

COOKING WITH THE STARS SERIES 3

Emma Willis and Tom Allen return as hosts presiding over all the action as eight celebrities are paired with professional chefs who will mentor them, in a bid to transform them from amateur to expert in a matter of weeks. Produced by South Shore and co-funded by Marks & Spencer, this six-part cooking competition will transmit this summer on ITV1 and IT VX.

The eight celebrities taking part in the new series are BAFTA award-winning actor Jason Watkins, boxing legend Chris Eubank, actress Joanna Page, Coronation Street's Samia Longchambon, singer and television personality Peter Andre, Busted's Matt Willis, Steps' Claire Richards and Love Island star Indiyah Polack.

Throughout the series the celebrities will be guided by their Chef Mentor as they attempt to create the winning dish in a series of intense Cooking Battles. The loser of each Battle will then have to fight for their place in the competition in the Cook Off – as they're tasked with creating a dish they've never seen before. Judged blind by all the chefs there is the possibility that the losing celebrity could be sent home by their own Chef Mentor. But who can handle the heat and go all the way to the end to become the culinary champion of this exciting cooking competition?

The professional chefs taking part in the challenge this year are British chef and TV presenter Rosemary Shrager (partnered with Peter Andre), chef director Jack Stein (partnered with Chris Eubank), Michelin Starred French chef Jean-Christophe Novelli (partnered with Samia Longchambon), Scottish chef and restaurateur Tony Singh MBE (partnered with Claire Richards), Michelin Starred executive chef Michael Caines MBE (partnered with Joanna Page), restauranter and cookery author Shelina Permalloo (partnered with Matt Willis), chef & restaurateur April Jackson (partnered with Jason Watkins) and award-winning chef Ellis Barrie (partnered with Indiyah Polack).

Emma Willis said: "Filming Cooking With The Stars is always a highlight for me as not only do Tom and I have lots of fun but we also get to try some phenomenal food. We have a great cast this season, who will no doubt be feeling the pressure as they head into the kitchen. We've seen blood, sweat and tears on previous series and I'm sure this series will be no exception!"

Tom Allen said: “A whole lot of great food, celebs reaching boiling point plus Emma Willis and me holding court - sounds like my dream party. I am so excited to be bringing back to your screens the glitziest competitive cooking show in the world!”

Katie Rawcliffe, Head of Entertainment Commissioning at ITV said: “We’re thrilled Cooking With The Stars is returning for a new series this summer. We have a fantastic batch of celebrities whose kitchen prowess will be put to the test once again, and a team of exceptional professional chefs guiding them through the chaos in the kitchen.”

Caroline Davies, Director of Programmes at South Shore said: “We cannot wait for Emma and Tom to start the race to crown the Cooking with the Stars champion again. And with a cast of household names, some fantastic new chefs and the pressure of producing spectacular dishes in our pressure cooker of a kitchen; laughs, disasters and some unexpected flames are almost certainly guaranteed.”

Sharry Cramond, Marketing Director, M&S Food and Hospitality said: “We are thrilled with how successful Cooking With The Stars has been, it’s the biggest cooking show on ITV and back for a third season! The stars and chefs are a fantastic mix reflecting our broad customer base and will inspire all ages to get cooking.

“Over the last few months, we have seen shoppers take to social media to show their amazing food hauls from our M&S Foodhalls and how great the value and quality of our products are. Through Cooking With The Stars we want to continue to show that we are the perfect place to find quality products, at a remarkable value, for any day of the week - and that we have a strong offer for when you are scratch cooking as well as for when you want a freshly prepared meal. “I personally can’t wait to see who wins the golden frying pan and the fun everyone will have along the way.”

Cooking With The Stars is a partnership between Marks & Spencer, ITV and South Shore. It was recommissioned for ITV by Katie Rawcliffe, Head of Entertainment Commissioning, ITV and Paula Thomas Gallie, Commissioning Editor, Entertainment, ITV. Executive Producers for South Shore are Melanie Leach, Caroline Davies and Rosie Franks.

ITV Studios handles global distribution for Cooking With The Stars.

EMMA WILLIS AND TOM ALLEN

How does it feel to be back for a new series of Cooking With The Stars?

Emma: It feels sensational - I love it. I've got my telly husband and my real husband at work with me. It's very difficult because I have to distribute my time evenly otherwise the other one gets jealous!

