

Chefs at home

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Over the next two weeks, most professional chefs will spend more time cooking in their own kitchens at home than in the high- spec environments of their restaurants, where they are surrounded by a brigade of chefs, all the latest equipment and are under constant pressure for the next busy lunch or dinner service.

I took this opportunity to ask five chefs from England, the US, France, Brazil and Singapore what they would miss the most while cooking at home. Was it a particular machine? Was it the kitchen porters paid to peel the vegetables, wash up, sweep the floor and change the rubbish bags when the shout goes up 'Bin change'? Was it the quality of the stocks that in a professional kitchen make such a difference to the final sauces? Or was it the camaraderie, the sense of being part of a team, which is so very different from cooking on your own at home?

Cindy Pawlcyn (pictured) of Go Fish and Mustard's Grill in California's Napa Valley astutely replaces her professional team with one made up of friends and relatives.

'I have a large, well- stocked kitchen with a wood- burning oven so the room becomes a cosy gathering place for holiday meal preparation. I crank up the music, pour the wine that is not allowed at work, and enlist friends and family to help. And, most fortunately, my husband John is very good at cleaning up and washing dishes.'

Anthony Demetre will be calling in to Arbutus and Wild Honey in London's Soho and Mayfair while cooking for his wife and two small daughters so it will be difficult to get the professional kitchen out of his mind, he admitted. But he was adamant about what he will and will not miss.

'It's the kitchen porters that are the biggest difference for me. They sweep, they clean up as you go along and they are a huge boon for peeling vegetables, fetching equipment and just keeping the whole kitchen clean and tidy. My wife is sick and tired of being my assistant. I normally stockpile heaps of peelings here and there, which really irritates her.'

But I will enjoy the break from the rest of the chefs. I have two great teams and kitchen banter is fantastic but it does get very repetitive,' he said.

The most detailed response came from **Michel Troisgros** in Roanne, France. Perhaps because, as a three- star Michelin chef with 79 years of tradition to maintain in their family restaurant, he saw three very disparate areas of difference between cooking in his restaurant and at home, and one distinct source of pleasure.

The first, he mentioned, is the solitude. 'Although it's definitely more peaceful cooking at home, away from the hurly- burly of the professional kitchen, I am far less accustomed to this solitude these days. There's no one around to help me with the A- Z of multiple tasks that need doing and sometimes it can take me longer than anticipated to get things done,' he explained with undue modesty.

The second is the fear of not having the right knife to hand or one that isn't sufficiently sharpened or of an inferior quality to those in the restaurant. These are, he explained, every chef's essential tools.

Finally, Troisgros made a point that initially seemed absurd but he subsequently explained was a constant concern for him when cooking at home: the fear of failure. 'The comments I get back from my family are obviously far more immediate and far less restrained than any I hear from either my customers or the reviewers who eat in my restaurant. My family definitely doesn't hold back!'

But the plus side is that he will have been cooking with his wife, Marie- Pierre. And although washing up is a bit of a bore, he admitted, it's a great time to relax together.

The comments from **José Barattino**, the highly talented chef at the Emiliano Hotel in São Paulo, Brazil, encompassed the turmoil he faces when switching from his restaurant to his home.

'In my own home I have to start by realising what's missing: the equipment, the staff, the structure, the five kinds of stock, everything I have come to rely on,' he explained. 'I begin by spending far too much time just doing the simple things, like boiling water and preparing the vegetables, while I mentally adjust. Then once I see that my family and friends are happy, I can start to relax and enjoy the meal with them. But what I miss wherever and whenever I am not cooking in my restaurant is what I call 'my fuel' that propels so many professional kitchens to do their best. That is the pressure, the sheer adrenalin, that is somehow never there when I'm cooking at home.'

One chef who will be transporting this sense of adrenalin from work to home is Austrian **Armin Leitgeb**, currently chef de cuisine at Les Amis restaurant in Singapore. 'As we're cooking in a business city and a travel destination, our restaurant will be open over the entire festive season, including Christmas and New Year. So what I will miss more is my family rather than my restaurant.'

'But I have learnt that the secret about cooking outside your own environment is to keep your level of compromises to a minimum. Then you don't miss anything. But what I would most like is to prepare the food for my family over Christmas in my restaurant and then simply whisk it over the city to them on a red carpet.'