



Turbot-charged Blow-out

Deprived by a health-conscious mother, Detmar Blow resorted to dog biscuits to satisfy his childish sweet

Detmar Blow, gallerist and bon viveur, lurches like a crab up the gravel driveway to his family home in the Cotswolds carrying what appears to be a small pile of black velvet. On closer inspection the bundle turns out to be a growling ball of fur: Alfie, his beloved pug. Alfie continues to yap at our ankles as we move into the drawing-room of Hilles, the Arts & Crafts house built in 1913 by Detmar's architect grandfather (also called Detmar Blow). It might be summer, but inside the Gothic setting, with its Mortlake tapestries, heavy elm panelling and open hearths, it could just as easily be autumn.

'Detmar is so excited about the turbot he bought today,' says Isabella Blow, Detmar's other half and the fashion editor of *Tatler* magazine. 'I've never seen anything quite like this fish – it's as big as a bloody dustbin lid!'

Detmar is wearing a check jacket covered in sew-on patches – a recent purchase from the Laden Showroom, an independent fashion boutique on Brick Lane, east London. 'Come and see the fish. It's magnificent,' he says, leading me into the rustic kitchen lined with solid-wood dressers, each one teeming with hand-painted Sicilian and English crockery.

By the time I get to inspect this monster of a fish, delivered that morning from William's



Top the Blows and their guests sit down to lunch in the grand dining-room at Hilles, the Arts & Crafts house built by Detmar's grandfather in 1913.

Above turbot fillet in julienne of leek and tomato stock



tooth. He has been making up for lost time ever since. By **Lucie Muir**. Photographs by **Jason Lowe**

Fillet of turbot in julienne of leek and tomato nage serves 8

Whole turbot (ask your fishmonger to fillet it but save the head and bones for stock)

3 leeks, the green part chopped, the white part left whole

4 shallots, chopped

3 cloves of garlic, crushed

1 stick of celery, chopped

half a bottle of dry white wine

1.8l (3pt) water

½kg (1lb) good-quality tomatoes, skinned, deseeded and roughly chopped

1 bunch of flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Make a fish stock by sweating the fish bones, the green part of the leeks, the shallots, the crushed garlic and the chopped celery. When the mixture turns white and smells aromatic, add the white wine, reduce briefly and add the cold water. Bring to the boil, cook for 20 minutes, then put through a strainer. Save half the stock for later to cook the turbot fillet in, then reduce the other half for the nage, or stock.

Cut the turbot fillet into individual portions and place in a glass oven dish. Cover the fish with the stock which you have put aside. Bake in a hot oven for roughly 20 minutes. Meanwhile, cut the white part of the leeks into fine strips – juliennes. Ten minutes before serving, add the leeks, the tomatoes and the parsley to the reduced stock and simmer on a low heat. When the fish is cooked, take out of the dish, put on a serving plate and serve with the nage, mashed potatoes and panfried cauliflower florets.

Kitchen in Nailsworth, it has already been skinned, boned and cut into eight portions by Loic Bonbonny. As the Blows' personal chef, Bonbonny is used to working the family's Aga and a sauce-splashed electric cooker – both of which have seen better days. In the centre of the room sits a sturdy oak table, beside it a roughly carved chair with a tall spindly back, nicknamed the 'Narnia' chair, which Detmar's sister, the fashion designer Selina Blow, brought back from India. Stopping at the long table, the French chef rests his foot on the seat of the chair and beats the daylights out of a soufflé in

a large ceramic bowl. 'Detmar and Isabella are the only people I know who take cookery books to read at bedtime and then call me first thing in the morning to discuss new recipes,' Bonbonny says, passing a whisk to Lucy Garden, a pastry chef who is working alongside him today. The two were up late last night cooking for Princess Michael of Kent at Nether Lypiatt Manor, her home near Stroud.

