

LIFE ON A PLATE

SEASON 2, EPISODE 7: HESTON BLUMENTHAL

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SPEAKERS

Heston Blumenthal, Jimi Famurewa, Alison Oakervee

Jimi 00:00

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Hello, and welcome to the second season of Life on a Plate, the podcast from Waitrose. In each episode, we talked to some very special guests about what food means to them, asking about their comfort foods and favourite dishes, their food memories and go-to ingredients – and finding out a lot more about each of them in the process.

Alison, hello – how you doing?

Alison 01:25

Hey, I'm alright, thank you. How about you?

Jimi 01:26

I'm pretty good. Pretty good as I always am whenever we get the chance to talk and do one of these episodes. But I want to cut to the chase. I think this is your influence rubbing off on me. What I want to know is what are you cooking at the moment? What's your kitchen project?

Alison 01:42

My kitchen project at the moment is I'm trying to... So, we were talking about waffles at work and a couple of people have got waffle makers. I've got a Hong Kong style waffle maker that I've been trying to recreate the waffles that we had as a kid. So they're slightly different to the normal square waffles that you put custard powder in and cornflour. So they're slightly sweeter than... Yeah, they're just great. But I've nearly got there. We've had a few practice runs. And it's been a good excuse to go down

memory lane and try and get the bubbles into perfect bite-size pieces to just break off – crispy, chewy waffles. So, it's great.

Jimi 02:26

Yeah, I've seen these. They're a bit of an Instagram sensation now, aren't they? And so you used to eat these when you were growing up? Obviously you spent your childhood in Hong Kong, which is always fascinating for me. I always want to know more about this, so talk me through it – when would you eat them?

Alison 02:42

So we'd eat them after school, there would be hawkers on street corners, and without telling our parents that's what we'd be doing, we'd just buy them, they'd be in a paper bag and you'd eat them. It's either that or fish balls and that kind of thing. So the waffles often had like a sweet peanut butter-type butter – a kind of butter and peanut butter spread on it and sandwiched together, or plain.

Jimi 03:04

Oh, they sound amazing. And the sort of thing that takes you back to that moment and the Hawker Market and the sights and the sounds I can imagine. And handily enough, I'm now just thinking, it's pretty good for our guest that we've got on this episode because we have got Heston Blumenthal, who is of course, well known for his scientific approach to flavour and his innovative way with food. He is also, of course, the chef and mastermind of The Fat Duck in Bray, which is a hugely acclaimed and decorated restaurant, which among many, many other accolades is one of the few places to get a 10 out of 10 perfect score with *The Good Food Guide*.

Alison 03:58

He's also been working with us at Waitrose since 2010. We've got his range of products – the Heston from Waitrose products that we've been selling for the last 11 years. He used to do a regular set of recipes for us that were on TV, so I'm really looking forward to just catching up and hearing what he's been up to.

Jimi 04:19

He's one of the gang! It's going to be like a casual zoom meeting with one of the world's greatest chefs. Yeah, there's so much to cover with him. He has got an incredible mind and an incredible story. So, why don't we get on with it? Here is our conversation with Heston Blumenthal.

Heston Blumenthal, thank you so much for joining us. You are in quite a picturesque set up there. You're in the south of France as I understand it, which may be quite a surprising location for a lot of people that followed your career and wondering how you ended up there. What's the story behind it?

Heston Blumenthal 05:09

Several reasons. In some respects, I've come back full circle. So I'm 15 minutes from the restaurant that inspired me to cook.

Alison and Jimi 05:20

Wow.

Heston Blumenthal 05:22

I fell down a multi-sensory rabbit hole into this gastronomic Wonderland – is one way of saying it. And it's about 15 minutes from Saint Rémy, where Van Gogh or Van Gough – however you want to pronounce his name – where his hospice was where he cut his ear off. So there were a lot of painters in this area, from Picasso to Zhong Cocteau, from Cézanne – many of them. One of the reasons is because there's something quite special about the light here. It has the highest power apparently – I don't know how they measure these – but apparently, it has the highest level of gamma rays in the world along with somewhere in the Himalayas. The gamma ray is the fastest sun ray from the sun, so is very bright. Also, you've got this wind called the mistral, which was – if you look at Van Gogh's paintings – all this swirly stuff in the painting is really the mistral. So really what it does do, is it blows all the pollen away, and the clouds. So if you put up with the wind, you get unbelievably clear air, also the rock here is bauxite, and the restaurant that inspired me to cook is in a village called Les Baux – which is bauxite – and this limestone bauxite rock is very porous, is very reflective. So I'm here because of my love for France. I'm here because it's the place that inspired me to cook in the first place. I'm here because of the underground water and the history of the connection of water. The village, I mean was called Land Water, and I'm looking at the role of water in our lives, which I mean, it is our lives effectively – and how water can change its structure depending on the energy it's subjected to.

