



How the professional does it

Do you have Michelin star app-titude?

A new iPad app shows you how to cook like an award-winning chef. James Ramsden tests it out and then learns how it should be done

There's a curious paradox in the domestic cook's approach to food: despite the popularity of programmes such as *MasterChef* and *Great British Menu*, and veneration of Michelin-starred chefs, home cooking has always been about simplification. Books by René Redzepi of Noma and Ferran Adrià of El Bulli stay on the coffee table, while Jamie's 30-Minute Meals and Nigel Slater's *Real Fast Food* become dog-eared and grease-splattered. Few people, it seems, want to attempt sous-vide or spherification in the home.

Or do they? A cooking app that goes on sale today aims to give home cooks the opportunity to recreate

suckling pig that takes 24 hours, incorporates eight processes and requires specialist equipment.

Many dishes, though, are quick and simple while maintaining that giddy air of Michelin stardom. There's a gorgeous smoked enoki, langoustine and lardo recipe by Nuno Mendes that my grandmother could pull off, while Agnarr Sværrisson's petit fours of Fisherman's Friend meringues is brilliantly playful and witty.

But does the app work? I picked a few of Pascal Aussignac's recipes to try, including a fillet of beef with oyster sabayon and girolles. I'd never eaten at his restaurant, Club Gascon, but had long been a fan of his stunning cookery book, *Cuisinier Gascon*.

Shopping was the first obstacle. After several phone calls, frantic e-mails and a fruitless bike ride to Green Lanes in North London, I tracked down marrow bones in a butcher's about half a mile from home. Girolles were a ride too far, so I used a mixture of supermarket shiitake and oyster mushrooms instead. And to my astonishment, the chaos I expected to reign, reigned not. I mean,

James Ramsden cooks from his iPad app at home, then repeats the recipes with chef Pascal Aussignac at his restaurant. Above, how the dishes should look

it wasn't the most straightforward morning's cooking I've ever done, but nor was it the most fiddlesome.

I started with the watercress velouté. After creating a makeshift steamer for the oysters using tin foil and a colander, so *Blue Peter*, and after burning myself twice on the ensuing steam, I shucked and chilled the oysters as instructed. I'd cooked oysters in the past, but had always shucked them from raw, a perilous exercise. This made much more sense, with the oysters steaming open in a couple of minutes.

The rest of the velouté was a cinch. I was slightly thrown by the lack of stock, but the simplicity of the recipe made perfect sense, and my final dish wasn't all that far from the version in the photograph.

While the crème brûlée for the dessert rested, I got on with the main course. Marrow was laced at and simmered, mushrooms blanched and yet more oysters were steamed open.

What works so well with these dishes is that after you've done your mise en place, you can wash up, have a drink, a nap, and then just throw it all together

66 If showing off with pig's feet croustons appeals, this is the app for you



PAUL ROBERTS FOR THE TIMES

when you're ready to eat. A quick flip-flop with a fillet of beef, a brief introduction of mushroom and marrow to butter, an enthusiastic whisking of egg yolk, butter and oyster jus, and dinner is ready.

Of course, there's still a yawning chasm between the manner in which a home cook tackles such food and a professional's approach, and to compare the two I headed to Club Gascon to see how Michelin-starred Aussignac cooked the same dishes. Quite differently, as it happens.

The first thing I notice is the disparity in equipment. In place of my very decent KitchenAid blender is a \$600 Thermomix, the daddy of all kitchen gizmos. Instead of my four-hobbed induction cooker there is a tank-like range with all gas rings burning. It is sweltering.

But Aussignac is cool, composed and totally charming, and not just because his head chef Andy has done all the prep already. As he blanches the watercress stalks he explains the reason for not using stock. "When you make a fish stock with vegetables and herbs, all you taste is a hint of fish. It's better to let the main ingredient speak for itself."

When he blends the velouté in the thermomix the colour is brilliantly vivid. Everything just seems effortless. Where I was scrutinising the iPad while cooking, Aussignac explains each technique with such clarity; where my sabayon was thick and mayonnaise-y, his is light and pale.

When we come to making the crépes, I confess that mine were somewhat thicker than his. "Ah, that is the English way — more of a pancake than a crepe," he smiles. "But that's up to you, you know? However you prefer to cook them." His own crépes are lace tissues to my woolly flannels; soft and delicate and golden. It is a dish that highlights the fact that, in the right hands, even something as simple as a crepe can be done with great finesse.

Ultimately it's going to be difficult to replicate many of these dishes to the letter. Without the fancy plates, fancier kit and years of hard, really hard, work, it would be bumpfist to assume you could. But there's great fun to be had in trying. While this certainly isn't an app for the beginner, most of the dishes are achievable with a level of application.

The greatest hurdle is probably the gadgets but just because Nuno Mendes, say, asks for sous-vide equipment doesn't mean the dish is impossible without it. You can take the ideas, the combinations, even components, and put your own spin on them according to your own abilities and appliances.

It's also worth keeping in mind that Michelin-starred chefs don't tell the whole truth. There is a lovely moment in James Sommerer's introductory video — a feature provided for each chef — when he insists "when we say 'scallop with Iberico ham' we literally mean 'scallop with Iberico ham', as the spoons over parsley foam."

Few of the recipes are to be undertaken with anything less than full commitment. You'll struggle to track down a number of the ingredients in your local supermarket, so forward planning is essential if you're to order the stuff online. But if the idea of showing off to friends and family with pig's feet croustons and yuzu jellies appeals, then this is the app for you. It's full of wild combinations, useful everyday techniques and genuinely brilliant, interesting recipes. And at a time of hyper-simplified home cooking, perhaps that's no bad thing.

