

We've all been to that one party in our lives where the hostess served out the most delectable canapés every 20 minutes (no helper needed) while managing to work her way through the room

looking picture perfect. It becomes clear halfway into *epicure's* December masterclass that Heather Barrie belongs to this category of women. Today, with her hair neatly coiffed and with nary a bead of perspiration on her brow, she shares with undergraduates Sheralyn Hu and Tan Puay Shian; fashion designer Irene Ho, design engineer Danial Foo; distribution manager Ruth Paul; and accountant Anthony Huang, the finer points of preparing canapés for a Christmas party.

The owner of Fine Palate Catering and Café is also used to dealing with different dietary requests from her clients and advises that a variety of small bites

makes good sense for guests. "If you make one big roast, vegetarians can only choose from salads and side dishes," she says. "It is essential to include vegetarian, seafood and meat options in your selection." Her festive recipes for *epicure's* masterclass? Zucchini frittatas, hummus and *baba ganoush* (a chickpea and eggplant dip respectively), salmon gravlax, crab cakes, duck confit and sunken chocolate soufflés.

TIME-SAVING TECHNIQUES

Having once made over 12,000 zucchini frittatas for an event, Barrie shares the secret to perfecting these savoury morsels, or what she calls a "a cross between a quiche, frittata and soufflé". She

reveals the way to "eliminate the time-consuming pastry component of a quiche, tone down the over-eggy taste of the Italian open-faced omelette, and do away with the troublesome mechanics of a soufflé altogether". "This I got to see," Paul quips excitedly as Barrie gradually adds flour into the zucchini mixture until it resembles a loose, chunky batter. "These can be made ahead of time and frozen. When ready to serve, just defrost for five minutes and pop in the oven to reheat," comes the essential tip from Barrie.

Next, Barrie works on the hummus and *baba ganoush*, Middle Eastern dips that take little more than a speedy whiz in a food processor. Retrieving two beautifully roasted eggplants from her Gaggenau oven, she warns of the higher water content in local vegetables due to the higher rainfall they are subjected to. "Peel away the blackened skins and press the flesh with the back of a ladle inside a colander to remove as much liquid as possible. If the dip is still too watery, grind up some breadcrumbs and add to the final mix to thicken," she advises.

THE NUMBERS GAME

Salmon gravlax is something that can be prepared weeks ahead if required. The dish was named in the Middle Ages, when Scandinavian fishermen salted the fish (lax) and buried it in sand (grav) to ferment. Here, the salmon is nestled in a dry marinade of sugar, salt, dill and juniper berries, drawing moisture out through a natural osmosis reaction.

Huang is relishing the advanced prep tips. "I love that you can also prepare the crab cake patties beforehand, then bread and fry them on the actual day of your party." Ho nods, "I don't have any extra hands on deck when I cook, so I need to prepare dishes in stages. The earlier the better, like these godsend sunken chocolate soufflés which keep well for three days."

It is important for Barrie that her participants not only know how to throw a splendid feast with ease and flair, but also know the proper allocation of food for their guests. "Portion 15 canapés for each person, so if

you plan on making five varieties, set aside three of each type for one guest," she says. But if the invitation takes place at dinner, she suggests adding a glazed ham on the bone, or a cheese tray with crackers, crostini, fruit and nuts. The idea of taking care of your guests resonates with Hu. "My taste buds were utterly pampered today. When I have friends and family over this Christmas, that's how I'd like them to feel too," she says.



Chic canapés

You can throw a memorable party and still find time to enjoy the experience. Heather Barrie shows how—with a little advanced kitchen prep—to whip up no-fuss canapés to woo your guests. By Maria Singh

ZUCCHINI FRITTATAS

Makes 30

Prep time 25 minutes

Cook time 15 minutes

4 green zucchinis, grated
2 white onions, grated
100g cream cheese
100g feta cheese
½ cup Parmesan cheese
5 eggs
1 tsp baking powder
1 cup canola oil
salt and pepper, to taste
2 cups self raising flour

- Mix all the ingredients (except self raising flour) in a large bowl. Add the flour in small batches, just enough for the consistency to resemble loose batter. Adjust as necessary due to varying water content in the zucchinis.
- Divide mixture into small silicon moulds (1.5-inch diameter) and bake at 180°C till tops are slightly golden brown, about 13 to 15 minutes.

DUCK CONFIT

Makes 30

Prep time 40 minutes

Cook time 6 hours +
overnight marinating time

2 uncooked duck legs
1 tbsp sea salt
1 lemon, zest removed and thinly sliced
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tbsp allspice
1 tbsp juniper berries
1 star anise, pounded
2 sprigs thyme leaves
2 cups duck fat
1 loaf baguette, toasted and thinly sliced
sprigs of fresh chervil

- Season the duck legs with sea salt on both sides. Mix the lemon zest and slices, garlic, allspice, juniper berries, star anise and thyme in a bowl. Rub the mixture on the duck legs and refrigerate overnight.
- Preheat the oven to 90°C. Scrape the >



marinade off the duck legs and use to line the bottom of an oven-safe glass or cast iron dish that is large enough to hold the legs in a single layer. Rinse the duck legs, pat dry and arrange skin side down in the dish.

- Pour duck fat into a small saucepan and warm over low heat till it liquefies. Pour over duck legs until they are completely covered (or top it off with some olive oil).
- Cover the dish with a lid and bake for 6 to 7 hours until the meat pulls off easily from the bone. Remove duck legs from the fat and place in a sealable container. Strain all the solids from the remaining fat and discard. Pour the sieved fat over the duck until completely covered.
- Seal the container tightly and let it cool to room temperature before placing in the refrigerator.
- To use, shred duck meat and mix with the fat for a rilette. Place on top of thinly sliced toast and garnish with sprigs of chervil before serving.

