

Heston Blumenthal

“Matt Damon got so pissed he kept doing Borat impressions”

Heston Blumenthal, the man who invented triple-cooked chips and edible cutlery, explains to JO USMAR why you should never eat a fermented shark...

Photograph by
Alex James

“What’s that smell of fish?” asks Heston Blumenthal, sniffing around the studio where we’re doing our photoshoot.

“Um, it might be from our Jaffa Hakes...” we realise, sheepishly proffering the dish of pun-tastic canapés we made just for him. “We’ve got Jaffa Hakes, Mustard Creams and Hammy Dodgers. What do you think?” The three-Michelin-starred chef examines our creations a smidgen suspiciously. “You’re going to make me eat them, aren’t you?” he asks, prodding a Mustard Cream. “Well, I’ve probably had worse.”

Weird food is nothing new to Heston. We’ve been obsessed with him and his creations ever since he tried to introduce cooking baths and ox cheeks to a Little Chef kitchen in *Big Chef Takes On Little Chef*,

and when he made an entirely edible house and live bird pie in *Heston’s Feasts*. But he’s far more famous for his restaurant, The Fat Duck, which is consistently voted one of the best places in the world to eat - if you can manage to get onto the two-month waiting list.

Heston laughs in the face of conventional cooking (politely, though, because he’s very nice) and makes the kind of food that five year olds dream about. (Flying Maltesers and exploding-candy chocolate cake? No problem.) Culinary genius, mad scientist or a bit of both? Let’s find out...

How do you feel about us turning you into an egghead?

On the set of my new show, there was a bowl of 20 eggs and someone had drawn different versions of me on all of them. →



EGGHEAD

■ “I’ve got you right where I want you now,” cackled Gordon Ramsay

It made me realise that if I cut off my nose and ears and sealed up my mouth, I'd look like an egg.

In the office, we think you look like a certain celebrity offspring.

[We show Heston a pic of Cruz Beckham.]

Do you get that a lot?

[Laughs and places his glasses on the photo.] Ahh...

I've heard this one before - was it from you guys?

Yes!

[Smiles.] It's great. I'm not sure if his cooking interest has started yet, but I can only hope so.

So, your restaurant, The Fat Duck... how did you come up with the name?

I wanted something with a bit of British heritage. After we named it, I got a letter from the council saying, "Welcome to Bray." That's nice, I thought, then I read, "We wish you every success, but we don't

think the name of your establishment is suitable." Basically, the council thought that people would swap the "d" and "f" around. It had never occurred to me. It was a bit of a dodgy pub when I took over and I think they thought I was just another dodgy landlord.

They must be chuffed now...

Well, I saw an article saying property in the village has increased in value by 16 per cent since The Fat Duck got its third Michelin star.

Who's the most famous person you've had in the restaurant?

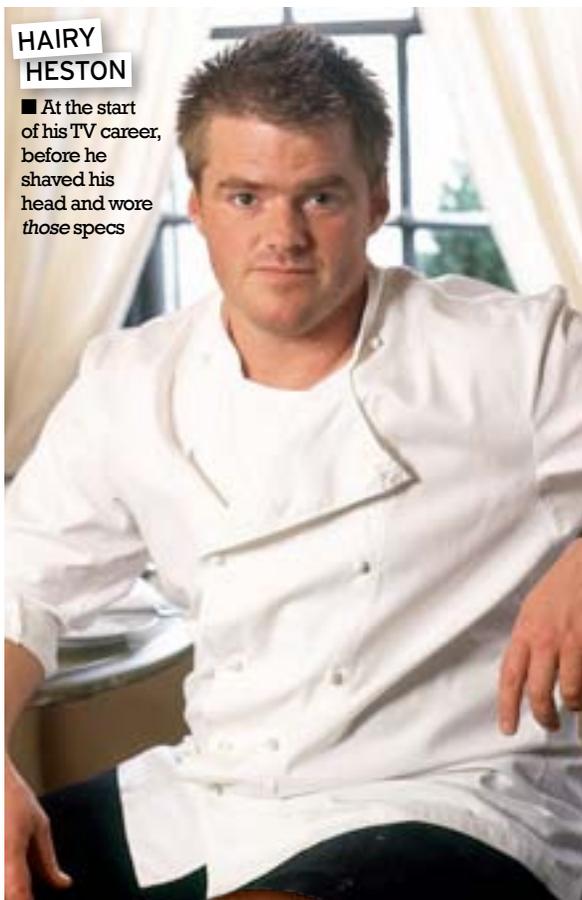
We've had loads. Who's that bloke from *The Bourne Identity*? Matt



CRUZ-ALIKE

HAIRY HESTON

■ At the start of his TV career, before he shaved his head and wore those specs



"Nothing beats a bacon sarnie"

FISH-CUITS

■ Heston makes his feelings about heaf's fishy biscuits clear

Damon. He's been in a few times, and once he got so pissed that he stood up and did a Borat impersonation in the middle of the restaurant.

Is anyone allowed to jump the waiting list?

No one.

So if Barack Obama rang up and wanted a table next week...

Not happening. We've had Tony Blair on the waiting list twice. Robert De Niro's been on the list, too. We don't hold tables back for anyone. A few years ago, a journalist kept calling up pretending to be various famous people to see if they could get a table. They couldn't! We get 30,000 calls for reservations a day, so it's unfair to put a table aside.

