

Say cheese

A cheese workshop near Arundel leaves **Laura Cartledge** smiling.



Ask me what my favourite food is and I'll answer without hesitation – cheese.

Whether it is melted on crumpets, scattered on salad or transformed into cake, it does not matter to me.

Needless to say when I was invited to have a go at making my own I could not resist.

Mandy Nolan runs workshops from her beautiful home in Poling, near Arundel, however the venture started thousands of miles from here.

"Home cheese making was a new trend taking off in Australia and New Zealand when I was visiting at the beginning of 2012," Mandy explains. "I attended a course in Sydney and within ten minutes knew that this was what I wanted to do with my life."

Returning home Mandy spent months researching ingredients, practising methods, testing and sourcing different products before launching the classes in September of last year.

As a former editor of several food magazines it comes as no surprise that Mandy has a passion for quality cuisine which, she promises, is easy to prepare.

"These cheeses haven't failed yet," she reassures us as we tie our aprons.

However, I have to admit I can't help feeling turning milk into six soft cheeses by the end of the day seems like a challenge of biblical proportions.

Something which isn't helped when words like "unhomo-genised" milk begin to be used.

Thankfully that is about as technical as it gets.

"Everyone assumes that cheese making is a scientific art and indeed there are courses available which concentrate on things like PH factors," says Mandy. "So people are astonished at how easy the method is and how few implements are required."

"The point of this method is it's adapted from century-old methods as practised in the home. It's how the old mothers used to do it."

With my worries eased they soon disappeared when I learn we will be starting with my personal favourite – Camembert.

This is closely followed by feta as these two take the longest to complete.



Making camembert in moulds



The cheese workshop

The different stages include heating the milk before adding the various cultures, enzymes and coagulant.

After it has set we are introduced to a very technical art of “jiggling”

Using a slotted spoon it helps to separate the curds and whey, allowing them to continue ‘cooking’ while removing excess liquid.

Speaking of jiggle, we have to get a move on as the quark, a full bodied but low-fat cream cheese, won’t make itself.

Again we heat the milk and add the culture then it is on to the messy bit – pouring into muslin and tying tightly into a Dick Wittington style parcel which is put into the fridge to drip drain and thicken.

We repeat this process to make mascarpone before settling down for a welcome coffee break and an aptly chosen snack – of cheesecake – made from quark.

A busy hour and a half flies by in a flurry of cutting and jigging before the Camembert curds and the feta finally rest in their respective moulds.

It is time for us to rest too as we settle down for a cheese inspired lunch.

“To be honest I eat cheese at least twice a day and frequently three times,” Mandy confesses.

And what a lunch it is, from the creamy beetroot risotto to the salmon fish cakes,

every dish includes something we are making during the day.

As we tuck in, Mandy tells us more about her classes and the great reaction she has had.

“It has been brilliant. My aim was to make an entertaining day which would appeal people from all walks of life,” she explains. “We’ve had young couples, a group of doctors and a lady who now makes an entire cheese

board – something which her husband always likes to point out to guests.”

Edible inspiration being the best kind there is we soon return, refreshed, to our workbenches for the final flourishes.

We turn the Camembert and feta in its moulds and make a luxury style Greek yoghurt, before

transforming the finished quark with a roll in toasted almond flakes ready to take home.

“I try to ensure everyone takes home three items from the course,” says Mandy. “There is always a slab of feta and then it can vary from ricotta, quark, mascarpone or Camembert depending on the day.”

Then, with our bags full of goodies and our heads full of ideas, all too soon the workshop is over.

“Within ten minutes knew that this was what I wanted to do with my life.”

■ **To find out more about The Cheesemaking Workshop please visit www.thecheesemakingworkshop.co.uk or call 01903 889730.**