

# KINFOLK



## FLORENCE KNIGHT

INTERVIEW BY GEORGIA FRANCES KING & PHOTOGRAPH BY INDIA HOBSON

**F**lorence Knight is the head chef at Polpetto, author of a recent cookbook titled *One: A Cook and Her Cupboard* and a girl about town. We ask her about what kind of grub she enjoys at home, how she likes living there and what pantry items she can't live without.

### AFTER A DAY IN THE RESTAURANT, DO YOU STILL COOK DECADENTLY OR PLAINLY FOR YOURSELF?

I'm a grazer who's committed to the best quality ingredients I can get my hands on. Meals at home usually consist of things I've collected from farmers markets with seasonal vegetables, relatively locally smoked salmon and meat from my local butcher. After a day of tasting such a wide variety of dishes, I just want to eat simple food that keeps the wolf from the door, like hot buttered toast, fennel tea and yogurt.

### WHAT STAPLES DO YOU ALWAYS KEEP ON HAND IN YOUR FRIDGE AND PANTRY FOR QUICK POSTWORK DISHES?

The fridge always has some charcuterie as well as some hard cheese such as Parmesan and Coolea that doesn't go off easily. My hours are pretty erratic once I'm in full swing with the restaurant, so it's best not to have anything that deteriorates too quickly. Homemade pickles and chutneys are among the jars. We also always keep eggs, lentils, rice and fresh herbs on hand.

### HOW CAN THE AVERAGE HOME COOK MAKE THEIR EVENING MEAL FEEL MORE RESTAURANT QUALITY?

Choosing seasonal ingredients is crucial: They'll taste better and be easily available, whether it's white currants, bobby beans, sloe berries, quinces, acorns, cocoa beans or nettles. I recommend stocking the kitchen with a few key ingredients. These are the building blocks, a kind of backbone to any dish: Olive oil, salt, honey, chocolate, vinegar, flour, eggs, mustard, nuts, unwaxed lemons and lots of fresh herbs are what make simple food shine.

### DO YOU HAVE A ROUTINE YOU FOLLOW BEFORE OR AFTER WORK?

I'm very spoiled. My husband makes me breakfast that usually consists of espresso, freshly squeezed juice, a big bowl of porridge with fresh fruit and a slice of toast. It's something of a family tradition. And I can never leave the house without making the bed.

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT HOUSE?

I'm at the end of the restoration of a Georgian house in the middle of Soho in central London. It was built in 1734 and was a brothel for at least 150 years. The Beatles recorded their first few albums a few doors down, including "Hey Jude," and Marianne Faithfull used to busk here when she was down on her luck. Most of the original features had been ripped out or covered over so we've spent a great deal of time restoring floors, fireplaces, walls, staircases and ceilings. Many of our belongings have traveled back with us from our trips to Paris, San Sebastián and Williamsburg flea markets. Hurdling down the platform for the Eurostar laden with two enormous mottled mirrors is a memory that will stay with me.

### WHO ELSE LIVES IN YOUR HOME?

I live with my husband and two dogs called Guinevere and Edna. They make my home the place I want to be.

### WHAT AREA OF THE HOME DO YOU SPEND THE MOST TIME IN AND WHY?

As with most homes, the kitchen is the room that everyone gravitates to. The first piece of furniture my husband and I bought together was our beautiful oak kitchen table. It must be something to do with sitting around the primordial fire, sharing, being together and eating together.

## SOFT-BOILED EGGS & BUTTERED SOLDIERS

RECIPE BY FLORENCE KNIGHT & PHOTOGRAPH BY GENTL & HYERS

**F**lorence says: "I have many happy memories of tapping the top of my egg with a spoon and dipping soldiers [toast cut into strips and lined up like soldiers at attention] into runny amber yolks. Boiling eggs may seem simple but there are a lot of factors: Always use the freshest eggs at room temperature, note that the ratio of water to eggs will alter the cooking time, and the best results will come from using a pot that comfortably houses a couple of eggs with about 1 inch of water above their heads."

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### SOFT-BOILED EGGS

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*2 large free-range eggs, at room temperature*

**METHOD** Place the eggs in a small heavy-bottomed saucepan and fill with enough cold water to cover by 1 inch/2.5 centimeters. Bring to a boil over high heat. Once boiling, reduce heat to a gentle simmer and cook for 2 1/2 minutes for soft, runny yolks. (You'll need a runny yolk to dip your soldiers into, but if you prefer a "set egg" then simmer for 4 minutes, or 6 for hard-boiled.)

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### SOLDIERS WITH SAGE & CHILI BUTTER

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*2 tablespoons (30 grams) salted butter,  
at room temperature*

*5 sage leaves, torn*

*A generous pinch of dried chili flakes*

*1 thick slice of bread  
(makes 6 soldiers)*

**METHOD** Pound the sage in a mortar and pestle (alternatively, pound them in a small bowl with the back of a wooden spoon) until coarse and shredded. Add the chili and pound to combine. Place the butter in a small bowl and stir in the sage and chili mixture.

Toast the bread, then spread one side with the chili butter. Cut into soldiers, ready to dip into the runny yolks.

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### SOLDIERS WITH BURNT BUTTER, ROSEMARY AND PARMESAN

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*4 sprigs of rosemary, leaves roughly chopped*

*1 tablespoon (3 grams) Parmesan*

*A generous pinch of salt*

*4 tablespoons (60 grams) butter*

*1 thick slice of bread  
(makes 6 soldiers)*

**METHOD** Combine the rosemary, Parmesan and salt on a small baking tray.

Melt the butter in a medium skillet over medium heat, and cut the toast into soldiers. Once it begins to foam, place the dippable-size soldiers in the skillet. The kitchen will be filled with the smell of biscuits and the bread will turn a golden brown. Spoon the foaming butter over the bread and turn them after 1 minute to get an even dark golden brown on each side.

Once the soldiers are evenly browned and crisp, remove the bread with a slotted spoon and roll them over the Parmesan mixture on the tray until all are evenly coated. ○○○

*Serves 1*

