

David cooks up a recipe for teaching kitchen skills...

David Wilson is bursting with enthusiasm. That's clear from the pace of words in the practical cooking course that he is pioneering in Broadford - and it is obvious when you meet him and he's talking about cooking.

And he wants people to feel the same - not be intimidated by the screaming, shouting and bad language of the stereotypical TV chef or by the scale of variety of dishes that is available to a would-be chef or cook, either at home or for a restaurant or café.

He is the driving force in the kitchen behind Creelers of Skye Restaurant in Broadford - not forgetting the Gumbo Shack of which more later - and since taking over in 1999 has developed the eatery in a variety of ways, including abandoning the takeaway in 2006 (which was sad for me because I loved stopping there when I was driving through Broadford, or staying at a Bed and Breakfast.)

He is also the last person to fall prey to the delusion that cooking in a restaurant is like cooking at home but just more of it - and the cookery course, which is designed to run during the winter months when there is spare time in the restaurant and when the would-be cooks have spare time, too, reflects that. It has a strong focus on understanding the dynamic forces that shape cooked food rather than having to memorise recipes without gaining a clear idea of why they work.

David comes to all this with wide experience in organising and teaching - and understanding how things work. Coming originally from Perth, he has a sociology degree but his first career was in osteopathy. He ended up running four practices in the south-east of England. He developed wide experience in lecturing to colleagues and also teaching his own staff.

He always had an interest in cooking, and used to cook to relax after a long day's work.



David Wilson in the kitchen at Creelers

He also loved eating in top restaurants, visiting many renowned ones in Britain, France and beyond, and studying their methods as he dined.

By the late 1990's he found himself needing a change of challenge and had become single again, so when he met up with Ann Doyle in the Borders, a friend from years before, and the opportunity to buy Creelers came up, it seemed the obvious thing to do. Ann had been in the catering business for many years, starting in her teens and getting experience in many different places, although at the time she was working for an investment

management firm.

Deciding on the location was easy. David was in Broadford and saw the restaurant advertised in a local newspaper. Then he told Ann. She came up a couple of days later and checked it out. He bought the place and she moved up a fortnight later to run it. He had to spend a year disentangling himself from his other businesses and then he moved up as well. The original eatery had been open for about six years and previously the building had several uses including being a butcher's.

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Artistic display for visitors and diners at Creelers of Skye

As Creelers of Skye became better known it won an increasing number of awards and plaudits, from publications ranging from the Los Angeles Times to Marco Polo magazine, and won a Certificate for Outstanding Achievement from the Good Eating Guide. It also attracted the attention of French and Belgian national media outlets because David has focused the food on the cuisine of southern France and northern Italy (apart from the Gumbo Shack of which more later).

"I cook the way the southern French and the northern Italians would cook – and I try to get it to the table as fast as possible but also tasting the best as well. " And certainly a glance at the recommendations he has garnered from customers suggests he is hitting their taste-buds right on the spot.

David reckons he cooks around 10,000/15,000 dishes a year with the 28 seat restaurant running throughout the evenings – although it is not planned that way, there are usually 2/3 sittings per table each evening in the summer. Naturally, he works with the best ingredients he can obtain for any dish. This has paid off with customers – some visitors ring to find when tables will be available before booking bed and breakfast in the area.

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How to enjoy your cooking...

In the winter, he can direct all this energy into the cookery course. The key to the course is direct leadership from David, plus repeated cooking of the dishes until the results are good and the technique perfected. The courses only last five days, but they are all-day, kitchen-action affairs covering everything from introductory snacks through entrées, sauces, main courses and desserts, perhaps as many as 50 in all. "Students," David emphasises, "will be cooking, not taking notes!" The overall aim is that will end

up with a repertoire of ten different dishes at each level of the menu. The target audience is people at home; people who are planning to start their own restaurant; and, of course, those already involved who wish to hone their skills. It is a five-day residential course – there's no recognised qualification at the end of it because there is so little theory taught, but those who go though it will be able to cook!

And the Gumbo Shack I promised to come back to? Well, Gumbo is lots of seafood and Cajun spices and originates from Louisiana in the southern USA, where, of course, the first Europeans to settle were French. It all started with David cooking it at home, and then there was some to spare so he put it on the menu – and then the customers would not let him stop cooking it! It has won praise even from visitors from Louisiana. So Gumbo Shack was added to the title – and it's still going!

The key for a chef or cook, according to David is "Enjoy it," he says. "Work hard and have fun." Cook well and the customers will enjoy your food; if the customers enjoy the food, you will enjoy cooking it. Simple, really!