

Nature's way

Cooking the best local, seasonal produce on Skye keeps head chef Scott Davies passionate about what he does

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'I always loved the kitchen,' says Scott Davies, head chef at the Three Chimneys. 'Ever since I was young, I was cooking and baking with my mum.'

The idea of being a chef took hold during work experience, aged 15, 'I just loved the vibe, the buzz and how the chefs were all so passionate about it. That really made up my mind.'

Runner-up in *MasterChef: The Professionals* in 2013 – 'It was an intense experience, you learn a lot' – the 30-year-old has been at the renowned Skye restaurant since last June. Originally from Wales, he moved to Scotland 14 years ago. 'My mum brought me over here. She's from Scotland and spent 21 years in Wales, and then she said to my dad, "It's time to go home".'

Gaining qualifications at Kingsway Campus in Dundee, Scott's first job was at the Carnoustie Golf Hotel, before stints at the equally prestigious Seafood Restaurant in St Andrews and the Isle of Eriska Hotel. 'Then I went to Melbourne in Australia and worked at the Point Albert Park. Melbourne is fantastic – I've had some of the best meals I've ever eaten out there.'

A career Down Under might have beckoned had a visa issue not cropped up. Luckily for

foodies here, Scott returned to Scotland to a job at Glenapp Castle. 'I worked there with Adam Stokes for a season because I felt my pastry wasn't strong enough. I really enjoyed it.'

A move back to St Andrews and the Rusacks Hotel saw Scott take the restaurant from one rosette to three during his tenure as head chef.

Seasonal produce is at the heart of his cooking, in keeping with the ethos at the Three Chimneys. 'The rule is that we go to Skye first. If the quality is there, we go for it; if not, we go to Scotland. The food's a mix of Scottish and French, but just looking at the landscape and the produce we have, it's very Nordic and Scandinavian – so smoking, pickling, fermenting, using ash in cooking. It's got a big mix.'

The menu changes every month, based on what is in season. 'As soon as a grower walks through the door with something, it's usually on the menu that night. We have direct contact with all the farmers, fishermen and growers as well, so we always know what they've got.'


Any advice for aspiring chefs? 'It's one of these things you have to be really passionate about,' he says. 'You have to have a real love for the job, but it's really rewarding.' 

Image: Head chef Scott Davies changes the menu at the Three Chimneys regularly to incorporate as much fresh seasonal produce as possible: 'From the end of October to February, the shellfish is absolutely fantastic.'

Orbost Farm Iron Age pork with sauce vierge, cauliflower and langoustine tails

For the pork belly

100ml water
30g table salt
2 parsley stalks
2 thyme sprigs
1 bay leaf
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 tsp black peppercorns
350ml buttermilk
400g skinned and boned-out pork belly
1 litre of bought pork fat, melted

Method: Put the water, salt, parsley, thyme, bay leaf, garlic and peppercorns into a saucepan and bring it to the boil. Turn off the heat, leave it to cool in the pan then add the buttermilk. Place the pork belly in a suitable dish and pour over the liquid. Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours.

Remove the pork from the brine, wash it, then place it in a roasting tin and cover with pork fat. Seal the roasting tin with a close-fitting lid or a thick layer of aluminium foil. Place in the oven at 110°C for six hours, or until very tender.

Remove from the oven and lift the pork belly on to a clean plate lined with greaseproof paper. Press a similar-sized dish or tray on top, and top that with a weight. Refrigerate overnight.

Cut the cold, pressed pork belly into rectangular pieces, each weighing about 50g, and return to the fridge until ready to serve.

Sauce vierge

1 tsp finely chopped baby capers, drained from any brine and rinsed
1 tsp finely chopped gherkins
1 tsp chopped wild garlic leaves
1 tbsp chopped parsley
1 tbsp chopped chervil
1 tbsp chopped chives
½ tsp chopped tarragon

½ tsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp chopped white anchovies
50ml extra-virgin olive oil
20ml lemon juice
Salt and pepper

Method: Mix all the ingredients together and season with salt and pepper if required.

Langoustines

12 live langoustines, medium size
50g butter, melted
Lemon juice to season
Salt to season

Method: Plunge the langoustines into a pan of boiling salted water and cook for two minutes. Remove and refresh under cold running water. Peel the langoustine tails and set aside in the refrigerator. Just before serving, brush the langoustines with melted butter, then season with salt and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Grill the langoustines and serve hot with the finished dish.

