Five Christmas food gifts to give pleasure from Christmas Day onwards

23 Nov 2004 by JR

1. **On the day itself**. A box, or more, of Aloisio chocolate covered figs from the Algerian Coffee Store, London W1 (tel 020 7437 2480). These beauties are this season's figs from Calabria, southern Italy, split in half, rolled with orange and lime peel then covered in chocolate. Available in particularly attractive hand-made straw boxes of 140, 300 and 500gr from £4.25 - £16.50.

2. **For Boxing Day to New Year**. A truckle of Colston Bassett Stilton available from the best cheesemongers. Such is the demand for this, the creamiest of Stiltons, that Neal's Yard in Borough Market will have received and despatched 15 tons of this cheese between the end of November and the last ordering day for Christmas delivery which is 13 December. Approximately £14 a kilo via email, mailorder@nealsyarddairy.co.uk

3. **To cook with during the new year**. Two bottles of that semi-precious cooking and health-endowing liquid, aged balsamic vinegar, for use in salads, on fish and as a teaspoonful of medicine whenever necessary. Only buy that which bears the stamp of the Consorzio and check out www.balsamicvinegar.com which offers a bottle of 25-year-old gold cap and 12-year-old white cap for 180 euro including shipment from Italy to the USA, Brazil, Japan and within Europe.

4. **For the next decade**. For any cook keen to hone their skills, the new cookery book from that great chef, Alain Ducasse, *Le Grand Livre de Cuisine, Desserts et Pâtisserie* published by ADF at 160 euro although regrettably only available in French. Stunning photos coupled with the clearest, most precise recipes.

5. **Finally**, a bread knife made in Laguiole, south-west France from £35 - £60 dependent on the handle, from Richard Dare, London NW1, (tel 020 7722 9428) and most good cookery shops. An utterly exquisite gift which will give great pleasure every time it is put to work and should last forever.