Watercress, lettuce velouté with oysters

- Serves 4
- INGREDIENTS
 - 4 large fresh oysters
 - 4 stalks of lemongrass
 - Iceberg and baby gem lettuce
 - Olive oil
 - 2 bunches of watercress
 - Small bunch of fresh parsley
 - Knob of butter
 - Sea salt, pepper

METHOD

Place the oysters, flat-side up, in a steamer basket over a pan of boiling water. Cover and steam for a minute so that oysters open. Reserve oyster juices in a cup. Remove oysters from shells and cool. Cut lemongrass stalks into thin skewers and pierce an oyster on each. Chill. Gently sauté shredded lettuce with 2 tbsp olive oil in a saucepan for about 5 minutes, until softened but not coloured. Cut stalks from watercress and parsley and blanch for a minute. Add watercress and parsley leaves, blanch for 2 minutes.

Drain and plunge into a big bowl of iced water. Leave for 5 minutes, then press water from the leaves. Mix lettuce and wilted watercress and parsley in a blender with oyster juices and butter. Whizz to a smooth purée. Add seasoning to taste, then pour and rub the velouté through a fine sieve into a bowl. Chill until ready to serve.

When ready to serve, heat a little olive oil in a frying pan and sauté skinned oysters for a few seconds on each side to reheat and lightly colour. Pour chilled velouté into four soup plates and serve with an oyster skewer balanced on the side.

Beef fillet with oyster sabayon and girolle mushrooms

- Serves 4
- INGREDIENTS
 - 4 centre-cut beef marrow bones
 - Sea salt
 - Pepper
 - 2 sprigs of fresh tarragon
 - 1 tsp olive oil
 - 4 x 150g beef fillet steaks
 - 500g girolle mushrooms
 - 2 tsp olive oil
 - 5 fresh oysters
 - 100g unsalted butter
 - 2 eggs
 - Salt and pepper

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 250C/gas mark 9. Soak beef bones in salted, cold water for 30 minutes. Drain and rinse. Then, using a long thin-bladed knife or skewer, scoop out the marrow.

Blanch marrow in a small pan of boiling water until it firms, about 10 minutes. Plunge into a bowl of iced water. When cold, take the marrow out and pat dry.

Blanch mushrooms in a large pan of boiling water for 2 minutes. Drain, rinse in cold running water and pat dry.

Place the closed oysters on a tray and cook in oven for about 2 minutes until they open. Remove oysters from shells and tip the juices into a cup.

Blend oysters into a paste and chill both oyster paste and the reserved juices. Melt butter. Let hot butter liquid stand for a few minutes so solids sink to bottom. Pour off the buttery

Here are the dishes James made earlier...



oil into a cup or jug and discard the solids.

Separate eggs and place yolks and the oyster juices in a heatproof bowl over simmering water with a little seasoning. Use electric beaters to beat yolks to a pale golden foam. Allow the foam to gradually increase in size as you whisk.

When foam has doubled in volume with soft peaks, drizzle in cooled but runny butter, whisking as you pour. When butter is fully incorporated, slowly whisk in oyster paste.

Check seasoning of sabayon and take bowl off pan, keeping it warm while you cook steaks and mushrooms. Heat oil in a large frying pan. When hot, stir-fry the mushrooms until lightly browned. Keep warm until serving.

Strip and chop tarragon leaves. Chop marrow and mix with tarragon. Add to girolles and cook until hot, check the seasoning and keep warm.

Heat the oil in a non-stick frying pan. When hot, cook steaks. Season in the pan and allow to stand for 5 minutes while you plate the rest of the dish.

Put some of the girolles mix in the centre of each plate. Spoon the sabayon around the plate. Carve beef fillets in thick slices and place on mushrooms.

Lemon and wild strawberry crêpes

- Serves 6
- INGREDIENTS
 - 1 orange
 - 60g unsalted butter, 40g caster sugar
 - 165g plain flour, 3 eggs
 - 1 tsp Grand Marnier, 1 1/2 tsp dark rum, 50ml whole milk, 3 tbsp corn oil
 - 1 whole orange, 30g icing sugar
 - 200g caster sugar, 70ml water
 - 70ml lemon juice
 - 2 punnets wild strawberries

METHOD

Grate the orange zest very finely. Melt butter in a pan on a medium heat until brown. In a mixing bowl, stir eggs, sugar, flour, orange zest, Grand Marnier, rum, milk and melted butter. Put in the fridge and rest for an hour.

Heat sugar in a pan until golden. Deglaze with water and lemon juice and set aside. Wash, hull and slice wild strawberries. Cook crêpes in a small pan brushed with corn oil. Fold crêpes into wallet shapes and add wild strawberries to the top. Drizzle sauce. Abbreviated recipes from Great British Chefs app, £4.99, from the Apple store, greatbritishchefs.com/the-app

Classics last forever.



www.magimix.com



Watch Tom Aikens' Michelin-star Masterclasses thetimes.co.uk/tomalkens

Everybody loves toast. That's why we've designed our toasters to make the perfect slice. They're built to last, using high quality materials and elements. In fact, because we're so confident of just how good our toasters are, we offer a 3-year guarantee — we'll even come and collect your toaster, then return it to you if it goes wrong. Which is unlikely. After all, classics last forever.

magimix
Built better to last longer