Jimi 07:19

Well, I can sense a tempting rabbit hole to dive down and join you down. But just hearing you talk there, it's really interesting because you're talking about artists and you're talking about sensory pleasure and these beautiful unexplained phenomena. But then you're also talking about the scientific explanation for them and that seems to chime with your approach and your sensibility throughout your cooking career in the way that you've married deliciousness – and that primal pleasure of eating – with why things get to be that tasty, and how you can perfect things, and search for perfection was one of your first TV shows. Did you always have that in you or was there a trigger for having that inquisitiveness?

Heston Blumenthal 08:05

I don't remember – not saying that I didn't have it – but I don't remember having it until I had this moment in this restaurant down the road. I think it was because I grew up in the 70s, food was... now let's say very different to what it is. In fact, Jacques Chirac said in the G7 Summit meeting when England... well, it was a week to two weeks before London and Paris were fighting it out for the Olympics, and I don't know if you remember this – and he said Britain has the worst food in Europe, secondarily to Finland. Now, no offence to any Finnish people, but I took great offence to that, and he clearly hadn't been to the UK for a very long time. But in the 70s you could sort of see why somebody from France would say that, because you couldn't even buy olive oil from a supermarket. You bought it from a chemist because you poured it in your ears for some reason. You used olive oil for blocked ears, not for cooking. And so I grew up – my mum was a good cook, she cooked classic 70s dishes.

Alison 09:30

What type of things would they be?

Heston Blumenthal 09:41

Chicken a la Cacciatore and maybe Coronation Chicken – I've just mentioned three chicken dishes..

Alison 09:39

So things like cod and butter sauce out of the bag?

Heston Blumenthal 09:41

But also fish fingers and cod in batter. But I had never eaten an oyster. I didn't know what fine – let's call it fine dining gastronomy restaurant was. I had no concept of the *Michelin Guide*. And we used to go to Cornwall for our holidays. And one year we went to France – and my parents read about this three Michelin-starred restaurant. So I had the same first time experience as they did – myself and my sister. So there I was, in France, approaching this restaurant, in this incredible, beautiful valley, bauxite rock. And that valley is where a guy called Raymond Thuilier in 1947 – I think was 47/48. He was mid-forties, insurance salesman, gave it all up, self-taught, opened a restaurant. Ten years later got three Michelin stars. And he basically puts it on the map. And so I went with my folks, and I remember we pulled up in the car and there's a man with a moustache that parked the car for you. Then you always have these little stairs, and the old guy, Monsieur Thuilier was the chef, was sitting there by one of his paintings, and then you sat on this terrace. There was a Sommelier with a handlebar moustache and a leather apron, the wine list was like a billboard, the cheese trolley the size of a chariot, they were pouring sauces into soufflés and carving legs of lamb at the table, and the chink of the glasses – and that's when I've fallen down... I fell down my multi-sensory rabbit hole – and that's when cooking got under my skin, and in my blood.

Alison 11:26

Do you remember what you got served that day? Do you remember what you ate?

Heston Blumenthal 11:30

Yes, it was red mullet. Starter. So I had the red mullet. Salade niçoise – which was sort of tomato, basil, olive oil, and lemon. And then it was a gigot of lamb en croute. So it was a leg of baby lamb, stuffed with its kidney, wrapped in puff pastry served with gratin dauphinois and green beans. And then crepe beurre manié.

Jimi 11:52

That seems quite adventurous for a 15 year old. Were you quite open to trying new things at that point? What was the young Heston like in terms of adventurousness?

Heston Blumenthal 12:01

That's great. No one's ever asked me that before – it's a great question. I went through a big period when I was younger of not liking brussels sprouts, but they were really overcooked brussels sprouts.

Alison 12:10

So is there any food now that you don't like?