Do you ever get nervous about who you're cooking for?

About ten years ago, a guy who'd been eating on his own came to the kitchen for a chat. He said he'd come over from Sydney. I asked how long he was staying and he said, "I landed today and I'm leaving tomorrow. I came just to eat here." I nearly choked. Talk about pressure. His meal must have cost around £10,000 when you think that he probably flew first class. But then you also get a couple who have saved up for ages for a one-off. That's the same pressure, but that's what gets me out of bed in the morning - delivering a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Have you ever thrown someone out of the restaurant?

Years ago, some bloke said to the waiter, "I don't want any of your poncey sauces," and was exceptionally rude to the staff. It got back to me in the kitchen →

Celebridoodles!

Heston drew us a rock 'n' roll legend...



ELVIS

HEAT SAYS:
We like the hair, but where are his feet, eh?

heat VERDICT 8/10



and I flipped. I reached the dining room entrance and had the guy in my sights, but my maître d' gently shoved my shoulder and I went back to the kitchen. I had a proper temper in those days.

You don't seem to be an angry sort of chap...

I'm not any more. I haven't raised my voice for ten years, but I used to be really bad. I made a conscious decision to change, because I used to be terrible both in and out of the kitchen. I could be frightening.

Are your mates scared of cooking for you?

No, it's the other way round. If people come to mine and get served scrambled eggs and they can't eat their glass or the tablecloth, they're like, "What the hell is this? Where's the liquid nitrogen?" I don't really have people round any more. I tell them to go to The Fat Duck!

In some cultures, burping is a compliment. Do you embrace this tradition?

Only if they can play a tune with it or make it sound like the sea.

Do you ever eat Pot Noodles?

I don't eat Pot Noodles, but I'm a lot less snobby about food than you think. I'm a fridge picker. If I get home late, I'll open the fridge and just put whatever's there into my mouth. I found a pork pie and some bread once, so I made a pork pie sandwich.

What's your drunk food of choice?

Me? I don't get drunk, but if I was on a night out I might get a kebab. But then nothing beats a bacon sandwich. I don't know what it is, but a good bacon sandwich can turn a vegetarian.

What's the worst thing you've ever put in your mouth?

There are two things, both from Iceland. One's a fish that fishermen urinate on. When it starts to go off, they eat it with a drink called Black Death, which is, like, the worst kind of vodka. When I tried to swallow it, my throat constricted and it came straight back up. I ended up downing the Black Death just to get rid of the taste. I thought I was going to vomit, but it didn't even get that far. The other one was fermented shark. I managed to swallow that,

"I used to have a proper temper"

but my chest seized up. I thought I was going into anaphylactic shock.

And what's the most expensive thing you've ever eaten?

For *Christmas Feast*, we made black caviar sorbet with ambergis. Ambergis is basically dried whale pus, which whales shoot out of their blowhole. It blobs around in the sea for a couple of years and then washes up on a beach. It goes for £30,000 a kilo, and that one dish cost about £1,000 to make, but a restaurant would charge about £5,000.

Has another chef ever copied your food?

Yes. A few years ago, my assistant found a picture of my gazpacho on a website for a three-Michelin-starred French restaurant. Also, triple-cooked chips are everywhere. People don't

even realise I invented them in 1992. And in most places they're terrible. If you're going to nick stuff, at least cook it properly!

What's your favourite takeaway?

Maliks Tandoori in Cookham, Berkshire. They used to wait for my taxi to arrive and then throw the naan in at the last minute. Naan is best straight out of the tandoor, so it was always the freshest takeaway.

At heat Towers, we don't have a canteen - how would you design one?

I'd have it so you project things on to the wall, jet different fragrances into the room and play music. So if you needed people to eat fast and be energised, I'd play loud, fast rock music and pump in citrusy flavours.

Wow. We don't even have a chocolate machine...

That's terrible!

We know. And finally, back to our Jaffa Hakes, Mustard Creams and Hammy Dodgers...

The names are inspired. We did do an afternoon tea on *Fishy Feast* with cod-flavoured bakewell tarts and crab-flavoured fondant fancies, so a Jaffa Hake could work. I wouldn't just take a Jaffa Cake out of the packet and spread the dodgiest fish paste I could find on it, though - I'd put a delicate fish mousse with a touch of tarragon on a thin savoury pastry base. And instead of chocolate, I'd use black olive puree.

Oh. They took us hours...

I can see the Hammy Dodger was particularly labour intensive.

Hey, we couldn't find a cocktail stick!

See? Being a chef is stressful.

How To Cook Like Heston is on Channel 4, Wednesdays, 8pm

(Not so) little chef



SKILLS

■ A proud Heston at Buckingham Palace in 2006. He has since cooked for Her Majesty



BEEFY

■ Wow. Those arms! Must be all the whisking he's done over the years...



MASTER CHEF

■ Heston was named Chef Of The Year and won this mantelpiece-hogging gong from GQ in 2010

EGGY

■ Showing off his vast culinary talents on Rossy's chat show by, erm, frying an egg



ICE ICE BABY

■ Creating an iceberg for his guests to enjoy on Heston's Titanic Feast back in 2010

