



At Tom's Table

Tom Kerridge is the hottest ticket on the celebrity chef circuit. *HANNAH LEMON* catches him as he launches his third cookery book and a pop-up in Harrods

Before Tom Kerridge landed himself the role of top chef, publican and TV cooking personality, he was cast as a bully. As a 17-year-old boy from a council estate in Gloucestershire, he had been sent to a youth theatre group by his mother, where an agent scouted him.

"All of my parts saw me play either a Borstal boy, a school bully or 'Thug One', which was my official title in *London's Burning*," laughs Kerridge. Years later, he could still look the part, standing at 6ft 3in with a shaved head, but for the dimpled, cheeky smile that proudly and comfortably spreads across his face.

After a short acting career, which also saw a stint on the *Miss Marple* Christmas special, Kerridge moved on to cheffing. "I went into the kitchen at the age of 18 and instantly fell in love with the environment," he explains in a soft West Country accent. "The kitchen space itself, the way it all worked, the staff – everything about it was amazing. So I've stayed there ever since." He worked first in country houses, hotels and restaurants in Gloucestershire, then moved to London to learn from the likes of Philip Britten, Stephen Bull and Gary Rhodes. Kerridge was soon posted as head chef at the Michelin-starred Adlards in Norwich and then, in 2005, he opened a gastropub, The Hand and Flowers, with his wife Beth. Within a year he was awarded a Michelin star, and after seven years he had two – the first time a pub has achieved such an accomplishment. This steady rise to the top has slowly, but surely, won the heart of the nation through programmes such as the *Great British Menu*, *MasterChef* and *Saturday Kitchen*, and also fellow celebrities (between pictures of food and dogs, Kerridge's Instagram shots include photos of Liam Gallagher, Alastair Cook, Sat Bains and James Martin).

Out of all of this, I ask, what has been the biggest highlight of his career? "To be honest, it has to be opening

my own place. The focus suddenly changes from being a chef – where it's all about the food and what you cook – to running a restaurant. There's just so much more to it." That and receiving two Michelin stars, right? "It doesn't get much bigger than that – I mean three Michelin stars is technically bigger, but..." Is that the aim then? "There's no end goal, it's just an ongoing drive. It's what motivates all of us to come into work every day." I notice how he refers to his team and colleagues as 'us' and 'we' and I feel that he must make a fair and considerate boss. A quick look at The Hand and Flowers website and my suspicions are confirmed – the ▶



Mediterranean chicken

► majority of photos on the gallery are black-and-white shots of the staff rather than the food.

But I wonder if a rougher edge is still lurking underneath the surface. After some research, I uncover a well-publicised Twitter tirade that Kerridge and a few other chefs launched against an amateur blogger after his under-par review of Claude Bosi's restaurant Hibiscus. Kerridge, via his account, typed a number of expletives aimed at the chap. I ask about the rant, curious as to whether my question will unleash any similar sarky comments, but Kerridge replies honestly and coolly: "It was a huge learning curve for me to find out that I have a voice that people actually listen to. Since then I've used it for the power of good by shouting out about the National Farmers' Union, British farming and pork farming and helping to raise awareness. Whether it's Children in Need or Battersea Dogs & Cats Home or anything I find that is close to my heart, I use my voice to a good extent now."

"It's not supposed to be a coffee table cookery book; it's supposed to be used"

Kerridge describes his food as "robust and honest", which has been refined during his time at the pub and through the release of three books *Proper Pub Food*, *Best Ever Dishes* and his latest edition *Tom's Table: My Favourite Everyday Recipes*. The latter showcases simple recipes from roast chicken, chilli con carne and blueberry muffins to more exotic dishes like prawn and chicken gumbo and blackened Cajun redfish. I note that this is a useful book for both beginner and seasoned chefs. "It's not supposed to be a coffee table cookery book; it's supposed to be used," Kerridge explains. "I like the idea of all cooking books having greasy finger marks on them and pieces of paper where people have tried them out. I love seeing people make changes to the recipes."

The injection of international flavours follows Kerridge's recognition that British cuisine is often swayed by fads and different cuisines. "You can't help being influenced by fashion, people and trends," Kerridge explains. "Basically there is a nod to everyday tasty food, which happens to be, at the minute, across the sea in America." Although he notes that flavours in the US stem from European flavours, thanks to Polish, Irish and Italian immigrants who brought with them the flavours of their homeland that "are now regarded as American staples".

I ask Kerridge what he cooks after a long day at work, but the hours at the pub don't really allow him to be back for meal times. However, for a quick fix he recommends an omelette. "Get a non-stick pan and fry up your ingredients.



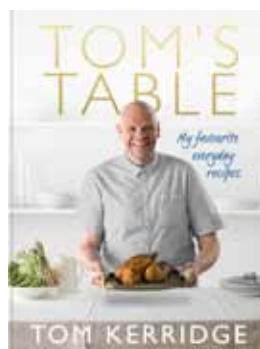


Onions, peppers, chilli and chorizo are a great combination. Whisk up your eggs, pour them in and stir them around like a good Spanish omelette. That's always a winner." This welcoming and laid-back attitude to cooking seems to be his signature style and images of family and friends gathered around the dinner table are hard to dispel. "Ultimately the end result is about flavour, taste and people having a nice time," says Kerridge.

*Left/ Flourless dark chocolate cake
Above/ Pollock with orange*

All photography © Cristian Barnett

If you are hankering for a taste of Kerridge's food, he has joined Harrods as its next Chef of the Season. This month he will be launching a Christmas range of dishes to go and a 21 cover pop-up restaurant. It will provide the chance for people to taste the flavours from Kerridge's latest recipe book and see him cooking at the grill with his team from The Hand and Flowers. I joke that despite being so far removed from the ruffian characters of his youth, surely he can get away with aggressively barking orders in the kitchen? But Kerridge smiles: "There are people who do the shouting for me these days." ■



2-8 November, Tom's Table at Harrods, SW1X

Tom's Table by Tom Kerridge is published by Absolute Press, £25