

# food and drink

## lightbites

with Emma Higginbotham



ON Wednesday, celebrity chef Nick Naim will be hosting three free cookery demonstrations at the new Divertimenti cookery school and cook shop in Christ's Lane, Cambridge. The *Great British Menu* finalist will be showing guests how to create a

series of gastronomic delights in demonstrations at 1pm, 3pm and 5pm. Sessions are on a first come, first served basis, so make sure you get your place early. Lucky attendees will also be offered a £5 voucher off a Divertimenti cookery course if they book a class before Christmas, and there will be a 10 per cent discount off everything in-store all day. What's more, customers will be able to sample some delicious Camp Viejo wine.

TALKING of alcohol, December is upon us, which can mean only one thing – it's Christmas party season. And if you are struggling with a hangover, scoff a banana. Bananas are the perfect food to eat the morning after the night before, as they contain sugar in the form of fructose, and potassium, which is one of the minerals the body loses after a night out drinking. They are also high in magnesium, which helps to relax those pounding blood vessels which cause a hangover headache, and are also a natural antacid, which helps with the nausea. No wonder monkeys always look so perky.



I TEASED my best friend relentlessly when she put "hostess trolley" on her wedding list, but she's the one laughing now. The mobile food-warmers may feel like something out of *Abigail's Party* but they are incredibly useful: fantastic for roasts and ideal for Christmas dinner, they can keep food at the perfect temperature for up to four hours, which is great for families who eat at different times.



www.simplyhostess.co.uk has a range of 17 models. Have a look – I promise I won't laugh.

Smoothie brand Innocent is launching a competition for children to design the packaging for their new smoothie wedges. The closing date for entries is January 31, and the winners will be chosen by Charlie and Lola author and illustrator, Lauren Child. Visit [www.innocentkids.co.uk/win](http://www.innocentkids.co.uk/win) to download a template.

Owning a vineyard in the south of France is a pipe dream for most, but could become a reality if you have a few grand to spare. Vineyard Partners has teamed up with three vineyards to allow customers to experience the journey of a grape from vine to glass by "investing" in the special domaines in which they are grown. Packages range from the Artisan (£79.99 for two bottles of wine from your chosen domaine, a dividend certificate giving you a discount on wine purchases and a guided tour with lunch and wine tasting for two) to the Master Vigneron, where you work with the wine maker to produce your own barrel (more than 300 bottles) of your own individually-labelled wine. This package also includes three visits and six nights' luxury accommodation. It's yours for a cool £3,699. Visit [www.vineyardpartners.com](http://www.vineyardpartners.com)

# New-look bistro fit for the king

EMMA HIGGINBOTHAM talks to a highly-successful property guru turned pub landlord about his exciting new joint venture in the city.



CHEQUERED" is the perfect word to describe the history of The Fleur on Humberstone Road.

Once a motorbikers' hang-out and an Elvis pub – though thankfully not at the same time – the former Fleur de Lys ended its life as a gay bar before being bought by local property gurus Stephen Chard and Neil Robinson this summer. Now reborn, refurbished and rechristened, the wine bar/bistro is barely recognisable as the grotty boozier it once was.

Stephen and Neil – who run investment company Chard Robinson and Accent Property, one of the largest lettings agencies in Cambridge – are used to buying run-down residential pads to turn into something more glamorous. But nothing prepared Stephen for this particular makeover challenge.

"The place was dire, tragic," he laughs. "It was painted dark blue and a ghastly 80s yellow. And because the smoking ban hadn't come in, the walls were dripping with tar. The bar was filthy, the cellar was just disgusting – I regret ever having drunk a pint in there before we bought it!"

Thanks to their contacts in the property world, the refurbishment took the pair just three weeks, and with their practiced eye for interior design, they have created something rather beautiful. The Fleur has a distinctly colonial feel, with dark furniture, a wooden floor, elegant blinds, and huge plants dotted around, but a metal-topped bar and muted mushroom-colour walls give it a contemporary twist.

"We wanted it to be light and airy with modern furniture, but something that was comfortable," says Stephen.



Cheers!: The Fleur's new owners, Stephen Chard, left and Neil Robinson with chef Sebastian Budin. Picture: Duncan Lamont 443148/39/34.

An imaginative menu, created by Argentine chef Sebastian Budin, is proving a big draw. It ranges from a meze plate for sharing and fresh salads to favourites like seabass and rack of lamb.

"We try to make it healthy. Not huge portions, but enough to make you feel like you have had a really good meal when you have finished," says Stephen. "Everything is sourced locally, and there's a lot of vegetarian dishes because Neil's vegetarian, and it's so boring when you go to a place and there's only one or two options."

So what persuaded the

property professional decide to run a pub/restaurant?

"Our other business interests were all going along well, so I needed a new challenge, and it was something we had always talked about" said Stephen, who has been very hands on – when he gets the chance.

"I'd never pulled a pint before, so that was quite interesting! They still kick me out from behind the bar. But I've put in big hours here. There are not many jobs where you wake up at eight o'clock in the morning and say 'Right, I'm off to the pub!'"

Originally from New Zealand, where he had run a successful computer company, Stephen came to England 11 years ago.

"I was having a bit of a life-changing experience in my early 20s. I had a small throat cancer tumour removed and I had been under a lot of stress doing the computer business. I was in Sydney on holiday and I met Neil, who was travelling. After I had sold the business I decided to come to the UK and we hooked up again in Cambridge.

"When I came here I tried to rent a property with a big agent in town. But I didn't have a job – I didn't actually need one – and they wouldn't rent me a house, even though I offered to pay six



months' rent up front. The service was so poor. Then I was thumbing through a franchise magazine and saw one in property management, and with my Kiwi attitude I thought 'I can do this better.'" And he did.

Now bitten by the restaurateur bug, Stephen is hoping to recreate his golden touch with four more pub/restaurants in Cambridge, but for the moment he's concentrating on The Fleur.

"Our biggest challenge has been letting people know that it's not a gay pub anymore. We don't have any prejudices in any way, all we really wanted to do was lift the game and build a really nice pub. We don't mind who comes in."

So everyone's welcome then – even motorbike-riding Elvis impersonators.

■ The Fleur is at 73 Humberstone Road (01223) 470401.