Tom: It's a lovely time. We get to try loads of lovely food hence why I have to wear slightly larger waistcoats. Also, I get to wear Emma's Spanx - this is what a great marriage we are, Emma shares her Spanx with me!

How does it feel to be back working together? How would you describe the dynamic between you both?

Emma: I think we're a lovely little duo. Not only do our outfits always compliment each other if we're being superficial, we look fantastic together but on a deeper level, I love Tom as a human being and I love working with him. He is a very busy man but I also love hanging out with him outside of work - I think that's when you know it's not just a work friendship. We were actually just planning a pilates class together.

Tom: Yes we have and I've been promised a stretch on her bed.

Tom: She calls it pilates! I've also been promised a go in Matt's cold plunge.

Emma: Tom is going to come over and we're going to have a little pilates session, cold plunge and then we're going to have cocktails and sunbathe. That is our relationship.

Tom: I absolutely love spending time with Emma and I've learnt so much from Emma.

Emma: Tom's had me over to his house already. He gave me M&S pizza and champagne and then we went to the theatre.

Tom: I've learnt so much from Emma because she is really good at talking to people on a sincere level whereas I take the p**s.

How are this year's cast getting on? What do you think they all bring to the series?

Emma: I think one of the best things about this show is the cast because they always get a real mix of people from different areas of entertainment and you get people you haven't

really seen on shows like this before. I think everybody would like to know how to cook and if you get the chance to be taught by the best on the planet then it's a real draw to come on the show.

Tom: They all take it so seriously and everyone is a high achiever in their own field but suddenly they are all desperate to not let down their mentor and not let down themselves in front of other people.

Emma: It's fun as well. You're teaching someone an essential life skill - you have to eat! What you're learning here will benefit lots of people around you. The judges are all absolutely brilliant. It's a really nice time at work. We want this to be a happy and fulfilling place.

Matt is part of this year's cast. What's it like coming to work with your husband?

Emma: It's really nice. We did *I'm A Celebrity...Get Me Out Of Here Now!* together about 15 years ago - that was the last time we worked together. That is exactly why he signed up. He said 'I just think it would be really nice for us to hang out together.' He's busy and I'm busy and we're often 'ships in the night'. He loves cooking and he's really good at cooking. He was like 'Why would I not do it?' I get to learn how to cook and we get to hang out together which is really nice.

Any standout moments you can share?

Emma: Chris Eubank!

Tom: Every moment is mesmerising.

Emma: He's fascinating. I can't stop watching and listening to him. I am quite captivated by him. I love his positive outlook.

Tom: He is so positive. I think what's lovely about *Cooking With The Stars* is Chris has space to be himself and then you've got Claire being herself and Rosemary being herself - there is space for everybody. It brings all different people together with different outlooks on life. Food brings us all together.

Is it easy to determine from the beginning who could go all the way to end? Or have you been surprised previously who has actually made it far in the competition?

Tom: I always try but never get it right.

Emma: Who would have thought Joe Wilkinson would have got that far?

Tom: He smashed it last year.

Do you guys pick up any cooking tips along the way?

Tom: We talk a lot about seasoning. Jack had that great phrase that chefs are home cooks who just know how to season better than anyone else - it does come down to that technicality. Rosemary said that seasoning is something you learn throughout your career so you never stop. That's the appeal of cooking shows, I guess that you're always learning something new or a new approach.

What is your favourite thing to cook or eat?

Emma: I love eating all food but I can't pick between them - Indian or Italian are my go-tos every time. I do love Thai food as well. Something that sets your mouth alight like those three cuisines, they all give you an explosion and have a lot of variety.

Tom: I think we're so lucky in this country that we have access to different cuisines and I think sometimes we take it for granted.

If you were hosting a dinner party, which three famous faces would you invite?

Emma: I would have Matt [Willis], I would have Elvis [Presley] and I would have Tom Jones. I've heard Tom's stories about Elvis so imagine sitting down and listening to the two of them together talk about that whole period of the beginning of rock and roll. And I could not have them for dinner and not invite Matt! And if I can find another plate, Tom [Allen] can come too.

Tom: Elton John - the only reason I'm in show business is to meet Elton John, I would love to meet him once. Cary Grant. And is it Barbra Streisand, Bette Midler or Cher? One of the gay icons. Dolly Parton!

