

FREE

METRO

Cook
yourself
a Sophie
Conran
pie!

Thursday, March 31, 2005

www.metro.co.uk

Page 19

MMMMMETRO
 Good things to eat and drink

 Thursday, March 31, 2005 **METRO** 19

BEST OF BRITISH NINA CAPLAN MEETS THE ENTREPRENEUR WITH THE FAMOUS NAME BRINGING A POSH EDGE TO TRADITIONAL FARE


What's cooking? Sophie Conran dreams up another unusual recipe in her airy London kitchen

SOPHIE'S RATHER DIFFERENT DISH
Spring vegetable pie with lemon polenta
Filling

 250g broad beans, fresh or frozen
 300g courgettes in 1cm slices
 200g whole sugar snap peas or French beans in 3cm pieces
 150g frozen peas
 175g baby leeks in 4cm pieces

Sauce

 50g butter
 120g leeks, finely sliced, white parts only
 2 garlic cloves, sliced
 180g Maris piper potatoes, peeled and finely sliced
 100g fennel, sliced
 150ml dry white wine
 150ml double cream
 4tbsp chopped mint leaves
 4tbsp chopped parsley leaves

Topping

 500ml milk
 50g butter
 75g instant polenta
 Finely grated zest of one lemon
 1 large egg, beaten
 salt

Instructions

Bring large pan of salted water to the

boil, add courgettes, French beans and leeks and simmer for 2min. Add peas and cook for a further minute. Drain well, reserving 250ml of the cooking liquid. Run vegetables under cold running water until completely cold. Drain well and set aside. In a separate pan of salted boiling water, simmer broad beans for 5min, refresh under cold water and add to other vegetables.

Heat butter in large non-stick pan; add leeks, potato and fennel.

Cook gently for 12-14min, stirring. Add garlic after about 6min, stir in wine and turn up heat. Reduce for 2min. Add reserved veg water and boil until all vegetables are tender, remove from heat. Stir in



cream. Carefully pour into blender and blend until smooth. Add to vegetables and stir in herbs. Pour mixture into pie dish. Heat milk and butter in non-stick saucepan until almost boiling. Add polenta in slow stream and stir constantly for 5-6min or until it is the consistency of porridge. Remove from heat and grate in lemon rind. Season well and beat in egg. Spoon over vegetable mixture. Cook at 180°C for 30min or until top is golden-brown and filling piping hot.

Pies for the upper crust

Pies are great – for pub lunches, post-pub munchies and slobbering-on-the-sofa ready meals – but it's a brave entrepreneur who tries to repack them as haute cuisine.

Sophie Conran, fortunately, has the right attitude – and the right surname, since she's one of Sir Terence Conran's brood of ridiculously productive children; equally helpfully her mother, Caroline Conran, is a food writer.

'I have so many childhood memories of my mother cooking in her lovely big kitchen and of us kids helping her,' says Sophie, deftly bashing a garlic clove with the flat of a knife to loosen the skin. 'Chopping the garlic was my chore.'

Conran is a charming 38-year-old who hasn't allowed a handful of current careers – colour director for her fashion designer brother Jasper, food and entertaining director for InStyle magazine, single parent to two pre-teens – to cramp her plans to revamp the humble pie.

'The idea came to me two years ago, lying in the bath at 5am,' she

explains chirpily, chopping up a formidable variety of vegetables.

'Pies are just perfect little packages and they can be so healthy.' They can, it appears, be all kinds of things, as Sophie has invited me up to her airy central London kitchen to demonstrate.

'I tend to use ingredients that traditionally go well together but might not be expected to turn up in a pie,' she says. The flavours currently on sale – chicly packaged in a Sophie-designed pie bowl – include pork and prune with apple mash and chicken,



olive and preserved lemon (pictured), but for the moment they're only available in London. So for Metro's widely-spread

pie-fanciers she's come up with one to make at home: spring vegetable with lemon polenta.

'Polenta is lower-fat than pastry, and this pie has no wheat,' says Sophie, who is nonetheless wary of fads and diets. 'If you eat real food, you don't get fat,' she maintains. 'I love butter, bacon, all those sorts of things.' As if to

prove it, she empties a healthy dollop of double cream into the soupy vegetable mix she's stirring.

'This pie filling is a bit like vichyssoise,' she says, stirring industriously. 'And it's a completely invented pie – I don't think there's a precedent for making pies with polenta.' She may be right: shepherd's pie has mash, but polenta?

Freezing assets

The pie takes quite a long time to happen, 'but at least you can freeze them,' says Sophie, whose products – made by a small South London catering firm – are sold frozen. And they're still a sight more palatable than many of the alternatives; she describes going to a pie factory 'where a man stood stirring this giant vat of mince all day. It's tragic what happens to a lot of food that then ends up on our shelves.'

Still, she's much too astute a businesswoman not to want her pies in supermarkets eventually. Until then, non-Londoners will have to DIY this delicious veggie pie, with its piquant lemon polenta crust – and not a speck of processed mince in sight.

Sophie Conran Pies, £9.95, www.sophieconran.com