Heston Blumenthal 12:13

Yes, there are several things I absolutely don't like. And normally they've been discovered through my TV shows. And Jay who I do the podcast with – who is brilliant – we've travelled the world together and I got to the point, and I said to him: 'Jay...', because he's like: 'Go on, eat that'. And I said: 'I'll eat anything in front of the camera, if you have a mouthful behind the camera'. It didn't take him very long to fall short on that. But we did a couple of visits to Iceland, ooph. They have something called Skata, which is Skate. So the ammonia, then – it preserves the flesh, however, it tastes of ammonia.

Jimi and Alison 12:54

Oh dear.

Heston Blumenthal 12:56

And I was on a fishing boat, and I ate this, and for the first time in my life, my throat took on a life of its own. It said: 'There's no way this is going down, Heston' – it just catapulted this whole thing out of my mouth. So have you seen those tinned fish that sometimes expands like a balloon – they have it in Finland as well?

Jimi 13:23

[Laughs] Right, no I've not seen this.

Heston Blumenthal 13:26

I've challenged Jay on the podcast – which he hated me for. We get sent... people... listeners – it's fantastic – send foods in. Because there's no food inherently or intrinsically disgusting, but if it were, it wouldn't be a food. It's just what we grow up with – our flavour preferences are about our culture, but it's also very personal. I think there's some really unpleasant things in the post coming to us as well.

Jimi 14:00

Wow, so you actually put a call out did you? Your podcast – this is for: Journey to the Centre of Food which I have to massively congratulate you on. I listened to a couple of episodes and absolutely loved it. And you mentioned tuna – and I think the one I listened to – you're exploring counterintuitive, or to our minds flavour pairings – like things that you wouldn't think that go together, that do go together – and you're talking about parsley and banana, and I think, was it tuna and Nutella?

Heston Blumenthal 14:28

That was an accident. That was my youngest daughter. I made her sandwich and she wanted like a starter / main course sandwich. White bread. Two slices cut in half. So one was basically tuna mayo with a bit of butter; and the other one was Nutella. And then cut them in quarter – two halves each cut into quarters. I think she was just playing around with them – a bit like Lego, And then took a bite of the two together. I'm thinking: 'Oh, wait – what are you doing?' She was too young to say, actually this is really rather nice. I mean, she might have been five years old or something. But she quite liked it. So I thought, I might as well have a try. Bizarrely it works. Well, when I say it works – it worked for me then. I haven't tried it recently. One listener wrote in... we were talking about sandwiches and dunking – and cheese sandwiches dipped in coffee, or dipped in tea. [Jimi and Alison laugh] Yes, exactly – that was

my reaction. So basically, I made a cup of tea, and a cup of coffee, and made a cheese sandwich and dunked it. In black tea – it's good.

Jimi 15:48

Well, it all seems like this whole idea of speaking to the child in all of us, and keeping that kind of childish curiosity, and things that aren't proper, or aren't right. And this is the... you know, The Fat Duck, initially, what you did with it wasn't recognisable as what you're known for now, was it when you first took it over? And it was pub. And so it was... you had this sense of trying different things.

Heston Blumenthal 16:20

Something's haven't changed.

Jimi 16:22

[Laughs] So you've not calmed down in that sense?

Heston Blumenthal 16:26

No, not at all. Things that are outside us change. But also we change. If we experience something new, that can then remould our memory. I remember once in the cereal boxes we were serving, having a food like a variety pack of cereal, or Christmas cracker, or picnic – I've done this on my TV shows – or sound of the sea. We can all connect to the object. So let's say you put an object on the table, and it's a tea cup, or is a mug, or it's a particular pen or a pencil that you can connect to. We'll all connect to the object. So we're sharing the object, but we've all got our own unique relationship with that object in terms of our memory and what things it conjures up. And that for me can be a wonderful way to start discussion. So when you start discussion, and then you can remember something that you did when you were young. I always chewed the end of a pencil, or I dipped mine in cheese or whatever it might be. I love it when you then remember something you'd forgotten. Michael McIntyre, for example, does a brilliant job at this. He's talking about bits of human behaviour. 'Were you watching anything?' 'Oh yes, I do that – I didn't even realise, or I'd forgotten.' So being able to trigger those memories but they change. So we had these twins, they came – it was a birthday celebration – and part of the play on this – you get these six packs of variety cereal, but in the boxes it's savoury and the bowl of milk is milk – it's a bacon and egg, toasted, delicate in French – it always sounds more delicate in French, a gelée – and then you pour the cereal on top of the bowl, and in the cereal packet it's got some little games on it, because there's – I remember playing games like this as a kid – there's a play on the... I love the variety packs. Most people did – it was a real treat. Yeah, but unless you got the All Bran. A twin said: 'I always ended up with the All Bran. And the other twin said: 'You've stolen my memory' [all laugh]. It was just that memory, and the importance in everything that we do. So I believe our perspective on life, on everything on life, and our perspective on ourselves, has the potential to continually change – it knows no bounds.