Who do you think would win in a cooking off between the two of you?

Emma: I think it's really hard with the cook-offs because it's one of those that you can't predict. I wouldn't want to be against Tom, you never want to go against somebody that you like.

Tom: That's the problem here because the stars get really upset as they've known each other for 20 years!

ENDS

MATT WILLIS

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

I thought it would be fun! I cook quite a bit at home but it's always the same thing over and over so I wanted to learn some new recipes. And to be honest, I wanted to hang out with Emma. We never really work together and something like this is so out of my wheelhouse so I thought why not try something a bit different, especially with Emma presenting it!

How would you describe your cooking abilities? How would you rate your abilities on a scale of 1 to 5?

I would say I'm two and a half - I'm definitely not very good but I get by!

Who is the chef in your house?

Me - I tend to cook more than Emma, it's just ended up that way. I don't mind doing it and Emma is quite particular so it usually takes longer. I'm not a massive fan of cleaning up so usually there's a kind of rule that if you cook, you don't clean up but that rule isn't always obeyed and sometimes I end up doing both!

What would you like to take from this experience?

I've learnt so much. Being paired with Shelina was brilliant because she's such an incredible chef, it was so amazing to work with her.

Do you like going out for dinner? Would you consider yourself a foodie?

We like a nice restaurant but it's very rare these days. When you've got three kids the chance of going out is rare. We both work quite a lot so when we're not working, we're at home with the kids.

What's your favourite cuisine?

I love Japanese food. I spent quite a lot of time in Japan with the band and I fell in love with Japanese culture.

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

When Emma met me all I ate was Pot Noodles. I lived on Pot Noodles and takeaway pizza, that was my diet. So she would cook things and I would be like 'Wow!' She was amazing! I never really explored anything before then. I love biscuits but I'm terrible at moderation - if I have a biscuit, I'll eat the whole pack. The chocolate rounds from M&S, they get me every time.

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

I'm not very good at pretty or making stuff look good, everything always looks a mess. I tried not to be messy on set but I'm a really messy person - you will see it on the show.

Who did you think could be your main competition when you met your fellow celebs for the first time?

To be honest I thought everyone would be better than me! I didn't come here to win necessarily, so I had a feeling that with my culinary skills, everyone would be better than me.

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

No, I'm not very competitive. I'm competitive with myself but I don't really get competitive with other people.

What has it been like working with Shelina?

Shelina is wicked in so many ways, she has so much faith in me. I feel like she was pleased she got me which was nice. She seemed pleased with what I could do. We had a brilliant time together and she's got such a calming influence as well which made me feel like I could do it.

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

I'm a big fan of Russell Brand - I find him so fascinating and intelligent. I'd love to have Judi Dench round - I find her incredible and Robert De Niro. Those three would be amazing.

ENDS

SAMIA LONGCHAMBON

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

I've wanted to do this show for a long time because I love cooking. I'm a family cook - I cook for my kids and my husband and apart from in the summer when you have barbecues, I don't really cook for a lot of people and I tend to do the same things for the family. I wanted to broaden my repertoire.

How would you describe your cooking abilities? How would you rate your abilities on a scale of 1 to 5?

I'd probably say I'm a three - middle of the road. I do my best, I like trying new stuff but I always have to follow a recipe exactly, I'm not very intuitive.

Who is the chef in your house?

We both cook. I probably do a bit more but it just depends on whoever is at home. I plan the meals a bit more whereas Sylvain will just see what we've got in the cupboard and throw something together and it'll be brilliant.

Do you like going out for dinner? Would you consider yourself a foodie?

We do enjoy going for nice meals and date nights and stuff. We don't do it very often, we're more let's get a takeaway on a Friday night type of couple.

What's your favourite cuisine?

I love curries. I love a Friday night curry at home with a glass of wine, watching a box set. But Lebanese food will always have a special place in my heart because my Dad was Lebanese - that's a special kind-of food for me.

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

I actually love a Pot Noodle. Whenever we go on holiday we always get a Pot Noodle on the plane for the kids or if we've had a few too many drinks the night before. Once the Pot Noodles come out on a Sunday morning we know we've had too many the night before.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

I try to bake with the kids, more so when they were younger and I've probably had a few disasters when it comes to cakes having soggy bottoms and things like that.