The mood in the kitchen is buoyant. Detmar's new West End gallery space, Blow de la Barra in Heddon Street, will open with the 'neopolemicist' Stefan Bruggemann on June 22. The lunch we are about to eat is partly to celebrate that, but mostly to do what Detmar enjoys doing best: eating, conversing and entertaining friends.

Lunch will be three courses. The guests include Gregor Muir, the director of the Hauser and Wirth Gallery in Piccadilly; Lina Dzuverovic, the founder and director of the contemporary art agency Electra; and Julia Delves Broughton, Isabella's sister and an associate director in the valuations department at Christie's. The line-up is completed by Pablo Leon de la Barra, the director of Detmar's new gallery, and Liliana Sanguino, the manager of the George and Dragon pub in Shoreditch. The

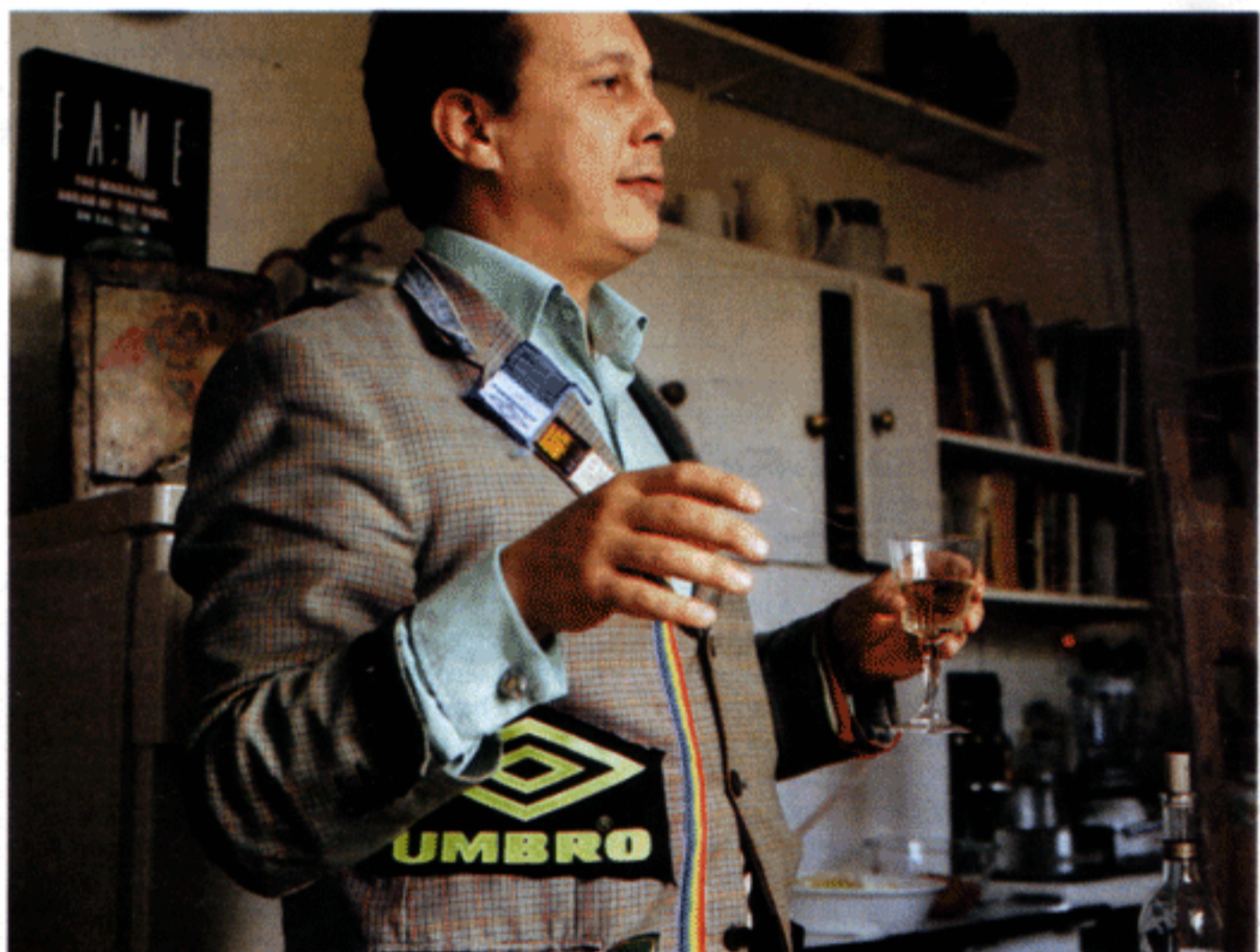


'When I first met Detmar,' Isabella recalls, 'I went through his things looking for evidence of women and

Cheddar and tarragon soufflé serves 8

- 25g (1oz) unsalted butter
- 25g (1oz) flour
- 900ml (1½ pt) whole milk
- 150g (5oz) unpasteurised cheddar, grated
- bunch of tarragon, chopped
- pinch of nutmeg
- 8 egg whites
- 2 egg yolks

Make a cheese sauce by melting the butter and then adding the flour. Stir gently to form a paste. Slowly add the milk and whisk until it turns into a thick bechamel consistency. Cook slowly for 10-15 minutes, add the cheese, tarragon and nutmeg, season to taste and let the mixture cool for an hour. When cool, beat the egg whites by