For the garnish

6 cauliflower florets, cut in half
Vegetable oil, for frying

For the cauliflower purée

1 small cauliflower, finely sliced
50g unsalted butter
Lemon juice, to season
Wild herbs and flowers (optional)
Salt to season

Method: garnish

Heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan and cook the florets, cut-side down, until lightly singed and turning black. Set aside in a warm place until ready to serve.

Method: purée

Melt the butter in a saucepan and cook until just turning brown. Add the sliced cauliflower, season with salt and cook very gently on a low heat for about 10-12 minutes.



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Blitz in a blender and pass through a sieve.

Add a squeeze of lemon juice and salt to taste.

To serve: Pan-fry the portions of pork belly until golden brown on each side. Plate as shown, with wild herbs and flowers if available.

Sea trout, wild garlic, fresh mushrooms and shellfish

Wild garlic purée

50g unsalted butter
2 banana shallots, peeled and finely sliced
100g wild garlic leaves, washed
100ml double cream

Method: Melt the butter in a pan and cook until a light brown colour, then add the shallots with a pinch of salt and cook gently for 10 minutes. Add the wild garlic and sweat down for two minutes, before adding the cream and cooking for two minutes. Blitz in a blender and pass through a fine sieve. The mixture should result in a loose purée. Check the seasoning to taste and set aside until ready to serve.

Potato terrine

250g unsalted butter, melted
1 clove of garlic, finely sliced
2 tbsp of thyme leaves
1kg King Edward potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
Salt and pepper to season

Method: Melt the butter with the garlic and thyme. Line a 25cm x 18cm baking tray with non-stick parchment paper. Cover the base with a layer of potato slices and brush with the melted herby butter. Season with salt and pepper. Repeat until all the potato is used then cover with another sheet of paper. Place in the oven at 170°C for 1½ hours, until the potatoes are tender and the surface is golden brown. Leave to cool for 1 hour. Press with another baking tray of same size sitting on top of the potato, plus a weight. Place in the fridge overnight. Before serving, cut into four equal-sized pieces.

For the sea trout

1.5kg sea trout, filleted
18g sea salt flakes

Above: Beautifully presented sea trout, wild garlic, fresh mushrooms and shellfish. **Left:** Layers of flavour with pork, sauce vierge, cauliflower and langoustine tails.



Image: The rhubarb soufflé with an oat crumble and stem ginger ice-cream looks as good as it tastes.

9g demerara sugar
200ml strong apple cider

Method: Scale, fillet and pin-bone the trout. Boil the cider, salt and sugar together. Pour over the trout fillets and leave for one hour, turning over halfway. Remove from the brine and pat dry then cut into four pieces.

Fresh mushrooms

50g fresh girolles mushrooms
25g butter
Sprig of thyme

Method: Add the girolles to a hot pan with the butter, thyme and 25ml water, and cook with the lid on for 1-2 minutes.

Shellfish

100g mussels
50g cockles
50g clams
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 clove of garlic, crushed
300ml strong apple cider
50ml white wine vinegar (if possible, infused with fresh dulse seaweed)
Olive oil

Method: Clean and wash the mussels, cockles and clams. Sweat the onions in a little oil for five minutes until soft, but not coloured. Add the garlic and cook for two minutes. Add the cider, bring to the boil and then reduce the liquid by half over a medium heat. Add the clean mussels, cockles and clams. Cook over a high heat, covered with a lid, for 1-2 minutes until they open. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve and set aside the cooked shellfish. Pick out the fish and discard the

shells. Add the seaweed-infused vinegar to the reserved cooking liquid. Season and adjust as required then leave to cool. Return the shellfish to the liquid and warm through before serving.

To serve

Rapeseed oil
Lemon juice
4 scallops, shucked, cleaned and ready to cook
Dry seaweed flakes
12 wild or farmed asparagus
50g unsalted butter
12 wild garlic leaves
Wild herbs and flowers from land and sea

Method: Brush the trout pieces with rapeseed oil. Grill for two minutes on each side. Finish with a squeeze of lemon juice on the flesh side.

Pan-fry the potato terrine slices on all sides until golden brown. Pan-fry the scallops until golden, then finish with a squeeze of lemon juice and season with seaweed flakes.

Cook the asparagus in a little water in which 50g of unsalted butter has been whisked to make an emulsion. Add a few garlic leaves to wilt them for just a few seconds before serving. Scatter the wild herbs and flowers over the top.