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

There was a disaster in training actually when I burnt all my fingers and my thumb. It was a really stupid mistake - I was taking a pan out of the oven and Jean-Christophe had told me to put a tea towel over the pan handle which I did but I also forgot the lid had also been in the oven. With my other hand, I took the lid off and burnt all my fingers and thumb and had to get medical assistance but I'm fine now.

Who did you think could be your main competition when you met your fellow celebs for the first time?

I'm not really competitive, I just feel like I want to cheer everyone else on but there are a few who say they love cooking. I feel like Claire does a lot of cooking, she seems really knowledgeable. Jo is so gorgeous and lovely and she's quite self-deprecating but I think she's really good in the kitchen.

What has it been like working with Jean-Christophe?

Jean-Christophe is just a dream. I adore him, he's brilliant. I couldn't have asked for a better chef. He's so patient, knowledgeable and supportive.

Do you feel like you have learnt a lot from him?

Definitely. I've learned loads from him. He's always there if I've got any questions or anything. We've talked about cauliflower until the cows come home!

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

Jean-Christophe - he could do the cooking! Madonna because I've always been a massive fan. And Michael McIntyre to provide the laughs!

Are you in it to win it?

I would love to win but I just want to walk away from this having done my best and not being frustrated with myself or not thinking that I could have done more. I want to give it my all.

ENDS

CLAIRE RICHARDS

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

The reason I wanted to do it was because you get a mentor who teaches you and I feel like I've got stuck into a bit of a rut the last few years. I cook the same things over and over again. I feel like I've got a good range of things I do make but I've got a bit lazy and haven't challenged myself very much when it comes to food for a long time. I really do enjoy cooking and always have.

Also, I'm a baker so when I started cooking when I was a kid, all I did was bake cakes and make puddings - that was my thing. Baking is very strict, you've got to be really precise with everything whereas this type of cooking is all about taste and making sure you've got the flavours right. There is a certain room for manoeuvre whereas there isn't with baking and I'm very much that type of cook - I do like to follow a recipe.

How would you describe your cooking abilities? How would you rate your abilities on a scale of 1 to 5?

I don't know but I've been bigged up quite a bit by Tony - he's got a lot of faith in me so I think he'd probably say I'm quite good. I'm in the middle I think - I'd say a three. I understand certain flavours but I'm certainly not an expert. I know a lot of stuff about nothing, generally!

Do you like going out for dinner? Would you consider yourself a foodie?

I'm a little bit of a creature of habit to be honest. If I find something that I like then I'll eat it until I'm sick of it. We love going out for meals and if we go on holiday, I'm probably a bit more adventurous. We went to Portugal last year and I'd never liked raw onions, raw peppers or sushi but I came away from that holiday having eaten all three. The way it's marinated makes it taste amazing. Every now and again, I'll introduce a new taste into my life.

What is your favourite cuisine?

I love a good burger and not these great thick patties but the American style with grilled onions and cheese in a nice soft bun. I do love that sort of stuff and some crunchy fries.

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

I love sandwiches. I've got two favourite sandwiches which I don't have very often but I love an egg mayonnaise sandwich on soft white bread with loads of butter. But my favourite is

two thick slices of crusty bread, loads of butter, really strong grated cheddar cheese and then plain crisps - it's the best.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

I remember one from years ago when I was a kid. My aunty and uncle were staying at our house for the weekend and I wanted to make soda bread because I figured out I didn't need yeast and when I was younger I couldn't stand the smell of yeast. The recipe said bicarbonate of soda and cream of tartar and I thought 'What is cream of tartar?' and I know what it is now and the only thing I knew was tartar sauce. I put tartar sauce in it and it was disgusting but my uncle who is American ate the whole thing - he loved it!

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

We've had a couple of falls! Both of them went to do the gong and they both slipped at separate times. They were there and then all of sudden they weren't.

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

I am competitive but I don't like competition if that makes sense. I want to do the absolute best I can do. But because I enjoy things like this and the same with singing - I get really nervous when I'm doing something that means something. I'm a Leo and we love being told how great we are!

Who did you think could be your main competition when you met your fellow celebs for the first time?

I think me and Joanna are very similar - we're the same age, we're both mums and I think our cooking style is probably similar. I feel like she's going to be good. Now everyone has done their first cook, it'll be interesting to see how we all progress.

What has it been like working with Tony?

