



Giles Edwards has made his food dreams a reality at the Salt Cellar pop-up restaurant in Cape Town's Salt River. Opposite: Crispy pigs' tails with garlic aioli are on the menu.



# PIG HEAD ED

After doggedly pursuing his dream job in one of London's most famous restaurants, Giles Edwards has come home to cook simple, delicious, nose-to-tail food for the lucky few who have heard ...

PHOTOGRAPHS JAN RAS PRODUCTION ABIGAIL DONNELLY  
RECIPES GILES EDWARDS TEXT TUDOR CARADOC-DAVIES

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there's one thing Capetonians love (apart from picnic protests, sunset pics and yoga), it's being told that something cool is in limited supply. This is especially true when it comes to food. Take the unlikely success of The Dog's Bollocks burger joint. The combination of huge, but average, burgers, in-house wine and word-of-mouth marketing that insisted you get there by 6 pm or miss out, meant it was full every time it opened.

The Salt Cellar pop-up restaurant in Salt River delivers this same limited-space-equals-must-visit eatery formula, only this time it's the real deal. The reason for this is quite simply – Giles Edwards. Giles is a Capetonian who left SA in 2006 with an unequivocal goal: to work at the fabled St John restaurant in London under iconic chef Fergus Henderson. This was no ordinary ambition. St John is one of the world's most respected restaurants. It numbers among the top 50 in the world. And Fergus Henderson is one of the world's most revered chefs: a pioneer of nose-to-tail eating (the title of his book). He champions age-old techniques and is frequently credited with repopularising traditional British food. His famous restaurant in Clerkenwell has a reputation for producing exceptional chefs who go on to spread the gospel in their own way. But the real accolades start with the food. By serving dishes such as "blood

cakes and fried eggs", "kid chop, chard and anchovy", "lamb tongues" and his signature dish, "roast bone marrow and parsley salad", Henderson promoted eating the odd animals and the odd parts of animals that the mainstream tends to discard. He simplified plates and the eating experience, so that offal became the hero and a legend was born. When chefs talk about inspiration from other chefs, his name is almost always mentioned.

The point? It would take some pig-headed determination for a young South

"and being overwhelmed by the space; thinking it was quite cool and unusual. I probably thought I'd have something I was used to, but then I had a crispy pig liver starter, some heart and we both had the bone marrow. I just remember sitting there massively enjoying the food and the wholespace, the theatrics of the restaurant. It's a white space, you can see people in the kitchen, there's no clutter. Everyone was abuzz – behind me was an elderly woman, to the right a barrister, to the left some East End London hipsters.

I was amazed at the diversity of the people eating there.

"I went home and told my parents that I didn't want to complete my PPE. All I wanted to do was go back to London and cook like that. I wanted to work in that restaurant. I became a chef because of St John."

It took Giles another five years to realise his goal. He did a six-month cooking course in Cape Town, followed by six months at Beluga in Green Point. Then he went back to London – and the floor of his brother's flat – eager to start his career at St John. Cue rejection number one for having no experience. Rejections number two, three and four followed in a predictable pattern, with Giles taking on new kitchen jobs before returning to St John every year.

He kept at it, year after year, punctuating each rejection with annual visits to St John for his birthday meal. Stubborn, a sucker for punishment or just totally single-minded, whichever way you spin it, Giles has staying power. While he obsessed over the ever-changing menu and the brilliant dishes, even his friends mutinied at the idea of going there *again*.

Over the years there were terrible employers and great ones, but between each attempt to be accepted at St John, Edwards learned more about food and what he wanted to cook. From London's high-end chains to Michelin-star destination restaurants, the menu is huge and he got the full buffet.

Finally, with the knife scars and burns of hard-earned experience, Giles went back to St John for the fifth time. There was no job of course, there never was,

African with no cooking experience to land a job at St John.

At age 19, Giles did what many young South Africans do and took time off to pull pints in London. "I was studying PPE (philosophy, politics and economics) at UCT and at the end of the first year there's that long vac. I felt like I'd never had a gap year so I decided to go overseas and graft. I got a job in South Kensington pulling pints for three-and-a-half-months. I slept on my brother James's floor in Clerkenwell. I had a whale of a time."

On his last night in the city, James took him out for a farewell dinner. They went to St John. It was a meal that was to change his brother's life.