Rhubarb soufflé with oat crumble and ginger ice-cream

Rhubarb soufflé base

1kg rhubarb
45g cornflour
175g sugar
70g water

Method: Roughly chop the rhubarb and add to a pan with 200ml of water. Cover with a lid and cook for 30 minutes over a medium heat.

Remove the lid and cook until you have a purée consistency. Blitz it and pass through a sieve. Cool. Reserve 500g of the purée and keep the rest for the soufflé. Add 100ml of the reserved purée to the cornflour and whisk into a paste. Boil 70g of water and the sugar together at 118°C, then pour the remaining 400ml of purée on top. Add the cornflour paste and whisk together. Place over a medium heat, stirring all the time. Bring to a simmer and cook for five minutes. Remove from the heat, pass through a sieve and cool, making sure you leave it covered to stop a skin forming.

Oat crumble

150g wholemeal or brown flour
75g salted butter, cut into small cubes
75g dark brown sugar
25g rolled oats
25g pinhead oats

Method: Rub together the flour, butter and sugar to form breadcrumbs. Add all the oats. Spread out on a baking tray and place in the oven at 170°C for 25 minutes until golden brown.

Stem ginger ice-cream

4 large egg yolks (80g)
100g caster sugar
½ tsp ground ginger
300ml whole milk
280ml double cream
6 pieces of stem ginger, finely chopped
1 tbsp ginger syrup

Method: Whisk together the egg yolks, sugar and ground ginger. Boil the milk and pour over the egg mix. Whisk and pour back into the pan, and cook gently until a custard forms. Pass through a sieve and leave to cool.

Semi-whip the double cream and fold into the custard, then fold in the stem ginger and syrup. Churn the mix in an ice-cream machine. Freeze.


Coat four soufflé pots with butter and sugar, and place in freezer about one hour before use.

To finish

160g egg whites
Lemon juice
80g caster sugar

Method: Whisk the egg whites with a pinch of salt and the juice of quarter of a lemon, until soft peaks form. Whisk in the sugar. The egg whites should be soft peaks and glossy. Add four heaped dessertspoons of the soufflé base to a bowl and beat until smooth. Add a third of the egg whites and beat until smooth. Fold the rest in.

Spoon rhubarb purée into each soufflé pot, just covering the base. Top with a thin layer of oat crumble. Spoon the remaining soufflé mix into the soufflé pots, filling to the top. Tap the base of each pot to remove excess air. Sprinkle with a thin layer of crumble.

Using your thumb, clean the edge of each soufflé pot to stop any of the mix touching the rim. Bake at 180°C for 8-10 minutes. Serve with the ice-cream and crumble on the side. 

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Wine to dine

Drinks writer Peter Ranscombe picks three wines to go with Scott Davies' recipes



ESCARPMENT THE EDGE, PINOT NOIR, 2011, £13.99 (WAITROSE)

Belly pork and langoustine demand a wine with high acidity to cut through the fat and provide a textural accompaniment to the meaty flesh. Step forward pinot noir, arguably my favourite red grape variety, especially when it's grown in places like Martinborough in New Zealand. As well as its refreshing acidity, The Edge boasts really intense red-fruit aromas and flavours of red cherry and red plum, making it a delicious glass with or without food.



CAVE DE TURCKHEIM GRAND CRU BRAND GEWURZTRAMINER, 2011, £17.95 (DRINKMONGER)

Gewurztraminer, the intense and floral variety that is one of Alsace's flagship grapes, is a classic match for strong fish like trout. This example from the Cave de Turckheim co-operative has peach, apricot and lychee flavours that work well both with the trout and the clams, cockles and mussels.



TASTE THE DIFFERENCE AWATERE VALLEY RIESLING 2015, £8 (SAINSBURY'S)

To accompany rhubarb and ginger we want something with a healthy dose of acidity to balance the residual sugar in the wine. An off-dry Riesling from the Awatere Valley in New Zealand is ideal. As well as the familiar citrus flavours – with the fresh lemons here joined by sweeter lemon sherbet and pear-drop notes – we have plenty of the classic Riesling acidity to provide balance.



For a look at the future of New Zealand wine, check out Peter Ranscombe's blog, *The Grape & The Grain*, on the Scottish Field website at www.scottishfield.co.uk/category/grapegrain/

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