

cauterised, with all the luscious, juicy tenderness of a blow-torched pterodactyl. It comes on a bed of couscous and dried apricot drenched in honey, so sweet it makes me long for some Scottish tablet as a palate cleanser.

The low, vaulted ceiling room has filled up now and noise levels are nausea-inducing. Unsurprisingly, we're not seduced into one of the three stultifying puddings – passionfruit pavlova, caramel panna cotta, sorbet. We'd only mourn the calories. Had we so desired, we could have ordered a £95 'Pornstar kit' to whip ourselves up '8-10 Pornstar Martinis'. So there's that.

There's little to announce who the chef is, and no wonder. One Rex Newmark, scion of the family who owns the place; "Mr Supranational UK 2016" apparently and, in a nice piece of symmetry, a former Big Brother reality TV person, was still quoted as executive chef when fined for attacking a girlfriend back in October. Lovely. 'I met him on the Isle of Wight,' grimaces another pal, 'and he foisted his pulled pork on me.' How was it? 'A bit Wetherspoonsy.' He describes himself on his Instagram account

## Pull quote Fuga. Orpossitat autempor ad quam

as a 'private chef'; he also describes himself as @sexyrexyfood, so who knows? If he's still anything to do with this ridiculous outfit other than being an entitled, gym-addled figlio di papa, he can very much foist off.

Superfan or not, I don't attribute towering discernment to most of the cast of *Made in Chelsea*. BBB is flashy and photogenic, so this and, I imagine, some kind of PR arrangement would explain its regular cameo in the show. BBB is pulsating evidence that the rich are different: our indifferent meal, with its 2 bottles of indifferent wine, costs £250 for three. For all the reasons to feel sorry for the beautiful, smart Meghan Markle – the stresses of marrying into that family; the dog-whistle racism from certain commenters – at least the thought that Harry was a good 'un (the odd, er,



## Trending *Botanical ice cream*

The flavours are hand-stamped onto La Grotta's ice-cream labels: raspberry verbena, bergamot custard, white peach and basil. It might feel more apothecary than gelateria, but a boom in botanicals means that the likes of sage and sorrel will be lacing scoops this spring. Forget raspberry ripple, it's now pear with myrtle.

Ice cream's move into Britain's back gardens is the latest incarnation of the New Nordic movement, which champions native and foraged ingredients. After all, frozen custard makes a brilliant blank canvas. While big brands use flavours derived from ingredients seldom found in the UK, such as chocolate and vanilla, smaller companies are looking local, reviving botanicals and aromatics.

This new wave finds inspiration in ancient woodland herbs and British hedgerows: with pineapple weed and meadowsweet ice creams both cropping-up on Simon Rogan's menus. "I have a seasonal map of London in my head," says Kitty Travers, founder of La Grotta Ices, which launched in 2008. "I know where to find green walnuts, fig leaves, verbena." It's not a case of flinging together hip-sounding ingredients and hoping for the best. The former pastry chef says she's careful to use botanicals that enhance the prominent fruit flavours: "You can

### FIVE TO TRY



**Kumquat and custard**  
La Grotta Ices, from e5 Bakehouse, London E8  
£7.50/350ml tub



**Damson and sour cream**  
Ruby Violet, London NW1, from £3/scoop



**Hazelnut and tonka**  
Poco Gelato, Leigh-on-Sea, £7.40/500ml



**Raspberry and sorrel sorbet**  
Northern Bloc, from the Co-op, £4.50/500ml



**Sea buckthorn sorbet**  
Trelleavens, Devon and Cornwall, price varies

barely taste the basil I add to the white peaches, but it heightens that sensation of biting into a ripe peach on a sunny day." She's right — the subtle addition makes the peach pop.

Ahrash Akbari-Kalhur, co-founder of Camden-based ice cream parlour Chin Chin Labs, also uses botanical blends to create unusual flavours — try "grass", which he makes using an infusion of parsley, lemongrass, lavender and bergamot. He sold only one litre in 2010, but when he put it back on the menu last summer, he couldn't take it off. "People are definitely more open to trying new flavours now," he laughs. This summer, Otter Valley Dairy will be serving flavours including ginger and butternut squash from their new ice cream parlour in Honiton, Devon. In London, Black Mylk will be debuting chervil and pear sorbet and sage caramel popcorn.

Supermarkets are also becoming more adventurous. Northern Bloc's pink grapefruit and bergamot is available at Ocado; its raspberry and sorrel is now stocked at the Co-op. "It's just the start," says director Dirk Mischendahl. Hazelnut with rose, and strawberry with yuzu will launch next month. By summer, salted caramel might seem as outdated as a two-litre tub of soft-scoop Neapolitan ■ **Rachel Walker**