

# SAT BAINS

## the Sheriff of Nottingham

STORY by ANDREA PETRINI

PHOTOGRAPHY by JOHN ARANDHARA-BLACKWELL

### Welcome to Restaurant Sat Bains with Rooms

The encyclopaedia is not exactly the discovery of the century, but it might be the best way to answer the question you will all be asking yourselves. Who is Sat Bains? The most heteroclit of English cooks? The most attractive? Well it's not just his charisma and fame, always promising for a bit of fun, that lead you to drive a good way down the M1 out of London towards the north of England, to Nottingham.

Certainly, the more prepared of our readers will catch two birds with one stone by making the most with a stopover in Sherwood forest, where once upon a time Robin Hood and his merry men made their hideout, a few miles from this busy university city. Not by accident they call Sat the Sheriff of Nottingham in these parts. A metre ninety tall, shaved head and bloodshot eyes, if it wasn't for his dazzling Durban smile against naturally suntanned skin, you would immediately cast him in a Shakespearian role as a bloody angry Othello if you ever met him in a dark alley at night.



In reality, Satwant Singh, ("Sat" Bains or Sat to his friends, who are numerous) is a big softy. A man apart; an open book to all things possible. It's great to see, especially given the two stars he has attracted, as well as the sea of prizes and recognition that his first book, *Too many chiefs, only one Indian*, took home. It was his first work, the most unusual of 2012, created and self-made beyond the usual editorial rules. An independent, molecular book in line with his cooking, far from contrite, about rules and current fashions (be they Post-Nordic, After-Molecular, Neo-Spanish or Proto-Forager). While it may not be an encyclopaedia the calibre of Diderot & d'Alembert, Cook\_inc is proud to offer a Satwant Singh Bains list of fundamentals, perhaps a bit disordered, but, like Sat himself, not at all without purpose.

## AMANDA BAINS

Saintly woman. The love of his life. A blond perm, eighties-style, plunging neckline, melodic accent with a soft voice ("Want a drink?"), she is the angel of the hearth. For her, the gentle giant turned away from his Sikh family who were less than enamoured (sick indeed) to see their son hook up with an English non-believer when he still had a full head of hair.

It was a long and troubled courtship. She used to buy her Silk Cut at the Bains family off-licence in Derby. Sat persuaded her from behind the counter to smoke other kinds of herbs together. Since they found the straight and narrow however, the two have been inseparable. Following an apprenticeship in the Oast House Hotel they became united against what would separate them. The lovebirds now share everything, from the breeding of pedigree rabbits in the restaurant's little garden to the same gymnastics instructor in the Nottingham gym where Sat goes in the morning to relive tension (less to keep his cholesterol in check and more to tame his testosterone).

When, one Friday at the end of the day, we ask Amanda, "See you Monday at 50 Best?" she, who has seen everything, replies without hesitating an instant: "Not a chance! Sat is going to do some damage in London with his chef friends. *It's a boy thing*. It's better not to see what they get up to! I'm staying in Nottingham to do a little window shopping with some girlfriends."





## **BRITISH MODERN**

Satwant is a Sikh. But he conceives of cooking a lot like his (almost) fellow citizen Talvin Singh, the Punjab percussionist surrounded by lots of beautiful women (Bjork, Madonna, Siouxsie but also the guys from Massive Attack), adored for the rhythmic pulsing sounds of his Asian Electro Underground. Indian by birth, but 100% English, Sat was never struck by lightning, like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, by the Spanish cooking chimera. For him it is all about the product and the seasonality (and whatever that means in a Northern British climate). He hasn't planted a vegetable patch like Mauro Colagreco. And if the hat of improvised forager, gathering herbs and marine weeds with friend René Redzepi, doesn't fit, it's just that he prefers to have the best of the island's agricultural produce arrive in Nottingham.

In 2007, when I first came to Bains' Restaurant with Rooms, there were mammoth scallops with spices ("Have you seen these meaty Scots?") that could feed a regiment. Now the menu consists of only two offerings for the whole contingent, one with seven dishes, the other with ten, plus all the usual tasty side temptations. A clear strategy to leave the door open to the inspiration of the moment and memories of travels around the world. It's identity fusion cooking that has pilgrim sensations of the sea, of mountains and plains, as double-faced as Janus. A seductive velvet glove with a knockout of flavour. With his physique, a backhand from Sat shuts everyone up. But to stop at first impressions, at the immediate, iridescent explosion of flavour, would be to overlook the suffused delicacy of his touch.

