

# First catch your kangaroo... (or ox if you get really stuck)

Peter Gordon's new cookbook is set to challenge the top-selling River Café volumes as London's most fashionable recipe collection. **SYRIE JOHNSON** meets the chef who could turn us on to braised kangaroo tail

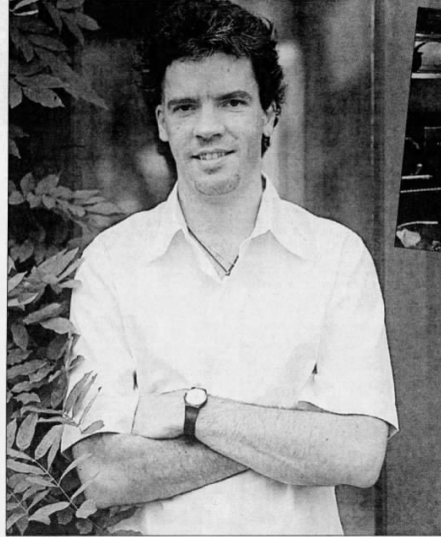
**O**N THE street round the corner from where I live, I have seen Kate Moss, Helena Christensen, David Bowie, Salman Rushdie, Mick Jagger, Calvin Klein, and Giorgio Armani all heading in the same direction — the All Saints Road. They are all regulars at the eminently cool Sugar Club restaurant, in one of Notting Hill's seediest roads.

Demand for a table at the Sugar Club, however, brings tears to London's restaurateurs' eyes. Madonna has tried to book a table four times and failed. "We won't throw out people who've already booked just because of a big name," the management claims. "She called on four consecutive days and ... it was a crazy time — we'd just won another award and the street was just covered in limousines."

The person largely responsible for this success is Peter Gordon. The New Zealand chef has not only put his "Pacific Rim" cooking on the map, since the restaurant opened two years ago — he's also about to serve it up on our coffee tables. Gordon has just put the Sugar Club Cookbook (Hodder & Stoughton) to bed. It is rumoured to have earned him one of the highest advances of any published chef. And Gordon may have Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers to thank for that.

Their River Café Cookbooks — one and two — have raised the price of foodie-style bibles, otherwise known as cookbooks. Indeed the myopic might even mistake Peter Gordon's for Rose's and Ruth's. They are exactly the same size, have similar art direction — laid-back in mood and arty black and white images of (good-looking) kitchen workers slaving over a hot stove. Then there are those colour photographs of exotic dishes. The recipes, of course, are different. And, at £29, Gordon's book is 15 cheaper than the River Café's second volume.

Gordon's CV is as interesting as his dishes. He left his home town in Wanganui, New Zealand, to study viticulture in Australia and planned to support himself by working in a talcum-powder mine, but he ended up in Melbourne. "I cooked and ate there for five years. Once three friends and I drove



Peter Gordon — "I made my first scrapbook of recipes when I was five" — and (above) in the Sugar Club kitchen

Waters. I still remember the bone marrow with brioche."

After travelling all through Asia, Gordon became chef at the first incarnation of the Sugar Club in Wellington, New Zealand in 1986. The restaurant was sandwiched in-between the hookers and transvestites in the red-light district. And, just like that first Sugar Club, the location of the London "branch" does not seem to put off customers.

Then he came to London. He moved quickly from Embargo to The First Floor and then on to the member's club, Green Street, waiting for the financial backing that

cooking — of course they were right in my case. That's all changed now. I see men picking up Thai lime leaves all the time, ready to cook for their girlfriends."

Cooking at school was a doddle for Gordon. "I made my first scrapbook of recipes when I was five," he explains. "The first one was for white chocolate using chrysanthemums, flour and water."

"And then at the age of seven, while cooking a dinner of fish and chips, I fell off my cooking stool and pulled the entire pot of boiling oil onto myself (the result is a facial

scar). Hospital, skin-grafts and more hospital followed. The family were convinced I'd lose my interest in food." He didn't.

So what is his beloved Pacific Rim cuisine? "It should conjure up images of beaches, palm trees and the ocean," says Gordon. "My style of food draws its influences from all over the world. I have a magpie approach to food — the mixing and matching of textures and tastes from the East to the West, sweet and sour, salty and spicy, soft and crunchy. If it tastes good, it works. It's that simple."

Gordon does not do the cooking at home. He shares his West Hampstead house with his boyfriend of 10 years, Michael McGrath, an actor and drama teacher, and actress Kerry Fox (Shallow Grave) and her actor husband, Jaime Robertson. "There have been rows about my not cooking," he says. He does not have the time.

After a long day at the Sugar Club, he manages to squeeze in his other commitments; he's a "foodie" contributor to New Zealand's House and Garden, and Arena magazine, and he creates the in-flight menus for Air New Zealand.

Whether or not his book, published later this month, will get us all braising kangaroo tail "in an olive stew served on soft roast garlic polenta" (you can use oatmeal if necessary, he writes), will probably not affect sales. Like the River Café cookbooks, it will look good on the bookshelf. And, yes, there will be a Sugar Club cookbook two.

Sugar Club Standard



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