cooking class Squid

Cheeky Food Group cooking class Chorizo

In a more suitable and (thankfully less nude) vein, this afternoon I am bonding with other media lovelies at Cheeky Food Group's Surry Hills office for their Team Building Cooking Class and learning a thing or two more about cooking. I'm given a logo'd black apron and a chef's name with my name on it and a drink. Whilst mingling and chatting we're offered some chorizo with caramelised onion and some lemon squid. The lemon squid is beautifully tender and heady with lemon and salt and the chorizo is ambrosial with the soft finely sliced onion.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class introductions

Leona from the Cheeky Food Group

Leona, the owner of Cheeky Food Group, introduces herself and tells us a little about why she started it. She prefers interactive classes, not ones where the chef stands at the front whilst the audience are either bored listening or twitching to pick up a knife. Leona's other philosophy is that you should use whatever is available and that you don't necessarily need to go out and buy specialist equipment or ingredients if there is something just as suitable available. I am excited to learn that these are fully interactive classes and that the classes give you a lesson in knife work. For all of my home cooking, I've got a morbid fear of knives and use one accordingly so the knife work class is something that is sorely needed on my behalf. We're also given safety tips on how to behave in a large kitchen which helps avoid any potential disasters.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class setup

We're cooking 4 dishes over the next few hours with a Spanish theme and she splits us in two groups although there is no competition and everyone is friendly and helping each other out. Firstly, a Pear and Asparagus salad with walnuts pancetta and Manchego cheese and a pear dressing with fresh pureed pears in the dressing itself. Then a pork loin with a Pistachio pesto crust, heady with rosemary and thyme and topped with pancetta and of course, since the theme is Spanish food, a seafood Paella. For dessert we're making chocolate tarts with sour spiced black cherries and a Pedro Ximenez sherry sauce. Having never made paella, I'm particularly excited about this as I have been dying to make it.

Everything is set up for us and we start with the knife work class. Leona spends 20 minutes teaching us the various steps starting with the "hula" motion needed to be able to chop without slicing off a finger and be able to look up and talk to someone whilst still chopping (although I think that's at a bit more an advanced level and beyond my current capability). Before long, we're "hula-ing" away and as she points out, no-one has ever had an accident in their classes which is the most important thing.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class Filling tarts

Filling the chocolate tarts

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class Cherries

Macerated cherries bubbling away

We then start on the chocolate tart as that needs to set so we're busy whisking and separating eggs and sugar and melt chocolate with cream. In one pan we place black cherries with some star anise, orange peel, sugar and some Pedro Ximenez Sherry to reduce down. Once the chocolate filling is made, we spoon these into tart shells (although Leona suggests that you could put them in cups

too) and top with the cherries. Her assistant Jason, whisks these off to be refrigerated before coming back and showing us how the seafood.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class paella

Paella absorbing the stock, prior to seafood on top

We're shown how to remove the beak from the octopus and how to treat vongole to remove the grit from inside. We brown the prawns and octopus, then fry off onion, garlic and tomatoes, add some paprika and then the rice and the seafood stock prepared earlier. These are cooked in large pans but not paella pans which heartens me somewhat as that was always what stopped me making paella in the first place. The thing about paella we're told is that once the rice and stock are added, unlike risotto which requires a constant stirring motion, one should not stir the rice at all, that is the worst thing you can do with paella. After the rice has absorbed a lot of the stock, all of the seafood is artfully arranged on top.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class paella

Artistically arranged seafood on top of paella rice

We then make the dressing and the pesto. Both taste delicious and the pesto is applied to two long loins of pork which are then topped with pancetta and placed in the oven. I've been tasked with the job of frying the pancetta to a crisp for the salad and the salad is assembled with the rocket, thin pear slices, pancetta, walnuts and dressing. It's terribly easy but delicious.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class Pork with pancetta

Pesto smeared across the top of a pork loin and then it is topped with pancetta and popped into the oven.

Cheeky Food Group cooking class table

We look around and see that a table has been prepared for us to feast on all of the goodies we've made. Sitting down we help ourselves to the food.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class Leona

Leona holding the herb and pancetta crusted pork loin

The pork loin is beautifully tender even though it is not a fatty part of the meat. Indeed I usually find pork loin very dry but this is beautifully melt in the mouth.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class Salad

Asparagus, rocket, walnut, pancetta and pear salad with a pear dressing

The salad is gorgeous, the delicious pear dressing goes perfectly with the cheese and walnuts.

Cheeky Food group Cooking Class paella

Seafood paella

The paella is heady with freshly cooked seafood and the perfume of the sea and the octopus is my firm favourite as this too is not in the slightest bit rubbery.

Cheeky Food Group cooking class Chocolate tarts

Chocolate tart with Pedro Ximinez sherry macerated cherries

The chocolate mousse tart is lovely and crunchy on the outside but the soft almost liquidy filling strong with dark chocolate and sherry with a plumped sherry soaked and spiced cherry sitting on top.

Everyone is enjoying their food and wine and as expected, bonding suitably and might I say appropriately without a stripper pole in sight!
Cheeky Food Group

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As well as team building classes from 4-400 people, Cheeky offers classes including Sultry Italian Feasts, Sexy Spanish & Tapas and Authentic Asian Delights. Plus "Lazy Sunday Cooking Lunches" and Singles Cooking Parties. Prices start at \$155 per person.