Jimi 19:02

Obviously you relaunched The Fat Duck and just hearing you talk about giving people that personalised experience. Does that all spin out from that relaunch?

Heston Blumenthal 19:12

Well, actually before then, the reimagining of the restaurant was probably the biggest single change that we made. But it's a manifestation of maybe 15... the 20 years before then, and there were some pivotal dishes. So the crab ice cream led me to... It was the first dish where I realise you just change the name and it can change the perception – just by changing the name. Oh my God, hang on a second – if I just a name change, how many other things? I mean, I've tried hundreds. I could write several books on this subject. But you taste something with your left leg forward, put your right leg forward, does it taste different? You know, it's easier with drinks because you can make the comparison after sip, after sip. Whereas if you've got a plate of... soups work well as well, or milkshakes, for example, but when you've got a plate of food that you might have a protein and different vegetables and sauces on, each spoonful won't be exactly the same as the one before. It's more... it's more subtle. So when I put the sound of the sea on, that was really... for me a game changing dish.

Jimi 20:20

And this is the dish: the iPod in the Conch, which is an absolute classic, and it's still on the menu in its evolved form.

Heston Blumenthal 20:28

It's still on the menu. And on that people started crying, they were crying. And the tears were really joyous ones, it took them to a place – that soundtrack occupied a wonderful place in their memory. I never before in my life, if I thought a dish that I did, somebody would cry in a positive way over eating that plate of food. I can't think of a more powerful emotional reward than that. But then I realised that what happens if you could then tailor-make the soundtrack for people because your particular memory might be waves crashing on a pebble on the beach with a fog horn in the background and eagles, and somebody else's might be just the gentle wave lapping on an island, the sandy Island. So that was the trigger that needed to be free, if I can personalise... if we could do it for just one person on the table where – you know, that movie *Ratatouille*? – that moment where the food critic goes back, has that *Back to the Future* moment? He's the *Ratatouille* and he gets sucked back to his childhood, to sitting in the chair, in the kitchen with his mum, with his legs swinging under the table. And he just lost himself in it. So that became my drive. And when I first told my team about it – I've had this quite a lot in the past, where I'm trying to explain something and I'm looking at the faces looking back at me – I'm expecting the big excited grins. Instead, they've gone ghostly white with jaws hitting the floor, and thinking: 'Hmm Heston, this is not... I thought this is going to be a bit more motivating than this'.

Jimi 22:08

I can absolutely imagine, yeah.

Heston Blumenthal 22:11

What our plan is now for after... we won't necessarily get this by the minute we open The Duck on the 18th of May. But within the next two months, our plan is... for one of the things we're going to add... on your booking.... because it's better if you... I was thinking about this... Rather than telling people, if you can give people the opportunity to trigger their curiosity and through their own curiosity, they have their own discovery, they have their own adventure, they take ownership as opposed to like the education system, which is you just being told. You're not paid to think, you just – you know, you're a sponge. And

if you could have a graphic equaliser when you do your booking, which will be your seascape. So you know that you're tailor-making... because it might be that at that moment in time... what happens if I turn that crashing down a little bit and make it a bit more lapping, let's put a seagull on it, oh that takes me to Cornwall, I don't want to be there, maybe it's a... So you can play around with your soundscape, so then you get that with the food, but the technology to be able to do it through a website – so then you get that on your headphones – it's taken a long time! [Jimi laughs]

Jimi 23:36

You've earned that right now that when you have an idea like this, or you want to try something – and you're in France, studying the properties of water, so when one of these rabbit holes beckons, you can bound down it and people will follow you. Do you then have to sort of police your own ideas, or notions, or do you...

