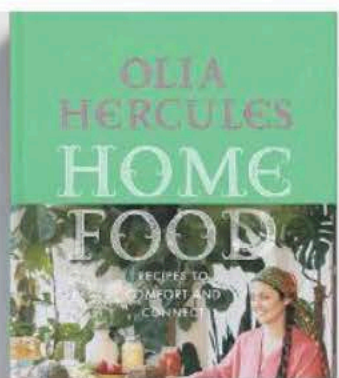


Weekend

20.08.22

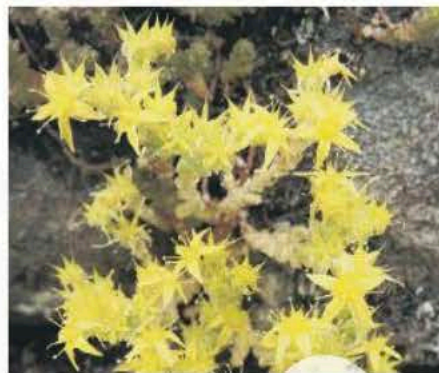


Skip to ma roo



Comfort recipes from Ukrainian chef Olia Hercules

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The amazing biting Stonecrop

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Dean Mellor relaxes at luxury hotel in Kos

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Food and drink

Tuck into Festival tucker from Down Under



Edinburgh Festival Fringe venue House of Oz is serving up kangaroo burgers and other Australian treats. Head chef David Lee has also designed some special dinners. There's a first time for everything, and I am experiencing a finger lime. "Just take a tiny bit," says David before I scoop its flesh into my mouth. Wow, it's like a normal lime, except bionic. So zingy. Apparently, these citrus fruits come in a range of different colours, and can grow as long as your digit.

This is just one of the Australian ingredients that Sydney-based chef and restaurateur Lee will be using in the Taste Australia experience at Edinburgh Festival Fringe venue, House of Oz, which has taken over King's House on South Clerk Street until 29 August. This is part of the UK/Australia Season 2021-



BY
GABY SOUTAR

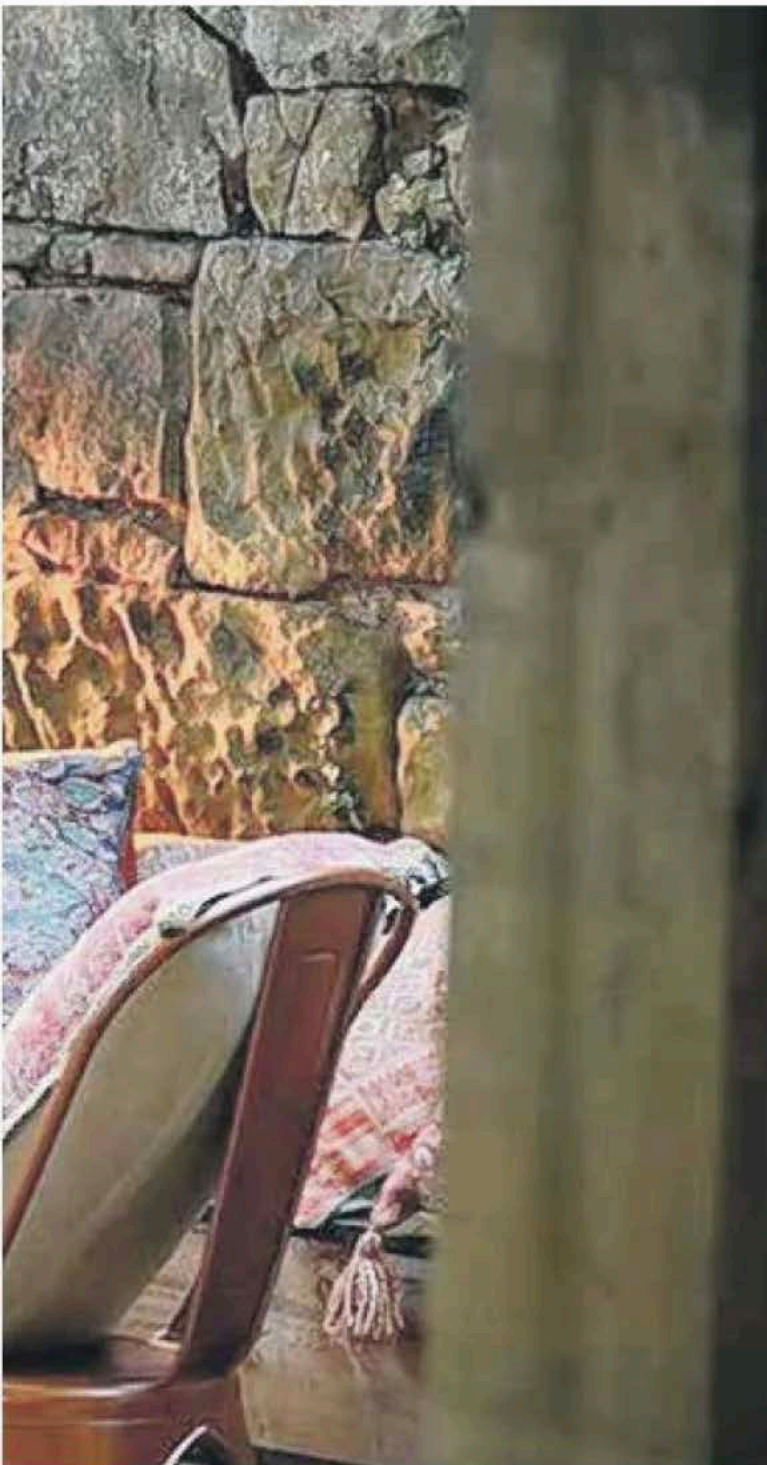
22 – the largest ever cultural exchange between the UK and Australia.

