

Smoulder and wiser

Marco Pierre White, 48, celebrity chef and restaurateur, dishes out pain and passion

I have no clocks in my house. I don't wear a watch. I sleep with my curtains open and wake at daylight. I tend to sleep for four hours, then I process my thoughts for the next hour, lying in bed. It's the most productive time of my day, because no one can get to me, there's no interference. I have the same three-course breakfast every day — a cigarette, a coffee and a cough. The only place I smoke in my house is in the bathroom. And I always have a bath, never a shower, because you don't think in the shower, do you? I like to think. When I step in my bath it tends to be too hot, so I'm paralysed. I sit motionless with a Musetti espresso, just black, smoking.

I live by myself in west London. Mr Ishi, who has been with me for 15 years, drives me everywhere. I can drive, though I've never had a lesson. I drive off-road all the time. But let's be honest, it's not hard to drive a Range Rover — just a great big bumper car. Basically the Rover is my office. I hate having a diary. I like my day to unravel naturally. I enjoy running at my speed, finding things to do. Work is my addiction. One of my philosophies in life is not to trust lazy people. They'll let you down. If I've nothing planned I'll find something. In the kitchen as a boy I was taught: if you haven't a job, find one. That's stayed with me.

I'm rarely seen outside my own restaurants, but the other day I had to go to Whitecross Street, near Shoreditch, for the launch of the British Street Food Awards, with the organiser, Richard Johnson. I thought, "I have to dress a bit street," so I'm in pumps, 501 jeans, a white T-shirt, pinstripe jacket. Very '70s. I've agreed to be a judge. People will enter or be nominated online, then they'll be shortlisted down, and there'll be a big cook-off at a live final in September. So I went and did my stuff, because I'm a great fan of street food. The market there is amazing — every nationality you can think of, and it's mobbed every day. There's people cooking Jamaican jerk chicken,



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paella, spit-roast Italian-style pig, pies, scotch eggs. I liked it, the buzz it gives off. And they were nice to me. I was taught as a boy that it was bad manners to eat in the street — the closest I ever got to street food was in Whitby, with the seafood stalls on the promenade.

I took Richard for a bite to eat at my restaurant Marco at Stamford Bridge for lunch. I had a piece of grilled fish — turbot's my favourite. I don't like sauces, to be honest, and I don't like fuss or too many things on my plate. Just good-quality olive oil, lemon and a few

crystals of salt, so as to taste the fish. With creamed potatoes.

My hobbies are shooting driven birds, deerstalking and fishing. I used to have a farm in West Sussex, but after my teenage boys, Luciano and Marco, went to boarding school, I never went there. So I got my boozier in Hampshire, The Yew Tree. It has eight rooms. I rarely stay there — it's always full — but I'll take mates down to do a bit of stalking or fishing. My favourite fishery is the Royalty, on the Avon, where I caught my first salmon in England. I prefer to fish in private

waters — I'm not pestered then.

Home is my sanctuary. I don't watch TV, but I read a lot. One of my great loves in life is reading about the great French restaurants, like Madame Prunier's in Paris, one of the most beautiful in the world at the turn of the last century. At the moment I'm working on a book on cooking delicious food in a few minutes, and another on my seven-year apprenticeship, which is more of an emotional journey than about the great people I worked with or met. Like walking through the doors of Le Gavroche as a lad for the first time — the effect it has on you. Or the feelings you suffered after a bad day. It's important for the young to have an insight into a world that can be very harsh. It's easy to want to throw in the towel, but you've got to push through. It was harder 30 years ago. We'd do 100-hour weeks, which was draining. And there are all my drawings from the dishes I served — say, a dish at Le Gavroche on May 3, 1982. Once I was home I'd write down the recipe and draw the method out. I'm a great believer in romance, and the journey of walking into the most wonderful kitchens in the world and going on to gastronomy is a romantic one, despite its painful moments.

At home I'll make dishes like braised belly pork with butter beans, or lentils with cotechino sausages. I like peasant food. I haven't cooked in my restaurants for 10 years now. If there's a charity dinner, I'll go and say hi, but I won't stay. We've now got five Frankie's restaurants [in partnership with Frankie Dettori] in London — there's also L'Escargot, the Belvedere, Luciano, the Marco Pierre White steakhouse in the City, and we've recently opened another restaurant, Marco Pierre White's Wheeler's of St James's.

No matter what's happened in my world, and because I work hard, I don't have a problem falling asleep. I process all I've done, people I've met, and go out like a light ■

Interview by Deborah Moore. Photograph: Steve Schofield