He's so lovely. I'm so lucky to have got Tony. Our personalities are right together. He's really patient. He's a good teacher and he's very confident in me. I would hate to think he is thinking 'This is going to be an absolute disaster' which I know some of the chefs have thought but I genuinely think he doesn't think that. I'm constantly asking him questions!

Do you feel like you're learning a lot in the process?

I did say I wanted to learn how to make a proper curry because I'm not good with chillies, heat and spice - I really struggle to understand those flavours. When I eat stuff like that, all I

can taste is chilli but Tony has opened my mind to the fact that while there is chilli in there, there are all these other spices that compliments and enhances the flavour.

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

Elvis Presley - I was born the day Elvis died. He died on 16th August 1977 and I was born at 1:30am on 17th August so in my head it was still the 16th in America with the time difference. My Mum said she woke up in the hospital after she'd had me and all the nurses were crying and it was the front page of all the newspapers the day I was born. I've always had this thing that we crossed somewhere across the Atlantic and bumped into each other and that was my destiny mapped out forever. Prince as well, I was gutted when he died because he was one of my big ones. And then either Ian McKellen or Richard Attenborough.

Are you in it to win it?

I don't think anyone takes part in a competition if they don't want to get somewhere. I'm a Leo so I would love to win but I can appreciate that other people have talent.

ENDS

JASON WATKINS

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

It seemed like a really good opportunity to learn how to cook good food. Why not be taught by a very skilled person as opposed to paying for some week-long course down in Somerset by an amazing chef? It's nice to entertain as well as learn.

How would you describe your cooking abilities?

I'm 'Mr Bland' and that term seems to have been coined and bandied about quite a lot. At home I don't do much cooking, my wife is a much better cook than I am and likes to cook. Over the years I've sort of stepped back and let Clara do the cooking and that's good in one way but also I've let that happen and I think I shouldn't have let that happen. I need to do more of the work so if I get better at it then I'm more likely to be able to do more meals for the family which is what I want to do.

Do you like going out for dinner? Would you consider yourself a foodie?

We do like food, yes. We like going out but my wife does cook nice food at home and she enjoys cooking and putting spices together and being very creative. When we go out, we don't go to fine French dining but we'll go to a good Indian restaurant or a good Italian - we're not massively refined.

What is your favourite cuisine?

I like Italian cuisine as it's very fresh - fresh pasta, fresh salads and fish. I like Mediterranean food but I also like Japanese food and Scandinavian food. I love fresh fish.

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

Chocolate! I'm trying to keep strong and fit so I try to avoid chocolate. It's not really a guilty pleasure but I must have tried every single granola on the market for the last two years - I've tried all of them and I don't know if I've found my ideal one! Pastries is another one.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

Two disasters come to mind. One was I made a French patisserie thing, I'd never done it before and I'll never do it again but it took around four hours, so by the time it was ready everyone had gone home. Me and my mate Andy dutifully stayed on and I made the worst bolognese in the history of cooking probably about five years ago - my family still talk about it, it's gone into the Watkins folklore.

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

Nothing can prepare you for the one hour time limit - I had four different elements of the Indian dish I was making and within each element I missed out a couple of ingredients. I got into a bit of a panic but I managed to pull it round and get everything plated in time.

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

I was a sportsman not like Chris [Eubank] but I loved sports so I always thought I was competitive. But with this I want to do the best I can do.

What has it been like working with April?

April's absolutely brilliant. She is very disciplined and I tend to get a bit distracted when we've been training and she's keeping me on the straight and narrow. She's got a fantastic personality and she's got her own brilliant restaurant in Brixton. I really want to help her in her career and not mess it up!

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

I'd have April as she's been brilliant. Somebody I would like to cook for would be a philosopher. Isn't it nice when you eat and you talk about philosophy? Plato or someone like that or Sophocles and Jean Paul Sartre. And maybe an artist like Barbara Hepworth.

Are you in it to win it?

I'm not a good cook, it's not just me saying that because I want to go on a journey, I understand my own shortcomings but in my heart of hearts I thought when I was first judged they would go 'Oh my God. You've got something.' And they didn't! So, am I in it to win it? No, because looking around I think other people will do better than me. And that's no disrespect to April because her dishes are fantastic but it's my ability. I'll be as determined and diligent as possible to cook them but I'm in it to make my dishes as well as I can.

