

A photograph of a long, arched trellis covered in green and yellowing leaves, leading to a stone statue in a garden. The path is covered in fallen leaves, and the background shows a white building and a fence.

Cooking

LADY OF THE MANNA

Visitors to Sarah Burgoyne's idyllic Sussex guesthouse love its little home comforts and its scenic beauty, but it is the landlady's heavenly cooking that is the real draw. Sacha Bonsor fills her plate on a visit to Old Whyly

Photographs by Andrew Montgomery



Sarah Burgoyne in her beloved kitchen, *this page*, from where a vine-and-rose-covered pergola leads out to the garden, *opposite*

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FOURTEEN YEARS AGO, SARAH BURGOYNE WAS A recently widowed mother of two with no job, a six-bedroomed manor house in Sussex to maintain and years of child-rearing costs stretching out ahead of her. She faced a decision: she could either open her house to the paying public for board and food or move to London to make a fresh start.

Sitting with Sarah today in the kitchen of Old Whyly, the home that is now a thriving bed, breakfast and dinner operation, it's clear she took the right path. This is the archetypal rural dream, complete with hanging baskets, Wedgwood-blue cupboards and regulation Aga pumping out warmth. The place has a cosiness that Sarah has worked to maintain while transforming it from family residence to a business.

"My guests should feel as though they are staying in a home, not a house," she says.

Set on the edge of an ancient estate near Lewes, Old Whyly mixes the informal charm of a bed and breakfast with the luxury of a country hotel. Outside, the pear trees, well-tended borders and duck pond are perfect for a romantic stroll. But for Sarah, the kitchen is the focus.

"The food is everything," she says, "and the key is simplicity."

It's a dictum exemplified by the panna cotta terrine she turns out before me as we talk. The deliciously creamy-looking pudding is already more than the sum of its simple parts, and just needs a few hours' chilling before becoming the finalé of our three-course meal. Its blackcurrant coulis is similarly uncomplicated but elegant.

"Just cover the blackcurrants with some sugar to bring the juice out," explains Sarah, "then whiz them in a liquidiser and sieve."

Sarah has been cooking all her life. By the time she was 12 she was preparing her mother's dinner parties. She took a cooking course in Paris at 18, but it was as a mother and a wife that she picked



Sarah does all the cooking at Old Whyly, *above right*. The use of anchovy, *top*, in her goat's cheese parcels brings a savoury depth to the dish



Baked goat's cheese parcels

ABOVE

SERVES 4

PREPARATION TIME: 20 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 20 MINUTES

- 375g pack ready-rolled puff pastry
- 4 x 2.5cm-thick slices soft goat's cheese
- 2 large garlic cloves, crushed
- 4–6 anchovy fillets in oil, drained and finely chopped
- few drops of fruity olive oil
- 1 medium egg, beaten
- 4 chives
- 2 tbsp grated Parmesan

Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6.

Cut the pastry into quarters, and roll out slightly to give 4 squares, each about 17cm square. Put a slice of goat's cheese in the centre of each square. Mix the garlic, anchovy and oil together and smear over the goat's cheese. Brush the edges of the pastry with a little beaten egg. Bring the corners of the pastry up round the cheese, pinch the edges together and secure each with a knotted chive. Place on a baking tray. Brush the parcels with more beaten egg and scatter over the grated Parmesan. Bake for about 20 minutes or until the pastry is golden.

Serve the parcels hot, surrounded by a few rocket leaves that have been dressed lightly with some extra virgin olive oil.

The reliable match for goat's cheese is a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. The saltiness of the anchovies here would benefit from a touch of sweetness though, so ring the changes with this deliciously ripe and tangy German Riesling. **The Naked Grape Riesling 2003 Dr Loosen, Pfalz, Germany. Bin 50371; £5.99**

Skate wings with green salsa BELOW

SERVES 4

PREPARATION TIME: 10 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 10 MINUTES

- 3 tbsp plain flour
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 skate wings
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil

SALSA

- 3 garlic cloves
- 8 anchovy fillets in oil, drained and finely chopped
- 2 tsp capers, rinsed and drained
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- juice of 1 large lemon
- handful of parsley, finely chopped
- 1 bunch watercress, finely chopped

To make the salsa, crush the garlic with a pinch of salt in a pestle and mortar. Add the chopped anchovy fillets and capers. Whisk in the olive oil and lemon juice, then add the parsley. Just before you cook the skate, stir in the watercress and check the seasoning.

Put the flour on a plate and season it. Dust the skate wings in the seasoned flour and brush off any excess. Heat 1 tbsp oil in a frying pan over a medium-high heat. When hot, add two of the skate wings and fry for 4–5 minutes each side until golden brown. Pour over half the salsa and cook for a further minute until the salsa is warmed through. Set aside and keep warm while you repeat with the remaining 2 skate wings. Serve with a green salad.