SALMON GRAVLAX

Makes 50

Prep time 10 minutes +
48 hours curing time

1kg fresh salmon fillet

marinade

85g sugar
120g rock or coarse salt
8 juniper berries, crushed (available at Culina)
black pepper, to taste
large bunch fresh dill

to serve (optional)

mini soft bread rolls, halved
200g crème fraiche
small jar capers in brine
1 purple onion, thinly sliced
sprigs fresh dill

- Place the salmon fillet, skin side down, into a wide, shallow dish. Mix the sugar, salt, juniper berries and black pepper in a bowl, and spread the mixture all over

the salmon fillet.

- Turn the fish over and place the dill sprigs on top. Cover with cling wrap and place a heavy weight on top. Place inside the refrigerator and cure for at least 2 days.
- Unwrap the cling film from the dish and remove the salmon fillet. Wet your hands slightly and brush off all traces of excess marinade. Place on a carving board flesh-side up and carve very thin slivers against the grain with a sharp knife.
- Optional: Roll cured salmon into a rosette and arrange on halved mini bread rolls spread with crème fraiche. Garnish with capers, sliced onions and small sprigs of fresh dill.

CRISPY CRAB CAKES WITH CHILLI MANGO SALSA

Makes 30

Prep time 20 minutes

Cook time 30 minutes

crispy crab cakes

350g canned crab meat (available at Culina)
100g snapper or seabass
30g coconut cream
½ tsp Thai palm sugar (available at most Thai supermarkets)
⅓ tsp baking powder
2 tsp light soy sauce
3 tsp fish sauce
1 tsp Thai red curry paste
½ tsp grated ginger and galangal
2 tsp sesame oil
2 tbsp coriander, chopped
3 tbsp spring onions, sliced
½ egg
pinch salt
4 kaffir lime leaves, sliced

batter

½ cup plain flour
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup panko (Japanese bread crumbs)
oil for deep frying

chilli mango salsa

1 medium ripe mango, finely diced

2 shallots, finely diced
1 red chilli, seeds removed and finely diced
handful coriander, finely chopped
juice of 1 lime
1 tsp fish sauce
dash balsamic vinegar

- Place all the ingredients into a bowl. Mix together until the mixture forms a rough paste.
- In a large frying pan, add enough oil to fill the pan and heat the oil until it sizzles slightly, about 160°C. Roll teaspoonfuls of crab mixture into balls with your hands and flatten slightly to form patties.
- Coat the patties in a light layer of flour, dip into eggwash and coat with panko.
- Carefully place them into the hot oil and fry until they turn golden brown on both sides. Drain the crab cakes on kitchen paper and spear each with a wooden cocktail fork.
- Combine all the ingredients for chilli mango salsa. Spoon ½ tsp on each crab cake or serve on the side as a dip.

SUNKEN CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉS WITH PRUNES AND ARMAGNAC

Makes 30

Prep time: 30 minutes +
1 hour soak time

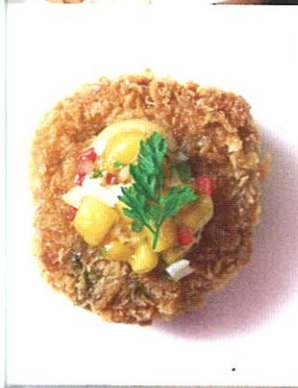
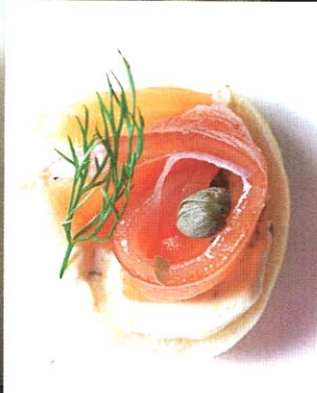
Cook time 20 minutes

sunken chocolate soufflés

75g prunes, chopped
30ml Armagnac
350g dark chocolate (70%) couverture, chopped
150g unsalted butter, chopped
185g caster sugar
¼ cup strong espresso coffee
50g self raising flour, sifted
35g Dutch cocoa, sifted
4 eggs, separated

whipped cream topping

1 cup whipping cream
2 tbsp icing sugar



- Soak prunes in Armagnac for 1 hour. Melt chocolate, butter, 110g of caster sugar and coffee in the top of a double saucepan or in a heatproof bowl over simmering water until smooth and glossy. Remove from heat and let stand for 5 minutes.
- Combine sifted flour and cocoa into chocolate mixture and mix well. Add egg yolks, chopped soaked prunes (reserving a small amount for cake topping) and mix well.
- Whisk egg whites until soft peaks form. Add remaining sugar and continue whisking until stiff peaks form. Fold egg white mixture into chocolate mixture, a third at a time.
- Spoon mixture into mini silicon moulds (1.5-inch diameter) and bake at 180°C for 12 to 14 minutes. The centres should still be a little moist.
- To make topping, whip cream until firm. Add icing sugar and reserved soaked prunes and mix well. Pipe a small amount on the cake and dust with icing sugar before serving. Cakes will keep well in an airtight container for three days. **e**

Log on to www.epicureasia.com for the hummus and baba ganoush recipes.

CHEF'S TIPS

- DO** Substitute Armagnac with port, rum or cognac for macerating prunes.
- DO** Allocate at least 15 pieces of canapés for every guest.
- DON'T** Cure the salmon without a heavy weight. Pressing down ensures a deeper and fuller cure.
- DON'T** Fret if your *baba ganoush* turns out a little watery. Simply grind up some breadcrumbs in a food processor and add to the final mix to thicken.



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