

LOCAL FOOD HEROES



Tom Russell

STEPHEN WHEELER, commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, shares some of the successes and challenges of local food producers

SHIPTON Mill, near Tetbury, has been milling flour for a thousand years and is recorded in the Domesday Book. In the 1300s the mill-owner refused to pay the local priory for the fishing rights in the millstream, so the monks sent over their heavy mob and carted away the millstones.

They were smashed to pieces in Tetbury high street, and the legend goes that the fragments lie under the road to this day.

The present owners bought the mill in 1981 – it had lain derelict since 1954. Hundreds of local flour mills closed after the war, when factory-made bread replaced local artisan baked loaves.

I visited Tom Russell, marketing manager, at Shipton Mill, where they now mill 126 different types of flour, many of them organic, for resurgent craft bakeries, chefs and amateur home-bakers.

“We’re passionate about the quality of the flour we produce,” Tom told me. “Whether the grain comes from a local Gloucestershire farm or the Canadian prairies, we test mill and bake bread from samples of every batch before delivery.”

The mill uses some ancient varieties of wheat such as

Emmer, which has been cultivated since 7500BC and now only grows in mountainous areas of Europe and Asia, and Spelt, which was an important staple from the Bronze Age through to the Middle Ages.

“Apart from making great tasting bread, keeping these ancient wheats alive is an important part of the stewardship of genetic diversity,” said Tom.

Shipton Mill uses French burr-stone mills, a marble-like stone, for milling its speciality flours. The burr-stone takes heat away from the grain or ‘berry’ as it breaks down, otherwise the flour would be left with toasted overtones.

This year they plan to use the mill-stream and refurbished mill-wheel to generate electricity for the lighting in the mill and offices.

“Nowadays we need a stronger and more constant source of power to turn the mills,” said Tom. “But this way we harness the renewable energy.”

Shipton Mill holds the royal warrant from its close neighbour HRH The Prince of Wales. “We’re sure Prince Charles shares our values of nurturing bio-diversity, sustainable farming and keeping tradition alive,” said Tom.



Tarik Chrigui at Cusina Moroccan restaurant

Authentic spice wins over diners

Moroccan restaurant Cusina hasn’t celebrated its first birthday yet but it’s already got a dedicated fan base, as **LUCY PARFORD** found out

THERE is only one Moroccan restaurant in Cheltenham and its owner is celebrating after scooping an award from his customers.

Cusina, in the High Street, is run by Tarik Chrigui and has been named a good restaurant by the Ethical Good Food Awards.

The awards give regular customers the chance to register their support for their favourite local businesses and supports small, independent restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes which have a good work ethic. The good restaurant award is judged on food, staff and ambience.

Cusina opened in March last year and is Tarik’s fourth restaurant, with the others in Kuwait and Dubai.

He grew up in Casablanca in Morocco before moving to the Middle East and has been inspired by his mother’s and grandmother’s cooking.

Tarik, 30, says: “I grew up with authentic Moroccan food which is full of flavour and spices on my grandmother’s side and my mother was into modern cuisine and would cook Chinese and sushi for us.

“She loved being in the kitchen and I used to watch her a lot.”

Tarik is head chef at Cusina and his wife, Mawaheb, also helps out front of house when she isn’t working as an oil field

engineer in Stonehouse.

“One day we just decided to move to a more open-minded country,” Tarik explains.

“My wife had the opportunity to be transferred and I was like ‘why not?’”

Tarik sold two of his restaurants and got a team to look after the remaining one while he looked for premises in Gloucestershire.

“There is a nice spirit around Cheltenham and it’s very safe place,” he says.

“Being new to the country we needed to adapt to the food, the language, everything was as challenge to us but we met it.

“We were thrilled to win the award. About 50 to 60 people voted for us. It was nice as it was very challenging at the beginning but we worked so hard.

“We’re very proud of what we’re doing and this made us think we’re on the right track.”

Tarik is the first member of his family to own a restaurant but says it is all down to his mother who is a “great cook”.

Dishes on his menu include traditional starters such as humous and haloumi cheese and for mains, lamb tagine, Moroccan mixed grill or vegetarian couscous.

“Casablanca is a busy city,” he says. “But every three to four months I go to

Morocco and travel to the mountains where people cook with me. I keep discovering new, authentic recipes.”

Cusina has closed until February 2 for a refurbishment and the couple is heading back to Morocco to source some handmade decorations and rugs to make the restaurant more cosy.

“I just want to keep the authenticity,” Tarik says. “We think people would really appreciate some sort of entertainment when they are dining as well such as belly dancing or a live band so we will be adding this in 2010 too, either weekly or monthly, along with a new menu.”

■ Cusina is at 35 High Street, Cheltenham. Call 01242 572985.

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Mise en Place
THE SPECIALITY FOOD COMPANY