Skate plays havoc with most lean, mineraly wines so try Semillon: a white with subtle flavours but a rich texture. **Louis Semillon 2003/04 Henschke, South Australia. Bin 37825; £9.99**





Panna cotta terrine

SERVES 6

PREPARATION TIME: 20 MINUTES, PLUS CHILLING

425ml double cream
14g sachet gelatine granules
1 vanilla pod
75g caster sugar
425ml Greek yogurt
fruit coulis and fresh fruit, to serve

Line a loaf tin or a plastic container, measuring about 10 x 10 x 20cm, with clingfilm.

Put 3–4 tbsps of the cream into a small bowl and sprinkle over the gelatine. Leave for a few minutes to swell then place the bowl in a larger bowl of just-boiled water and leave the gelatine to dissolve. (See page 100 for step-by-step instructions on using gelatine.)

Put the remaining cream into a pan. Split the vanilla pod, scrape the seeds into the cream, add the pod as well, then the sugar. Heat gently until the sugar has dissolved. Whisk in the dissolved gelatine and cream. Set aside to cool slightly. Remove the vanilla pod.

Stir the mixture into the yogurt. Pour into the prepared container. Chill for 4–5 hours.

Turn out the terrine onto a board. Slice and serve with fruit coulis and fruit. This is best eaten on the day it is made.

This underrated fizz has a foamy grapiness that binds the sharp fruit with the delicate panna cotta. **Gancia Asti, Italy, Bin 83800; £4.99**

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up most of her skills. When, in the early 1990s, her husband Richard died, she realised that her culinary gifts could help to make ends meet.

Now, Sarah hardly has a day to herself. With Glyndebourne five minutes away, Old Whyly is full during summer, and winters mean back-to-back weekend bookings and a hectic, if ad hoc, weekday schedule. Running a B&B as well as a family needs first-rate organisational skills, and boundless energy.

“There are days when I end up screaming,” she admits. “When my son [Guy, now 23] broke his thumb a few years ago during a particularly busy time, my first thought was ‘How could you do this, on today of all days?’” But if Sarah’s life has its turbulent moments, you wouldn’t guess from her welcoming manner. “A lot of guests have become friends and come back year after year,” she says.

Today, Sarah is cutting pastry into large, neat squares, placing chunks of goat’s cheese in the middle and seasoning them with crushed anchovy and garlic. A carrot and banana cake sits to her left,



Sarah’s panna cotta terrine, top left, is the perfect end to a meal, and her elegant drawing room, above, is an ideal place to retire to afterwards



Banana and carrot cake

SERVES 8

PREPARATION TIME: 30 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 1¼ HOURS, PLUS COOLING

3 medium eggs
 175g soft brown sugar
 175g plain flour
 2 tsp baking powder
 1 tsp salt
 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
 175ml sunflower oil
 175g walnut pieces
 2 ripe, medium bananas, mashed
 175g grated carrot

ICING

75g butter, softened
 75g cream cheese
 150g icing sugar, sifted
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 chopped walnuts, to decorate

Preheat the oven to 170°C/gas 3. Grease a 20cm-diameter cake tin with removable base.

Beat the eggs and the sugar together until thick. Sift in the flour, baking powder, salt and bicarbonate of soda. Mix well then add the oil and walnuts, then the banana and carrot. Pour into the tin. Bake for 1¼ hours or until a skewer comes out clean. Cover with foil if it begins to brown too much. Cool on a rack.

For the icing, beat the butter and cheese together, then add the sugar and vanilla. Spread on the cold cake. Finish with walnuts.

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topped with inch-thick icing and walnuts. On tasting the sponge, I remark on its perfect moistness.

“Oh yes,” Sarah smiles. “The secret is including plenty of sunflower oil in the mix.”

While the oil for the skate sizzles and we devour the goat's cheese parcels, Sarah passes on more tips: be careful to warm through the salsa for the fish rather than cook it, she warns, or you will lose some of its flavour. And when she brings out the terrine, now perfectly chilled, she shares with me her secret to perfect scrambled eggs (it involves using a double boiler).

Witnessing Sarah's enthusiasm for cooking, it occurs to me that opening her house to strangers was not the burden that it might have seemed. If she won the lottery, I wonder, would she close up shop? She looks shocked. “Lord no. I would still have to do it. Millions wouldn't change my life.”

For bed, breakfast and dinner enquiries, call Old Whyly on 01825 840216 or log on to oldwhyly.co.uk.



Sarah's perfectly moist banana and carrot cake, top, is a tea-time treat. “The secret is to include plenty of sunflower oil in the mix,” she reveals