Heston Blumenthal 24:02

Brilliant point, yes – I have to police my own. I have to slow down so I'm not saying I'm faster than anybody else – but I have to slow down. Also in my dot joining. So I've found the connection between breast milk, umami, oxytocin, short chain fatty acids, oligosaccharides, lactates and mental wellness. I've joined these dots. But if I throw that out to somebody, no one is going to know what I'm talking about. The most amazing thing is here in my office development kitchen – in the way we've done the rice experiments, which are inspired by a guy called Professor Emoto, who died a couple of years ago – we've done some work with his long term assistant. You can see Emoto's rice experiment is followed in that way – you take three jars of rice. So take some rice and take some water. Mix them all up and then split them into three. Three jars, same jars, sterilise the jars and then just put them in a line. And every morning give one love and gratitude. But you have to have – the important thing here is you have to believe in it. If you say the words and don't believe – it's the intent behind the words that is the most important. If you give one love and gratitude, the other one uses this: idiot, stupid. And the third one, you ignore. Now we've done it 12 times and had the same result each time. The jar of rice that has had the positive affirmation, or positive intentions, stays fairly clear. Sometimes the water goes slightly golden. If you smell it, it's like a fresh cheese but slightly honeyed, slightly floral. The one that's been given the abuse goes like an overripe cheese. But the one that's been ignored rots. It stinks. And Emoto's point is if water can do this to food, if motions can do this to things through water, what do they do to ourselves? Because it's the same thing – if we carry around stress, we have an inflammation of our system.

Jimi 26:29

You've mentioned that idea of word scaring people and it is that kind of thing – you're right, the logic follows. There's a lot of long standing study on that. But as you say that, you must have encountered a lot of scepticism of all forms throughout your career.

Heston Blumenthal 26:45

Oh my word.

Jimi 26:50

So how do you combat that when people just don't... and not just in that sense, but even in something as: 'Oh, you can't have crab ice cream, or you can't put that flavour with that'.

Heston Blumenthal 26:56

Yeah, the Hind's Head, my pub next to The Fat Duck, in Bray, there's a fireplace there, and there's a quote in gold leaf – a phrase above the fireplace, and the phrase has been there for 300 plus years. And I've walked past it thousands and thousands of times, and only in the last sort of year or so did I realise its value. And it says: Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. And no one was there. Now replace faith with basically belief. We all have fear. We might say 'no', but we need fear. You need stress to be able to do something with. When the stress becomes... when it's something that you kind of become then it becomes damaging. But a little bit of stress, a little bit of fear, a little bit of... you need... it's like if the Joker didn't exist, then Batman wouldn't be able to put on his cool Lycra and go to his Batcave and drive his cool car. Thanks to the Joker, you got Batman. So we do need thanks – if you appreciate the rain when it's just been sunny for so long, or vice versa. That saying, I had a belief. Then naturally asked the question – well was your belief? I'm still following it. And it's the exploration of our relationship with food, from an evolutionary point of view, from a current point of view, but most importantly, from my point of view.

Alison 28:23

You're always coming up with ideas and that, how do you channel them into new dishes? And how do you know when it's right to retire a dish?

Heston Blumenthal 28:33

Lots of dishes have been on the menu for several years.

Alison 28:36

And are they always the same?

Heston Blumenthal 28:40

No, no. Like never, never. Well, when I say never, when a dish has stayed on for a period of time of several months – then without a change in it, without a tweak, they will normally take it off. And what I wanted to do on the wall upstairs in The Fat Duck was have – I think it might be Monsters Inc, where they're walking down a passageway, a corridor, and there are these picture frames of great grandpapa old bear, and the mama bear says: 'If it wasn't very old Grandee rowing over in 19-whatever, you wouldn't be here today'. So those dishes like the crab risotto and stuff I wanted to put on the wall of fame, which had a little story behind them. But the interesting thing is I'm rethinking that because if you look at the sound of the sea, yeah the dish evolves but you also evolve. So especially if you can then tweak your personalisation for the dish. So the dish then changes. So who's changing the dish? Yeah, it's interesting – a really interesting thing.

Jimi 29:46

When you're cooking at home, when you're cooking for your family and your kids, can you turn that sensibility off? Can you turn off that inquisitive mind and analytical side of yourself?