In his home country, Lee has cooked for the likes of Bill and Melinda Gates, Robert Plant, Venus Williams and Michael Fassbender. As part of his Edinburgh residency, you don't have to be famous to try his modern Australian five-course tasting menus, with a side dish of entertainment. Each of these Monday dinners, with 60 covers, is a collaboration alongside a performer, with an appearance from Australian comedian and drag superstar Reuben Kaye on 15 August, before singer-songwriter Michaela Burger does her thing on 22 August.

Although Lee doesn't like the word "fusion", there will be many influences in these dishes, especially as he'll be adding Russian and Greek twists to celebrate the next two performers' respective heritages.

"Australia is such a multi-





cultural space, we have such a broad church of foods," he says.

Lee hasn't quite finalised those menus yet. However, all guests can visit Outback in the courtyard, where you can grab a bite before going to see something like a circus act, Circa, or drag turn Dolly Diamond. This area features an all-day wood-fired barbecue that's serving kangaroo burgers, jaffles (toasties, with fillings including cheese and Vegemite) and wattleseed damper (a type of bread), as well as more familiar dishes like BBQ skewers, surf and turf and meat pies.

The bar next to this also features exclusively Antipodean produce. There's Star-

ward Whisky, Manly Spirits Co, Lilly Pilly Pink Gin, Mr Black Coffee Liqueur and other spirits, as well as a machine making boozy slushies. However, the bar manager tells me that homesick customers have mainly been stockpiling snacks. Someone spent £20 on packets of Shapes, which are a bit like Mini Cheddars, and the Caramel Koalas (the Australian version of Freddo Frogs) have been going down a storm.

I have my eye on the giant lamington cakes, but Lee takes me into the makeshift professional kitchen of this building, which usually operates as a church.

"It's not a commercial kitch-

en, but we're working really hard to make sure we get a good product out and making menus that are achievable within the space," says Lee.

I'm keen to try some of his Australian ingredients. As someone who's never travelled to the Southern Hemisphere, they all sound very Alice in Wonderland to me; I imagine that the toothfish might resemble a fur-less Cheshire Cat. "Could you pass it over?" says Lee to one of the other chefs.

I feel slightly nervous about the creature from the deep, but it has already been filleted. The meat is dense and pure white.

"It's unctuous and an extraordinarily oily fish because it lives in such cold water," says Lee. "It's very hard to overcook because of the total oil content."

All the fish he has imported was nitrogen-frozen before being shipped over here. When I visit, the kitchen crew is organising the first tasting menu

Sydney-based chef and restaurateur David Lee is presenting the Taste Australia experience at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe venue House of Oz, Above: Outback seating area

event with storyteller Joseph Tawadros, which ran earlier this week. There is a table full of exotica, like warrigal greens (an Australian version of spinach), that's already been prepped. Some of these ingredients have been hugely expensive to procure – especially the finger lime. I would have savoured it for longer if I'd known.

When he's at home, Lee prefers to cook local and sustainable food. For this event, they've worked with London-based company, Oz Trade, to source ingredients.

"We would like to have used local food, but the immersive nature of the whole event is a showcase for the products," he says. "With Brexit and the new free trade agreement, there's a lot of Australian suppliers wanting to send their food here."

I also test a pinch of wattleseed. It appears in their first menu, in a cocktail in the courtyard, and in that damper bread

served from the barbecue. It has the texture of cacao, with a nutty spice flavour. Lee says it really needs to be toasted, to release the oils.

There's also lemon myrtle, and a bag of dried and finely powdered bush tomato, which is one of chef's favourite ingredients. Apparently, these are more related to aubergine than tomato, and they smell like a hybrid of both.

"I've been a chef for 33 years, and back in the Nineties, we went through the whole indigenous food thing. Recently there's been a re-invigoration of that kind of food," he says. "It offers so many textures and flavours that people aren't used to."

House of Oz, 41 South Clerk

Street, Edinburgh

www.houseofoz.co.uk

"Australia has such a broad church of foods"