

Too Many Cooks

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All the best chefs are men and in the Basque country women are not allowed to be members of the traditional gourmet societies. So why am I such a bad cook? There is an English saying that "Too many cooks spoil the broth" . Well, I can spoil it all by myself.

My work colleagues amaze me! They are so good with food. I used to go to the university canteen near the office to buy a bacon sandwich at lunchtime and I would come back to a scene of epicurean hedonism.

As I tucked into dead pig my Phillipine colleague, Paola, had a plate of exotic looking fruit. Just looking at it made you feel healthier. Jeremy produced haute cuisine from two tupperware boxes and my Director had a selection of cereals which were as free of cholesterol as a bald man is from dandruff.

Recently I have varied my midday meal and moved onto Crisp Sandwiches. Two chunks of bread with a handful of potato crisps in between. I make a concession and use 'Ligeresa' margarine. After all, I don't want a heart attack!

Years ago when I lived with an Italian girlfriend I discovered herbs. Now I nearly always have steak for dinner (at seven o'clock) covered with oregano, parsley and garlic. I can eat the same thing every night for months on end. Even the butcher is making suggestions that I try fish.

I am, however, an expert making breakfast. Not the sad little effort of the Mediterranean table but the full-bloodied toast, bacon, eggs, sausage and beans breakfast from the north of Europe where winter mornings are as cold a greyhound's nostril.

(Sometimes breakfast includes "Toad-in-the -Hole". You get a piece of bread and cut a circle out of it with a glass. You fry the bread and break an egg into the hole. Then you place the fried circle of bread on top.)

It's the same when I go out. I am useless at eating. I always - always - order a mixed salad and I never eat the half of it. I beg fellow diners to help me out so I don't get that offended look from the waiter.

Up to 5 years ago I lived in the Basque Country and I suppose that if I didn't learn to eat there, I never will. Now I live in Madrid where I am trying cuisine from the four corners of the earth. I love Indian food for example.

The real reason I have never cooked well is that I have had no-one to cook for. When you dine alone it's easy to microwave some salty convenience food.

However, that has changed now and so look out for future weeklies with recipes!

"Bon apetit!" as we say in English.