



Of course you can

Need some help cooking? La Cucina Caldesi in Marylebone runs all kinds of courses to transform your culinary skills.

Cathy Levy cooks up an Italian Sunday lunch



Everyone is a cook these days. People you wouldn't imagine the type, turn up to work on Monday morning regaling tales of having made lobster and langoustine ravioli, Georgian pheasant and a nifty chocolate fondant. The shame of using a shop-bought pasta sauce is far too great to admit anymore; 'it's an outrage' people in the street cry. So, the time has come to get help from a man who certainly can.

Italian chef Giancarlo Caldesi (pictured left) and his artist wife Katie Beresford, set up La Cucina Caldesi in Marylebone six months ago, offering inspiration, cookery wisdom and spatulas of hope to all who believed their's was not to cook. Owner of Caffè Caldesi and Caldesi Restaurant, Giancarlo had been running informal cookery classes for his customers on demand over the past six years. Time, he thought, to get serious

about it. Now the husband and wife team offers a range of courses, not just for cooking, but about wine and cheese, Italian art – and for children as well as adults.

So on a Saturday morning, 10am, standing around the worktop in Giancarlo's restaurant kitchen, five men and five women gather to absorb, risotto-like, dollops of cookery wisdom from Mr Caldesi himself. Today, we're learning how to prepare a typical three course Italian Sunday lunch. And after we've cooked it, we get to eat it – a pretty good deal. Our group includes all kinds of people from all kinds of professions, some total novices in need of serious help, some more gastronomically aware looking for a chef's insider knowledge and others falling somewhere between the two.

Giancarlo introduces himself to the group in his lilting

Italian accent (originally from Tuscany, he came here 30 years ago), telling jokes and stories with cheeky charm. He then gets each of us would-be chefs to say a few words about ourselves – it's relaxed and informal. Then before you know it, we're down to work, preparing an authentic ragu. Based on Giancarlo's father's recipe, it's made using a mix of pork and beef. "Tuscan food is all about genuine flavours. It's rough cooking, but the artistry is in the eating," he says, animatedly. Food is a passion, he explains, enriched with all sorts of history and emotions. "When we cook, our feelings become part of the dish, so if you're in a temper or sad, it flavours the food." It's an idea that springs up in Laura Esquivel's gastro-inspired novel *Like Water For Chocolate*, where in one example the main character cries into a wedding dish she's cooking to make all who consume it overcome with sadness and longing.

“When we cook, our feelings become part of the dish, so if you're in a temper or sad, it flavours the food”

Being careful to stay perky, we finish preparing the ragu and leave it to simmer slowly (Giancarlo sends us off at intervals to smell the different flavours while we stir it; it's wonderful). We move on to the chef's famous mixed roast: guinea fowls and chicken, stuffed with a wonderful herb mixture. The birds cook in the oven atop chopped potatoes and a generous layer of olive oil. We all take turns chopping, stuffing and stirring; everyone helps, everyone asks questions, everyone enjoys themselves.

We also make Tiramisu and where it really gets fun, make our own fresh pasta dough. Some of us need rescuing more than others (who me?). It's wonderfully simple if you can only get it right. Fortunately, Giancarlo made a reliably good batch for our starter – all three courses coming together magically by 1pm, served at a long table in the restaurant, with our chief chef at the head and our guests seated beside us. It's a wonderful end to a busy, informative and very fun day.

The above course, including the three-course lunch, costs £100 per person. For details of all other courses (starting from £15 per person), visit the website at www.caldesi.com or call 020 7935 1144.

Caldesi Tuscan Restaurant: 15-17 Marylebone Lane W1

Caffè Caldesi: 118 Marylebone Lane W1

