

# feature

Karen Hindle

**BACK TO SCHOOL:**  
The apprentice chef's with Chef Mark David in the kitchen at Braxted Park.



# The stately art of cooking

**G**ORDON Ramsay has tried to remedy this problem of recreating his dishes from his programmes by making us cook while we watch, but again, like Gerald Ford, it is tricky doing two things at once.

So, you cannot beat a cookery course with one of Britain's finest chefs to really learn something. And so it is with the small ambition of learning how to cut an onion properly, that I drive down the avenue of the 500-acre Braxted Park, south of Colchester, in Essex.

In these magnificent surroundings a cookery school was created last October within the wedding venue, which has proved a sensation for estate owner and manager Duncan Clark, grandson of Sir Allen Clark who occupied the house in 1947 as chairman of The Plessey Company.

People of all ages and all abilities now have the opportunity to learn how to master a diverse range of cuisines, including French, Italian and Thai. You can also learn how to create the perfect dessert, throw a stress-free dinner party or create modern versions of classic British dishes and you can do it while having fun.

Duncan said: "We started the school to maximise use of the kitchen facilities when

**It is all very well watching celebrity chefs on the television create fantastic dishes in the blink of an eye but when it comes to recreating those dishes many of us mere mortals are left wanting. Karen Hindle attends a new cookery school, set in 500 acres of picturesque parkland, where cooking is actually fun**

they are not being used for weddings and events. "It has really taken off and is now leading the way in providing unique courses to the people of Essex. We are continually developing new courses to appeal to different audiences, including students about to go to university, recently retired gentlemen and vegetarians.

"The quality of the experience and expertise of our chefs are second-to-none and will encourage people to become more creative in the kitchen. The range of courses available gives people of all ages the opportunity to get involved and leave with invaluable skills that will serve them well throughout their lives."

The Cookery School invites a number of well-respected chefs in the region to conduct the courses including Mark David, who has a recreational cookery school, which he runs with his wife Anne, in Hadleigh, Paul Boorman - the Heston Blumenthal of Essex, who is currently head chef at the Juniper Restaurant

at Claris House, Colchester, MasterChef 2006 winner Peter Bayless, Chris Jagger, Mark Webb and Siranese Smithkin.

Our tutor is Mark David who insists we are going to have fun, something he has always found in his colourful career: From the cavernous, almost tropical kitchens of a large city centre hotel in Yorkshire, Mark has worked as a waiter in Paris, a chef at Walton's Restaurant, Chelsea, London, a restaurant and hotel inspector for Egon Ronay and spent a year with the legendary Robert Carrier at Hinton Hall, Suffolk.

Over an early morning coffee he says: "We all cook" (for my part discretion is the better part of valour here, I decide) so we are all going to be doing this together. By cooking together we are introducing a whole new dynamic to cooking. Usually at home you don't get the chance to cook with anyone else in a sociable way. This is very different to what most people are used to and because we all muck in



**NEW SKILL LEARN:** Karen Hindle and Julia Rogers chopping onions