hand to a soft peak. Add the yolks to the cheese sauce and gently incorporate the whites, stirring in one direction with a wooden spoon into the cheese sauce. Fill individual ramekins with the mixture, spreading evenly. Place in a pre-heated oven at 180C/350F/gas mark 4, keeping the oven shut for a minimum of 25 minutes. Serve immediately.



Top and middle the area around Hilles played a key role in the Arts & Crafts movement. Detmar Blow, **above**, is keen to attract artists back to the Cotswolds. **Top right** unpasteurised cheddar and tarragon soufflé. **Right** Isabella Blow, the fashion editor of *Tatler*, and gallery director Gregor Muir



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pub hosts regular art events, and exhibits work in its very own 'White Cubical' gallery housed in the downstairs lavatory. Five minutes in and they are persuaded by Isabella to join her in a game of backgammon on her new, leather-bound Asprey set. The Vatican-purple board is the same colour she wore on her wedding day.

Detmar's love of food is steeped in childhood memories. 'My mother [Helga Perera – hotel owner, jewellery designer and one-time model] was very young, 18 or 19, when she had me, and was incredibly health conscious. She based her diet on a book called *Look Younger, Live Longer* written by Gaylord Hauser, Greta Garbo's nutritionist. The emphasis was on raw eggs, offal, kidneys, cheese and spinach.' As a result, the Blow children – Detmar, Selina and Amaury – were banned from eating sugary foods.