Heston Blumenthal 30:01

Yes. Well I might still have an idea, it might be... I remember slicing a leek once and wondering if the leek tasted any different one/two millimetres above the root, or a centimetre, or two centimetres above it. I was having that internal dialogue because when recipes say use the white or green of a leek: Okay, let's taste the white, let's taste the green'. I can see the green is more bitter and tougher. It doesn't just go from green to white, it fades.

Jimi 30:31

I've just got this vision of your partner being like: 'Have you chopped those leaks yet?' And you're still in the other room...

Heston Blumenthal 30:41

Yeah, I'm better when I have less ingredients because more of it just doesn't help – my ADHD goes mad. I just think I'd buy stuff to make potentially 200 dishes. Just give me five ingredients – that makes it easier for me.

Alison 31:04

Is there an ingredient that you always – an everyday ingredient – that's always in your store cupboards at home?

Heston Blumenthal 31:09

Yeah, there's a few. I mean, the obvious ones are salt and pepper. But I'd say very useful ingredients are mustard and vinegar – they are very, very useful. A little bit of Dijon mustard, and some white wine vinegar. Think about acidity like salt – acidity can be a bit of soup, or anything really, a few drops of vinegar and a little bit of mustard. I mean I've got a batch of other stuff, but I say as advice for somebody at home, a little bit of salt, a little bit of mustard and a little bit of white wine vinegar added to many dishes makes a difference. Yeah makes a massive difference.

Alison 31:55

And what do you eat as a family because you've got a small child still at home – do you eat together?

Heston Blumenthal 32:00

We used to – I wanted to try and get back – because Shay's three years old. So there is a sort of witching hour with kids around about seven when everything seems to get a little bit fractious.

Jimi 32:21

[Laughs] We know the range of those hours can get bigger and bigger. Sometimes you're like: 'Oh wow, it's starting at four o'clock!'. And yeah, the moon's playing up – something's in the air.

Jimi 32:40

One of the other things that I really enjoyed about the episode of your podcast that I listened to, was you did this incredible experiment with wine and with tasting, and it skirts around some of the things you're talking about. How does it work? I'm eager to try it.

Heston Blumenthal 32:57

Okay, well, there's several dozen of them but two or three for you guys to have a go at – is have a glass of red wine, and write on a piece of paper the word 'wine' – but in rounded letters, so there's no sharp edges – imagine they're made from the balloons for kids parties. So it's really rounded letters. And on the other side of the piece of paper, write 'wine' where there's no round edges, it's completely sharp, jaggedy edges. Being even able to understand what the letters are is less relevant than the shape of the font. With the hand you would normally sip with, have a look at wine written in the rounded letters. Have a sip. And then immediately – you don't need to put the glass down – flip the page over and look at the sharp letters. When you see the sharp letters, the wine is noticeably sharper, it's more bitter, more closed. And you think, isn't this bizarre? It's not really because language came – in terms of human evolution – language evolved as a form of sort of expression of body movement. And so we use the word sharp: like a piece of music can be sharp, lemon juice can be sharp, a knife can be sharp. So there's that one. Probably – for me – one of the most profound discoveries I made was probably two, three years ago now where, again, take the glass of wine, keep the same hand because for many people it tastes slightly different from the left to the right.

Jimi 34:29

Oh wow, really?

Heston Blumenthal 34:30

I think if you drink with any hand, there's less difference but if you would always automatically pick up your glass of wine with your left hand, let's say – if you try and then taste it and swap it in the right hand, it can become more closed and sharp. But if you pick this glass of wine up – before we have the first sip – close your eyes and picture someone, or something, that fills you with absolute love. Complete, wonderful, warm, positive emotions. You can't think anything negative. Have a sip. Don't put the glass of wine down. But then pretty quickly afterwards, close your eyes and think of someone or something that fills us with negative emotions. Let's say jealousy, anger, frustration, rage, rejection, there's many, many names and we've all had them. Even if we've dealt with them in the past, but picture that person and have a sip. It's like a different wine. And the same thing if you play Carmina Burana – the Old Spice advert basically – or the dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy from the Nutcracker where they have the bit where they have the chimes, same hand – completely changes the taste of wine. So yeah, we cover a lot of experiments like that in the podcast. We talk about revolting foods and some silliness around delving deeper into ingredients.