"I remember having a pint," says Giles,



Above, clockwise from top left: Pig's head pie; winemaker Tim Martin (left) and wine merchant David Cope; perfectly braised lamb, turnips and green sauce; Giles releases a pig head's pie from its tin; salted caramel chocolate tart, which Giles describes as an "advanced Mars Bar"; octopus, tomato and fennel salad.

Opposite: The space is spartan – guests make the soundtrack and the food is the star of the show.

but a gap presented itself: an opening at a new hotel where they could use him *in future*. In the meantime he could "help out" in the St John kitchen. It meant a demotion and a pay cut, but it was his chance. He took it.

Needless to say, Giles spent the last few years in London as one of Fergus Henderson's right-hand men.

Back in Cape Town, Giles was a different man. He knew he wanted to do something but had no time to set up a restaurant. "Someone said to me 'you can't get a reservation in summer anywhere, even at the Ocean Basket, but

**"IT WOULD TAKE SOME PIG-HEADED DETERMINATION FOR A YOUNG SOUTH AFRICAN WITH NO COOKING EXPERIENCE TO LAND A JOB AT ST JOHN"**

what you can do is set up a shop on the corner, sell 100 amazing hamburgers and make a name for yourself," he says. "So that was it, I decided to do a pop-up. I asked around, but nothing was quite right."

Giles's partners now are David Cope of Publik wine bar and Tim Martin of Tim Martin Wines, which is based at Salt Cellar. "I found David, Tim and Salt Cellar on social media and told them what I wanted to do: cook honest, sharing-style food, and see how it goes. It was a good opportunity for Tim and David and it's a good match for me. Their wines are very different to mainstream wines and my food is very different to mainstream food."

David, it turns out, carries around an old St John menu from a visit as a memento of meals past. "I loved St John so when I heard Giles was coming back, we got in touch and met up. We try to keep the wine pairings uncomplicated. The wines are all quite flexible so you can mix them over the different courses Giles makes."

Like St John, the co-operative's pop-up has no music, no art and no flowers. The dishes have no garnishes. The room is stark and simple. The tables are communal, as are the platters of food, which form both the star attraction and the supporting act. Your conversation is the soundtrack.

This is not prissy food. Don't expect a stack of delicate ingredients, shaved vegetables or fussy foams. Don't expect to ask for the sauce on the side, though you will get extra broth if he is serving his "lamb ham" (lamb in a salt-and-sugar brine, cooked simply and served with a mint-infused broth). Don't expect your own plate. You're going to have to share.

Instead, expect food from a different era; food that has an echo of your grandparents' generation; food that acknowledges its roots, the animal, and is elevated by basic techniques that command great skill. Expect food that might challenge you initially, but that will surprise you too, for how much you enjoy it. Crispy pigs' tails with garlic aioli; octopus, tomato and

fennel; ox tongue with green beans and anchovy; beetroot-and-curd salad with foraged capers; pig's head pie with chicory and mustard. All take days of painstaking sourcing and prep.

Back home, Giles is interested in Afrikaans and African treatments of offal, such as tripe and *skilpadjies* and is baffled by how few restaurants serve anything

**"DON'T EXPECT A STACK OF DELICATE INGREDIENTS, SHAVED VEGETABLES OR FUSSY FOAMS"**

really resembling South African food. His days are spent sourcing the things he took for granted in the UK, such as lamb's brains and pig's blood.

At Salt Cellar I sit beside farmer Angus McIntosh from Spier and Boschendal's butcher, Mark Muncer. After 15 minutes of blissful eating silence, they speak for the first time to make a bro-pact. They pledge to meet once a month for the rest of their lives to eat Giles's crispy pig's tails with aioli. This could be the start of a cult. **W** Follow @giles.edwards on Instagram and @gilles.edwards on Twitter for future event dates.

**OX TONGUE, GREEN BEANS AND ANCHOVY**

**Serves 6**

**EASY**

**Preparation: 30 minutes**

**Cooking: 3 hours**

**For the tongue:**

**salted ox tongue** 1, rinsed

**leek** 1, cleaned

**carrot** 1, peeled

**onion** 1

**garlic** ½ bulb

**celery** 1 stick

**thyme** 1 sprig

**bay leaf** 1

**For the salad:**

**garlic** 1 clove, peeled

**anchovies in oil** 1 x 80 g jar

**lemon** 1, juiced

**red wine vinegar** a splash

**good-quality olive oil** 6 T

**green beans** 250 g, trimmed

**shallot** 1, peeled and finely sliced

**rocket** a handful

**capers** 1 t

**Italian parsley** 1 T finely chopped

**black pepper**, to taste

**1** To make the tongue, place all the ingredients in a large saucepan, cover with water and gently bring to the boil, then