ENDS

INDIYAH POLACK

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

I've decided to come on Cooking with the Stars because I've always loved cooking. My mum and sister have always been good chefs but you know when your parents get to that age where they don't want to cook for you anymore? But I've kind of fallen in love with it and I'm a big foodie so everywhere I go, I feel like food is involved so this is right up my street.

How would you describe your cooking abilities? How would you rate your abilities on a scale of 1 to 5?

I would say I'm a good three and a half or four. But after coming on the show, I've realised there is a different level! Everyone has different taste buds and Michelin-starred chefs like different things.

Do you feel like you're learning a lot in the process?

I'm definitely learning things. One thing I did say before I came on the show was that I feel like I'm always cooking the same things so even if I don't make it to the end, I want to learn new skills and new recipes. I've already learnt how to peel ginger in a quick way which is cool. I've also made Indian food for the first time whereas usually I'd just get a take out.

What is your favourite cuisine?

Anything Caribbean or Korean - I love Pan Asian food.

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

I like everything. I wouldn't say I have a guilty pleasure but a weird snack I like is Ritz biscuits and then I'd spread peanut butter on them - it actually tastes really good together.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

I nearly set the house on fire if that counts! I came in from a night out and I put fries in the oven. I fell asleep and then woke up and I went into the kitchen and there was smoke, the fries were charcoal!

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

There have been so many cooking disasters. Even today when I was cracking my eggs to make a scotch egg and I eat eggs all the time for breakfast so I'd never think they would be giving me hell in a cooking competition!

Who did you think could be your main competition when you met your fellow celebs for the first time?

Claire was really nervous but her food was perfect so I wouldn't say there is anyone who is competition but I'd definitely want to be able to cook like her - she has great cooking skills.

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

I'm very competitive. I definitely wanted to learn new skills and tips and tricks but winning was on the list - I'd love that golden frying pan!

What has it been like working with Ellis?

It's been a dream. Ellis is so nice. He taught me how to peel ginger and he's taught me so many other tips and tricks that I didn't know before. I wished for an understanding chef and he's been that - he's so supportive. He believes in me as a cook.

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

Definitely Rihanna. Nicki Minaj and Cillian Murphy - I have a little bit of a crush on him so he can come round. If he could come as Thomas Shelby, that would be even better.

ENDS

PETER ANDRE

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

It's quite a simple reason - this year I'm celebrating 30 years in the entertainment industry and I'm also 50. And because of those two milestones I want to tick off some things on the bucket list. One of them is to do an album, one of them is to do a film which I started over a year ago, and one of them was to do a cooking show. Masterchef has very kindly approached us a few times in the past and I was always too scared. I heard about the concept of this show and that you have a chef guiding you and you get to call them in and whatever happens you're going to learn all these magnificent things. I knew it was going to be tough because there are going to be people who cook at home and who have cooked a lot more.

How would you describe your cooking abilities? How would you rate your abilities on a scale of 1 to 5?

I cook at home but it's always the same five dishes - the standard five dishes which I do every week. The kids love it and I'm used to it but the difference is that I do it in my own time. I sometimes put things in the oven and don't have to worry about it until later in the day. It's very different doing it within a time limit. And being taught by someone who is really amazing at their craft and you've got to try and not let them down - that's tough but it's a part of the experience.

Do you like going out for dinner? Would you consider yourself a foodie?

100%. I love food, it's everything in my life. I grew up in a big Greek family and the kitchen was always the hub of the house and everything was based around food. Whenever I think of food, I think of joy, family, friends, and generally feel good. I've always loved food and all different cultures' food.

What is your favourite cuisine?

There are so many. I love Italian food, I've always felt drawn to it. I love the flavours of Italy because there are elements of the Mediterranean but I also love Middle Eastern food because there are elements of the Mediterranean. If the food is done right, it's too hard to pick!

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

I love cooking all my food fresh but I also love chocolates and donuts. For me, as long as it's food, I'll have it.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

Many times when I've done those five dishes I spoke about, I've got them spot on but sometimes it hasn't turned out right. I've never been perfect at cooking but I've always managed to do good-enough food that the kids love. There have been times where oil has splashed on me - it hasn't given me any lasting burns but horrible.

