**By Lorraine Mallinder**

**Clare Smyth**

Clare Smyth is a shining example of how far determination can get you in life. With the single-minded focus of a long-distance runner, she’s reached the pinnacle of her trade, the first and only British female chef to hold three Michelin stars.

Mentored by Gordon Ramsay from a young age, she was always destined for the top. Today, her restaurant, Core by Clare Smyth, is widely regarded by critics as the best restaurant in London. Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, loved it so much, she invited Smyth to cater for her wedding reception.

Even over the phone, Smyth has unmistakable presence – subtle yet commanding. Though clearly proud to have catered for the Sussexes, she maintains that it was “just like any normal wedding”. Truth is, whoever was getting married on that day, she would have been giving it her all, delivering nothing less than absolute perfection.

Such is the outcome of working 13 years for one of the fiercest chefs in the business. Working at Gordon Ramsay’s was like being in the “SAS of kitchens”, she says. “Either you’re good enough and strong enough or you step aside. I wanted to be a part of that, to be part of the best team.”

She took a break from Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in 2005, having worked her way to senior sous chef. It was Ramsay himself who encouraged her to go for a job at Alain Ducasse’s Le Louis XV in Monte Carlo. “He said: ‘Just go, you’ll love the lifestyle, soak up all the glamour’,” she remembers.

Later, Ramsay and Ducasse would battle it out to recruit her for their respective restaurants in London. Ducasse lost, but remained one of her biggest champions. She remembers dining with Ramsay one night, meeting Ducasse the next day for breakfast.

“I left, thinking to myself how I lucky I was, knowing two of the greatest chefs in the world,” she says. “I am continually inspired by both.”

But the essence of this rare talent dates further back, to a 15-year-old schoolgirl obsessing over an Anton Mosimann book in Country Antrim, Northern Ireland. This daughter of farmers had been raised on real food: soda bread, slow cooked Irish stews, salmon from the ocean and cod poached in milk and parsley.

She had the good fortune to find work at one of the best restaurants in the area, with “tablecloths and waiters in uniforms”. “It wasn’t burgers and chips, like your typical restaurants in Northern Ireland,” she says. She started off as a schoolgirl, doing the dishes, gravitating towards cooking.

At the tender age of 16, she already knew what she wanted. Practical yet creative, she had a strong sense that she would find fulfilment in cooking. She moved to England to study culinary arts at Highbury College, honing her skills in different restaurants until she landed at Ramsay’s in 2002.

She never forgot her roots, turning the humble potato into haute cuisine in her signature dish at Core: a single Charlotte spud, slow cooked in a marinade of butter, topped with smoked trout and herring roe, served in a butter sauce.

It’s been described as the world’s best potato, the poshest you’ll ever eat. From Clare Smyth, it’s clear we should expect nothing less.

**Chocolate and Lavender tarts**

**Shortcrust pastry**
150g icing sugar
90g egg yolks
375g plain flour
188g unsalted butter
5g sea salt

Mix the butter, flour and salt together until it becomes a crumbly texture.
Cream the egg yolks and icing sugar together using a hand blender.
Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and mix until they come together as a dough.

Roll the dough between parchment paper to 5mm thick.
Cut 6cm diameter discs from the dough. Using round shaped moulds of 5 x 2cm, position 1 disc in between 2 moulds and press down. (Trim any excess dough with a small knife.)
Bake at 160°C for 6 minutes.

**Chocolate filling**
108g Udzungwa 70% dark chocolate
125g double cream
1g dry lavender
2 whole eggs
52g pasteurised egg yolks
50g caster sugar

Break-up the chocolate into small pieces.
In a small saucepan, heat the cream to 80°C, add the lavender and let it infuse for 4 minutes.
Remove from the heat and strain the cream through a sieve into a bowl. Add the chocolate and mix to create a ganache.
Keep this at room temperature.

Mix the eggs and sugar with an electric whisk until they are light and fluffy, creating a sabayon consistency.
Slowly pour and fold the ganache into the egg mixture using a spatula, until it forms a light brown mousse.
Place into pipping bags.

**Tart preparation**

1 Tart
30g Chocolate filling

Pipe the chocolate mix into the tart case until it is level with the rim.
Bake at 180°C for 4 minutes.
The tart should have a very slight wobble. If it is too liquid, cook for a further 30 seconds then remove from the oven and allow to rest.