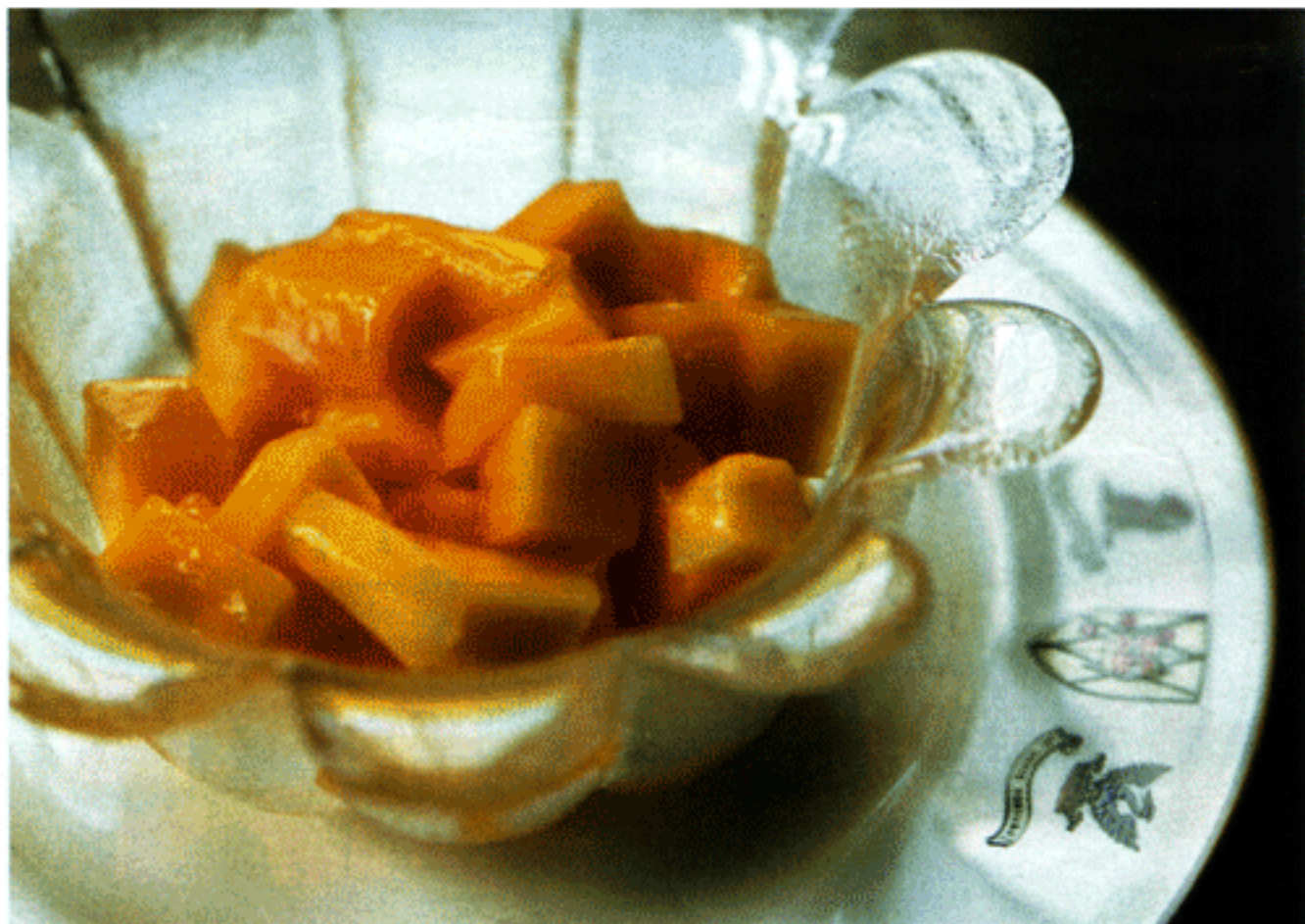
'I can remember my mother making fudge in the kitchen but we were never allowed to have a single piece of it – I never understood that,' says Detmar, who would satisfy his nagging sweet tooth by eating dog biscuits. 'I loved the little bone shapes – they were so much fun.'

He didn't have to eat them for long – when an elegant Portuguese couple were hired as kitchen staff in the early 1960s, Detmar remembers sitting in this kitchen eating sweet marone

chestnuts – the ones in brown tins that you mix up with double cream – which soon became the house speciality. And his late Sinhalese grandmother – an artist who studied at the Slade school of art – would send him back to boarding school with rich fruitcake that made all the boys sick. 'I found it strange that English boys in the 1970s had never eaten banana cakes or carrot cakes before,' he recalls. 'I was called all sorts of racist names for bringing those cakes in!'