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

We've had some great moments. I'm working with Rosemary Shrager - you cannot find anyone more hilarious! She is brilliant. She's so good because she'll tell you she loves you and be annoyed at you within the same five seconds. All of the chefs are lovely - I've met Jean-Christophe a few times, he's such a lovely man. But Rosemary, her personality just works. When she tells me off, you kind of want to do what she says - she's doing it with love. I can't explain it, she's just brilliant. We got a phone call from Ian Botham in the middle of one of the cooks because he happens to call Rosemary and we're just having a good old chat while I'm learning to cook. She had Johnny Vegas ring one day. There are some great moments. You'll see me running backwards and forwards - I've actually learnt how to do the moonwalk!

Do you feel like you're learning a lot in the process?

100% because all of the things I thought I knew, for example in our culture we put a lot of salt in our food, we love salt but as I've been bringing up the children I've been trying to put a lot less salt in food so I've cut right back. Rosemary not only puts the amount of salt I used to put in but much more. She says 'You need to season your food.' One of the things she has taught me is that your instinct is correct, you know the flavour. I've realised when it comes to pleasing chefs, you need to put more than you think.

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

Elvis Presley, the Queen and Nelson Mandela.

Who did you think could be your main competition when you met your fellow celebs for the first time?

Knowing these people and knowing they love food, I imagine they're going to know what tastes good. Matt, I've known for years. Chris Eubank, at least 20 years I've known him for. All of the others that I don't know, are they secret chefs? Whatever happens, I think we're all here because we have a love of food. Therefore, we're all going to start off not great and improve or start great and stay great or start off great and drop down - we don't know which way it's going to go!

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

I was saying all along that I'm not competitive but then I got in the kitchen for the first time! I'm competitive in the sense that I want to make a nice dish but competitive in the sense that I have to beat that particular person, that hasn't kicked in but we're only at the start.

ENDS

JOANNA PAGE

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

I decided to sign up for this because I'm not a good cook, I have to cook and I'm a very practical cook but I don't put much thought into it, I put love into it because I'm cooking for my family but I don't enjoy it. It's absolutely exhausting cooking for four kids and my husband. Mostly I do dried pasta and open a jar. The thought of doing this and learning from a proper real life chef, that is so alien to me so I'm not even scared about it. It's an experience that I would never normally have, it's only because of my job that I get to do this, it's the most amazing and priceless experience.

How would you describe your cooking abilities? How would you rate your abilities on a scale of 1 to 5?

One. I came into this and thought it would be really relaxed, it's not going to be a lot of pressure and I'll come out of this having learnt a few basic skills. It's utterly terrifying! I'm with Michael and he's a Michelin-starred chef - he's off the scale, he's amazing, his taste, his depth of flavour, he's just wonderful. He's introduced me to a passion for cooking and food that I never knew existed. Since working with him now, in my day-to-day life when I'm making an omelette I'm sprinkling parsley on it or adding a bit of parmesan, seasoning everything.

Do you like going out for dinner? Would you consider yourself a foodie?

I would say I am a foodie. I do like going out for nice meals but I don't get to a lot now because we've got four children so we basically have no social life - we're in bed by half seven. I'm definitely a foodie in that I love my food, I love trying out all sorts of different things but I don't ever take that back to try out myself. But if someone is quite happy to feed me then I will sit there and try everything but I will not return the favour!

What is your favourite cuisine?

I don't know. I don't have anything specific. I like everything but I do really love seafood - I adore scallops.

Do you have a bit of a guilty pleasure when it comes to food?

I really like that chicken and mushroom pasta in a packet and they do cheese and broccoli too. You pour it in the thing with water, milk and a knob of butter - I love it! Sometimes real pasta doesn't cut it.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

When I first met my husband, to woo him one of the first things I made him was spaghetti bolognese but my spaghetti bolognese was plain spaghetti. I boiled it for twenty minutes, put it on the plate with no sauce and then I got a tin of tuna, opened that up and put it on, still in a circle on the top and served it to him. I've also made him frozen chicken kiev. It had been cooking for twenty-five minutes, I made him that with frozen chips and frozen peas and half way through it was still raw!

Have there been any funny moments or cooking disasters yet during filming?

I heard a noise and shouting and then at one point Peter [Andre] was on the floor then I had a complete disaster with my ravioli and sauce. All of sudden I heard 'Joanna, your sauce!' and I think it was Indiyah who said it. I looked up and caught Samia's eye and I started laughing. I went back and my sauce was a bit congealed but I did bring it back. My ravioli suddenly turned into something I haven't seen before. And then I fell off the stage when I was banging my gong. I was in such a fluster and plummeted onto the floor!

