

A feast of Irish flavours

In her new book, Clodagh McKenna presents a modern take on Irish cuisine, writes **Marie-Claire Digby**

The images make you try the recipe, and the recipes make you make them again and again." Clodagh McKenna knows the power of a good food snap, which is why she sought out an expert whose work she admires, Londoner Tara Fisher, who has worked with Jamie Oliver and Thomasina Miers, to do the photography for her new book.

Clodagh's Irish Kitchen (Kyle Books, £19.99) is a beautifully shot, modern and sophisticated look at contemporary Irish cuisine. "I wanted to create a book that reflected the way Irish food is now cooked and eaten in Ireland. It has developed into such an exciting cuisine, and I wanted people to see that," says the restaurateur, writer and TV presenter.

The lifestyle shots were taken along the south Co Dublin coast, near where she lives, and Dublin bay has never looked prettier. It's Donna Hay meets Martha Stewart – but it looks and feels indelibly Irish.

McKenna is known for her high-octane energy levels, and she shows no signs of slowing down. She's just back from launching the book in the US, and returns State-side next week to do some TV. Then it's back to London for the UK launch. "In between the travel, I will be spending all my time in the restaurants in Blackrock and Arnotts, they are my most important projects of all."

Aesthetics are important to McKenna, she loves beautiful things, and creating a gorgeous setting in which to eat seems to be almost as important to her as what's on her pretty plates. Tablescaping, she calls it. "For me the visual aspect of a beautiful table adds to creating a beautiful memory."

Beautiful memories are at the heart of the touching dedication of the book to her father, who died last year: "To my Dad. I would give up everything to share one more meal with you."

"My dad loved everything about food and having us all around the table to share a meal together. Those memories are everything to me."

FREE-RANGE PORK WITH APPLE, CHERRY AND SAGE STUFFING AND APPLE CRISPS

Serves 6

1.5kg boneless loin of pork
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the stuffing:

200g cooking apples, peeled and diced
60 dried cherries, roughly chopped
1 red onion, finely diced
4 sage leaves, finely chopped, plus extra to garnish
40g panko breadcrumbs
50g butter, melted

For the apple crisps:

2 cooking apples
50g ground cinnamon

For the apple jus:

1kg cooking apples, peeled, cored and roughly chopped
2 tbsp caster sugar
50g butter

Sundays were made for this. Slow-roasted juicy pork filled with apple, cherries and sage that collect the fabulous flavours of the meat while roasting.

You could substitute dates for the cherries if you wish, or use fresh, flat-leaf parsley instead of fresh sage for a more peppery flavour.

Make sure to take the pork out of the fridge one hour before roasting to allow the meat to come to room temperature, which will make it more tender when cooked.

The apple crisps are so simple to make and they add a lovely texture to this dish.

Preheat the oven to 240 degrees/gas mark 9. Weigh the pork before starting and make a note of its weight.

Start by making the stuffing. In a large bowl, combine the apples, cherries, red onion, sage, breadcrumbs and melted



butter. Season with salt and pepper and mix well.

Butterfly the pork loin by making a slit down its length, cutting just deep enough so that the loin opens up to lie flat like a book. Do not cut all the way through. Spoon the stuffing mixture onto the meat and spread evenly. Close up the loin and, using pieces of string, tie at even intervals so it assumes its original shape. Push in any stuffing that escapes from the ends.

Rub the joint all over with salt and pepper and place in a roasting tray. Cook for 25 minutes, then reduce the heat to 180 degrees/gas mark 4 and cook for 20 minutes per 450g.

To make the apple crisps, core the apples and slice very thinly through the middle (aim for slices 1-2mm thick). Dust with the cinnamon and lay flat on a baking sheet lined with baking parchment.

Cook in a preheated oven at 180 degrees/gas mark 4 for 45 minutes to an hour (so if you are cooking the pork at the same time, add the apple slices to the oven soon after reducing the temperature to 180 degrees).

Turn the slices halfway through and remove any crisps that have turned brown. Continue cooking until the apples have dried out and are light golden.

For the apple jus, put the apples, sugar and butter in a saucepan. Cover and cook gently, stirring every so often, for 15-20 minutes, until the apples start to disintegrate. Once the pork is cooked, pour about 100ml of the pork cooking juices into the apples and stir.

Slice the pork and place on warm plates. Scatter a few apple crisps over the top and finish with a drizzle of the hot apple jus. Garnish with sage leaves and serve.