Back at Hilles, nine-year-old Detmar excelled at cooking full English breakfasts with pancakes for the entire household. But then came 'the grim years', when his mother, depressed by his father's drinking, decided to stop cooking, and fishfingers and frozen burgers became the norm. This unexpected ice age showed no sign of thawing and so, in revolt, Detmar's late father Jonathan Blow, the foreign diplomatic correspondent at *The Sunday Times*, would take the children to the Berni Steakhouse in Gloucester. 'We would eat steak and chips, which was heaven to us but there would be no mention to my mother!' Blow senior would also supplement his children's diet with huge pots of cheese. 'We are a family of big cheese eaters,' confirms Detmar, who favours French

A plate of cod's roe which Bonbonny has drenched in lemon and a dash of tabasco, magically appears on the kitchen table. Pablo de la Barra comes in search of sustenance before heading back to the backgammon board. We discuss Detmar's 'margarine years' in the mid-1970s, when butter was replaced with Flora, and his first ever curry, which he savoured on a trip to Sri Lanka, his mother's homeland, when he was 14. 'At first I found rice and curry for breakfast quite shocking, given my British background, but I was soon eating two or three a day.' Weight gain rapidly ensued. 'I am a glutton and so was my father,' says Detmar, who remembers the time when Blow senior ended up



Mango and lime salad serves 6-8

4 large mangoes, diced
the juice of 4 limes

Cover the mangoes in the lime juice. Leave to marinade in the fridge for two hours and serve with or without fresh cream.

in a room next to Peter Sellers in the then equivalent of the Priory. One night while the actor slept, a famished Blow raided the kitchen and ate everything, including Sellers's breakfast. He was asked to leave the next day.

Fast-forward to the 1980s – not great eating years for Blow. When his punk era was over, (not that he was a real punk, though he did see the Ramones play), he began to crave elegance. It was then that he discovered the Caprice and the Ivy and, of course, Isabella. 'When Isabella

and art-world gossip. 'I've had some great working lunches,' says Detmar, who worked as a barrister before becoming a gallerist. 'What amazes me most about artists is how they manage to eat at good restaurants. They have very high standards and only spend their money on good food.'

We then discuss the house and the area around Stroud which played a fundamental role in the early British Arts & Crafts movement. A hundred years ago it was the east

London craftsmen who settled here. Today it is home to Damien Hirst's studio and the estate of Lynn Chadwick, the late sculptor. And Detmar is keen to encourage more artists here when his summer art programme begins next year. He wants London's leading collectors to view new art works in this crafty setting, and to open the adjoining outhouses to resident artists. Enthused, he leaps up to change the music – from the Peaches to Roxy Music – and lights up a large Cohiba cigar. ■

'At first I found rice and curry for breakfast quite shocking, but I was soon eating two or three a day'

came to Hilles, she brought real elegance and elegant menus back to the table. We ate English delicacies such as game and deer and set the table with candles, and starched linens.'

'We source all of our ingredients locally,' Bonbonny interrupts, listing herbs from the garden, fish from David Felce (a fishmonger in Stroud) and vegetables from the farmers market. When staying at his London pad in Waterloo, Detmar gets up early to scour the food stalls at Borough Market. The stews, steamed muscles with white wine, and roast chicken that he loves to cook are the result of his weekly trips there.

By now, all the guests have arrived. We sit at the elm table, made by Detmar's grandfather and set with Tolemache silver, which Isabella has been polishing since 9am, an experience she describes as both therapeutic and grounding. Our glasses, heavy 1920s Murano beakers, are filled with Alsace Pinot Blanc, 2003 vintage from Berry Brothers. As the tarragon soufflé is served, Isabella confirms her husband's love of food. 'When I first met Detmar, I went through his things looking for evidence of women and sex, but all I could find was his diary,' she says. 'The first entry I read began with the words "Delicious osso bucco".'

Conversation turns to Detmar's new space



Top mango and lime salad. **Above** Isabella Blow, in trademark Philip Treacy hat, playing backgammon with her sister, Julia Delves Broughton. The set, from Asprey, is Vatican purple, the same colour Isabella wore on her wedding day