Who did you think could be your main competition when you met your fellow celebs for the first time?

I think you can sort of tell who are the good cooks. Lots of people are talking with a knowledge of food which I don't have. You can tell they use things when they're cooking like real herbs and stuff. And some people are talking with a real passion for food which I've never had before. You can definitely tell Claire's a good cook. Indiyah as well because she was talking about ginger and how she had found a new way to peel ginger - I've never even used ginger in anything!. But also Samia has Jean-Christophe and she talks to him in French so they've got a whole French thing going on.

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

Very competitive. I'm an Aries and I'm an actress so obviously I am competitive. I came into this really laid back and thought it was a really amazing experience. I know it's not my thing, it's not a performing thing, I'm not worried about it. I know I'm not going to win, I know I'm not a really good cook. But saying that, seeing how we've all changed from day one, I'm starting to get a little taste of it and I was walking around this morning with all of my notes being a really good student. So, I'm starting to get competitive and you don't want to let your chef down. Everybody is so lovely, I wouldn't want to beat any of them but you don't want to let your chef down. I know I'll be really angry if I don't do my dishes to the best of my ability.

What has it been like working with Michael?

Amazing. He is so calm, he's really gathered and talks us through it. Aside from that, he's like a god - the man makes the most wonderful food. He talks about depth of flavour and when you taste his food, there is a depth of food, everything is layered. You start eating and it's not like the same taste. Oh my goodness, I don't know how I'm going to carry on the rest of my life without him! He's going to be a friend for life. I want him to come and live with us and cook forever. He's lovely.

Do you feel like you're learning a lot in the process?

Completely. I've already learnt things that I didn't know before. When my cream caught and started burning a bit, I was like 'Oh my God.' and normally I'd put it in the bin but Michael told me to add some of my pasta water so I calmed down and started stirring and brought it back. I've gone from the girl who never seasoned anything to now properly seasoning. Since working with Michael, he's now made me discover this passion for cooking and for food.

Are you in it to win it?

I'd like to say that I was but deep down I know that I don't have the skill to get to the final. I think now instinctively I am quite good now and I'm enjoying this. I know my limit but also I'm competitive so I'm like 'You get going as far as you can.' I'm not going to give up, I'm just going to go as far as I can. It's quite hard because I am competitive so I obviously want to win but I know I won't because you've got cracking cooks here. But you never know!

ENDS

CHRIS EUBANK

Why have you decided to sign up for the show?

When I'm on television, I'm serving you because I'm entertaining you. It's not just entertainment but entertainment with a touch of elegance or gentlemanly conduct.

How would you describe your cooking abilities before the show?

I love cooking. Doing it on the TV show, I can't do it the way they know how but I do it the way my mother subconsciously taught me. And my food will always taste better than my adversaries or my competitors! My presentation isn't going to be emanating but the taste will always make you sigh because I'm always cooking from my mother's spirit. That's right, no one beats a mother's cooking!

What is your favourite cuisine?

Jamaican - there is no food like Jamaican food. Everything else, they can bump it up and talk it this way and talk it that way but you can't compare it to Jamaican food. You can't beat the taste. We use green bananas. We use yams which are different carbohydrates, which are powerful - it's powerful food and it tastes amazing.

Do you feel like you're learning a lot in the process?

Nothing can improve my cooking skills - my mother has given me everything.

Have you ever had any cooking disasters at home?

Everything I've cooked has been perfect even if it wasn't. I don't understand negativity. The only way to live is in the now and allow the present but you have to actually live in the present.

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

It depends. If we're talking about boxing, I'm not competitive because I'm the king! There is no one who can talk about boxing better than me in terms of teaching it and explaining it. I don't say that from a boasting point of view, I've actually had to learn the hard way - I'm not the man who listened to the trainers.

What has it been like working with Jack?

Jack Stein is a sweetheart. And that is all you want in a man. That's what they call me, they call me a sweetheart!

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite three famous faces, who would they be?

Muhammad Ali one. Jack Johnson two. Mike Tyson three. If you look at their careers, no one can come close to them - no one.

Are you in it to win it?

I've already won because I'm not looking for the cherry. Just coming onto the show, you've already won.

ENDS