**OX TONGUE, GREEN BEANS AND ANCHOVY**



**BEEETROOT AND GOAT'S CHEESE**

reduce the heat and simmer for around 3 hours. You may need to top up the water to ensure that the tongue is submerged; a plate can also serve as a good weight to keep it under. **2** To check whether the tongue is cooked, pierce it with a thin, sharp knife; it should go in and come out with little resistance. Allow the tongue to cool slightly, then peel it while still warm; if you can't peel it easily, it's not ready. Keep the stock as it makes a fantastic broth. The tongue can be used in a variety of ways, hot or cold. **3** To make the salad, place the garlic, anchovies, lemon juice and red wine vinegar into a food processor and blitz to a fine paste; you may need to scrape the sides to incorporate everything. Slowly add the olive oil until you get a thick, spreadable paste. A splash of water will loosen it up and make an ideal dressing for salads and vegetables. **4** Cook the green beans in salted water for 4 minutes, drain, then mix in a bowl with the anchovy dressing, shallot, rocket, capers and parsley. Thinly slice the tongue, I like to keep its "profile" by slicing it lengthways; you can use a meat slicer or just a really sharp knife. This is a

tongue salad and I very much like a higher ratio of tongue to bean, but this is entirely up to you. Tumble everything and ensure that the tongue and beans are decently coated with the rich anchovy dressing. Season and serve as a starter individually plated or on a platter as part of your feast. **Cook's note:** You can get a salted tongue from your butcher, alternatively you can buy a cooked tongue and skip this step. **CARB-CONSCIOUS, DAIRY-FREE, WHEAT- AND GLUTEN-FREE WINE: Cape Rock White 2014**

**BEEETROOT AND GOAT'S CHEESE**

**Serves 6**

**EASY**

**GREAT VALUE**

**Preparation: 20 minutes**

**Cooking: 45 minutes**

**mixed beetroot (red, candy, whatever varieties are seasonal)** 1.5 kg  
**good-quality olive oil**

**sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**, to taste  
**small red onion** 1, peeled and finely sliced  
**good-quality balsamic vinegar**  
**watercress** a handful  
**capers** 1 t  
**goat's cheese** 100 g, at room temperature  
**thyme** a few sprigs, leaves picked

**1** Preheat the oven to 220°C. Place the beetroot into a deep roasting tray (keep 1 raw for later), add a splash of water, olive oil and salt and pepper. **2** Cover with tin foil and roast for 45 minutes, or until tender. Allow to cool slightly, then peel wearing gloves. Cut into chunks. **3** Meanwhile, peel and finely slice the raw beetroot. Place the cooked and raw beetroot in a bowl and dress with the onion, olive oil, balsamic vinegar and salt and pepper. Tumble in the watercress and capers and top with the crumbled goat's cheese and thyme.

**FAT-CONSCIOUS, HEALTH-CONSCIOUS, MEAT-FREE, WHEAT- AND GLUTEN-FREE WINE: TMW Qaisar Mourvèdre 2014**

**FROM SOIL TO CELLAR (PRETTY MUCH)**

Inspired by Burgundy, made in Salt River, Tim Martin is making fantastic minimal-intervention wines

By day, the venue for the Salt Cellar pop-up is Tim Martin's eponymous inner-city winery. When you click through to the "About Me" section of his website (tmwines.co.za), there's a single sentence: "One day I decided that what I really wanted to do with my life was make wine." It says a lot about the man and his approach.

After spending nine months in Burgundy while on sabbatical from his London finance job, Tim returned to South Africa to make wine in as few steps as possible,

ideally using organic grapes.

"I use no yeasts and no lactic bacteria. I do filter before bottling but only very lightly. There is no racking, I don't move the wine around much, I try to leave it be, look after it and make sure it's healthy. That's always been my instinct, based on the producers I visited in Burgundy, people who inspired me to work on a minimal-intervention basis. Minimalism doesn't mean that you don't do anything, but rather that what you do is done with

consideration."

The simplicity in Tim's winemaking matches the simple yet skilled handling of food and atmosphere favoured by Giles. "His food is quite traditional with techniques including making stocks, braising, grilling and quite a lot of fat, and generally my wine works well with it."

**Tim's 2014 wines, Chad (Chenin), Mothership (Chenin) and Qaisar (Mourvèdre) are available at tmwines.co.za.**