Do you really think the mastodon doesn't have a soul? That behind the drive and strength of Fire there is not also an almost Proustian spleen? Ask Amanda. She remembers when, while building his career as a new apprentice travelling around the world, Sat cried like a baby in the telephone booth (mobile phones at the time didn't exist) swearing he would return to her one day. And it was always her that encouraged him to hang on, that their unlikely dream would shortly be at hand.

And now their dream has come true: clients arrive from all around the world to the Bains'. The only ones absent are the hacks. "Getting them to move from London is an effort. Without clear means (and without curiosity I might add), journalists don't travel. When I see how mobile the specialised press are on the continent, I get worked up. How can you build the identity of tomorrow's English food if food writing is reduced to four lazy London cats who don't consider anything outside of London?"

## **ART AND GUNS**

At least three times a week, at eight in the morning on the dot, you'll find him in the gym, getting in shape (note: this is a euphemism). If Amanda takes advantage of their day off to take things easy ("the luxury of a hot bath with the whole day in front of you"), he, waiting to meet her at the end of the day ("each lives their own life, that's our Monday routine"), goes to meet his friend Stephen Dilks. "He's been a street artist since he was fourteen-years-old. He has travelled everywhere; he was one of the first graffiti artists in England. I took him with me to France for a performance on the stage of Paris des Chefs. Before I became a chef, I also dreamed of being an artist." When you arrive in Dilks' boutique/atelier at 6 Goose Gate, Sat probably has already left, gun slung across his back. These photos taken last 26 April are testimony to his latest obsession: clay pigeon shooting.



## **BOOK**

Sat Bains' book is my favourite of 2012. There are the photos from our inspiring collaborator, John Arandhara-Blackwell, and ten ideas for each page. In particular, the genial idea of asking cooks, friends and esteemed acquaintances (Alex Atala, Dave Chang, Mauro Colagreco, Wylie Dufresne, Michel Roux, Redzeppelin, Daniel Patterson and even the humble author of these few lines) to contribute to the multifaceted identity of the book with a few lines of reflection on the current state of cuisine in the world. I was bemused to read in the section dedicated to invited collaborators that on 4 May 2012, at 10:37 local time in New York, Dave Chang wrote: "Be careful when travelling with Sat and his friends. You could find yourself stuck with the bill of a night's drinking charged to your hotel room...when you hang out with delinquents like us, these are common things, anything could happen."

Attention: Chang-san tells of the sin, but not of the sinner. Sat is the one to reveal the mystery. "A few years ago I was invited to Milan to Identità Golose. It was the year that Heston Blumenthal participated and also Paul Cunningham, who was an English friend in those years still in Copenhagen. Jockey Petri, the pastry chef of the Fat Duck and my partner in crime, was also there. After the convention we went out in a group to have a drink. For practical sake, but also to save money at the bar of the Bulgari Hotel, we decided to order not one but two bottles of gin for our tonic straight away. Okay, okay...we got a bit carried away, we really were very badly behaved, carousing until the wee hours. Monica was also there (Monica Brown, Sat and Heston Blumenthal's PR agent, and director of London agency Lotus) and she was red, both headed and with rage, and green with shame, throwing us murderous looks. At one point Jockey tried to get up in time, but didn't, and vomited his drink all over the hotel carpet. The next morning after breakfast, Monica Brown was furious and ordered us to present our apologies to the management. But, as soon as we entered we were welcomed like heroes, as if we were rock stars. In the end they served us an aperitif. For the whole convention the Bulgari was our Quartier Generale. We asked the manager of the hotel to put all the drinks on our friend Paul Cunningham's bill, saying "you know how it is, when we meet up someone pays one time and the next time another pays". Neither Sat nor Paul Cunningham have confirmed how many zeroes were on the invoice sent to their Anglo-Danish friend.

## **BOSI CLAUDE**

Franco-English head chef of the London restaurant Hibiscus. It was he who spoke first of Sat Bains back in 2005: "When people see me, and I am not exactly a waif, they don't expect cooking as delicate as mine. Sat is more corpulent than me, but he makes dishes that are even more soft and feminine than mine. Go there straight away. One day he will be great."