Jimi 36:05

It's a fascinating deep dive, and you go into all sorts of different worlds of not just flavour, but history and science, and it's absolutely great for anyone who has enjoyed this little insight into your world.

Heston Blumenthal 36:24

Brilliant. Thank you.

Jimi 36:24

You've talked as well about the busyness of your mind, and you mentioned there about being diagnosed with ADHD. How did that change things for you?

Heston Blumenthal 36:34

It was only about five, six, seven years ago. I wondered why my head was very sensitive to temperature. So we do this other podcast and Jay said: 'This is probably the worst superhero strength that you can imagine'. [Jimi laughs] I meditate a lot now. So I think actually my head is less sensitive to heat than before, but I could tell the temperature of a room between 18, and say 24 degrees. I could tell you what the temperature was by what my head did in terms of perspiration. It wasn't exactly very helpful, I didn't want to be feeling very hot and sweaty, and I thought: I know I have a busy head but I don't know if my head is any busier than anyone else's. And then I was looking at it from an evolutionary point of view: food, the brain is 2% of our body weight, 25% of our blood and 60% of our glucose. And this brain-gut connection, which I'm so fascinated in, and I thought: brain is both an organ and a muscle. So if it would make sense that if you go to the gym and train your biceps, for example, we get hot, go red, maybe this has got something to do with that. And then a friend of mine said to me once – we were talking about something – and he said: 'Have you ever thought you might have ADHD?' and I said: 'I don't see how I can have ADHD because how can I focus so much for so long on a subject?' He said: 'That's classic ADHD, you're not interested until you discover something and then you hyper focus on it.' So I went and got diagnosed, I've had ECGs and EEGs, and tested my hormone levels, and done the multiple choice test, and I've got full on ADHD. Now, that is just part of who I am. Everyone's on the spectrum, whether it was autism, or just different – it's like a graphic equaliser. So it helped because it helped me understand more about myself. So I don't like being late, never have done. But I was late, not because I'd just sit at home looking at the clock thinking I don't need to bother, let's wait, there'll be no traffic. No, I'd leave the house three or four times, then I'd run back in again, run upstairs to look for something, come down with a whole handful of stuff, including a watch I'd lost six months before and then forgot what I went up for in the first place.

Jimi 39:13

Yeah, it's hopefully very worthwhile for any people that have had a diagnosis, or have felt like they haven't experienced life – that it can be channelled in the sort of way that you have.

Alison 39:29

I'd like to ask you – you joined Waitrose in 2010 and started working with us and over the years you've launched loads of different Heston from Waitrose products. Have you got any favourites?

Heston Blumenthal 39:41

No, there's so many there. There were products that were before their time, like the Ponzu sauce. Ponzu dressing which was a fantastic product, the chicken liver parfait... ah, it took several years.

Alison 39:55

And that's still available now.

Heston Blumenthal 39:56

That's still available now. I mean, there's tonnes and tonnes.

Alison 40:01

The one that always amuses me, because it wasn't until we launched it – it was the burgers with the mince in the right direction... same direction.

Heston Blumenthal 40:11

Yes, all the mince comes through in the same direction, yeah, and then you cut it. How can I explain this? So imagine... or look at your forearm, put your forearm out, and you've got your hand on the end of the forearm. Stretch your fingers out. The muscle fibres basically run along the bone like your fingers do. So if you slice – not down onto the bone – this is probably sounding quite painful...

Jimi 40:46

A lot of people are suddenly going to be vegetarians.

Heston Blumenthal 40:50

Cut a slice parallel to the bone. Then you're biting – like your fingers – you're having to bite through the fibres. If you cut down onto the bone, and then take those slices off, then turn them, you're now biting down on to the fibres. So it opens up, so just by the way that you carve a piece of meat can make it seem more tender.

Jimi 41:15

Heston Blumenthal. It's been amazing to talk to you and just really dive into the expanded possibilities of what we can do with food and flavour. It's been amazing to have you on. Thank you so much for joining us.

Heston Blumenthal 41:30

It's been great to be on. Thank you.

Jimi 41:38

You've been listening to Life on a Plate from Waitrose. I'm Jimi Famurewa, thank you to my co-host Alison Oakervee, and our guest, Heston Blumenthal. To learn more about the series, go to waitrose.com/podcast, and please subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.