An exchange of courtesy: "Claude, are you sure that you want to put the story in my book that when you worked at Arpège da Passard, one day the chef de partie made you so mad you whacked him on the head with a pan? And do you really not regret the 1500 euros that you had to give him for damages and physical abuse of human dignity?"



## HAM EGG PEAS

One of Sat's signature dishes, it's a paradigm shift for kitchen evolution that was years in the making. Of all the versions of this lateral reinterpretation of English heritage, I have never tasted a single one. Instead, I will tell you all the good things that I think about Sat's spring/summer collection of 2013, such as the steamed horseradish flan served with a cream of nettles that has not even a hint of bitterness or acidity, and almost tastes like a cream of pea ("you need to use the baby nettles that are the youngest as they give that sweet flavour"). Sat loves scallops, and we love them even more. In particular, his so-called BLACK (on the other menu with seven dishes, there is also a version called WHITE) with translucent sweet onions and caviar, the meaty and rubbery consistency is almost a mimetic mollusc. The game sausages with a sauce of pine and juniper are superb next to the venison tartar. While the muesli with foie gras mousse is an unlucky slide for me ("maybe you didn't like the dish, but it's the one that the clients appreciate the most"), we will always hold in our heart the pearl barley risotto with St. Georges mushrooms (better than any muesli, perfect at breakfast, lunch and dinner). Then came the great thunderbolt: the onion cooked whole, candied as it should be, browned to perfection, next to a tartar of veal. What, another tartar? Yes, but this time it's from an ox that has been hung for 75 days. "When they brought it to me this morning, it wasn't beautiful to look at; a disturbing green colour and as hard as a piece of wood. The same supplier I have worked with for years was sceptical. He said, 'Sat we overdid it, went too far, the meat has had it.' But from that initial repulsive piece I took the exterior off, leaving only the centre; tender, succulent with this concentrated flavour. Did you taste the sweetness?" We confirm, it was exquisite.

## KITCHEN TABLE(S)

Everything is quiet. Or almost. Amanda is at the front desk while the staff scurries away faster than ghosts in a Japanese horror film. The restaurant seems as empty as Tokyo in Kairo by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. So Sat, is there a recession here too in England? "No, everywhere is full. We need to go in step with the times. Anticipate what the clients want. They come here from London and further, for them it must be a treat, a party. So we offer an even more exclusive service at lunchtime. We don't even use the restaurant room under the veranda. Diners are in three private spaces: at the big counter for four in the kitchen, in the room where we can seat up to ten people, and in front of the garden where we have our laboratory. The restaurant room is almost secondary. The regular clients, the ones who are in the know, want to be in the centre of the action. They want to see the preparations in the kitchen, interact with the cooks and with the sommelier. It's a way to break out of the box; it takes more organisation to go beyond what you normally expect when you enter in a restaurant."

## MANCHESTER

"Sat, what are you doing? Aren't you coming to Ghent for Gelinaz? You said you'd be there!"

"Sorry... I got the dates mixed up! I'd forgotten that I was supposed to participate in an episode of MasterChef in Manchester and I've signed a contract." Bains, too, a future TV star?





## **MARCO PIERRE WHITE**

Every time journalists recycle the stubborn question about his formative influences, Bains has the answer ready: Blumenthal's Fat Duck and Adrià. But after the third beer, he finally admits – like Virgilio Martinez at Central in Lima and David Chang – that the book that changed his life was *White Heat* by MPW. "I couldn't believe it – I read it in three-and-a-half hours. It opened my mind, and let me see a path. It was the most important influence, not only for me, but for a whole generation," adding after another sip, "at the time I had never worked for him. I only met him once a few years ago. He was promoting a brand of stock used to make broth. He had a sceptical approach, quite conservative. But what did that matter? Without him, I would probably not be here."

## **MONTPELLIER**

"It was in that town in southern France that I met a little guy, who was unknown at the time. His name was René. In the kitchen of Jacques and Laurent Pourcel's restaurant, Redzepi and I became friends straight away, and when we were off, we always hung out together. One day we heard talk about the restaurant of a mad Catalan. We asked the twins if they knew him and if they could find us a table at Rosas. René and I – he even went on to work there and met Massimo Bottura – we remember that first dinner at El Bulli as if it were yesterday."

## **NOTTINGHAM**

If we had to advise a great international sponsor about who should win the Entrepreneur of the Decade Award, Cook\_inc. would not hesitate to recommend that first prize go to Amanda and Sat Bains. Taking this restaurant, hidden in the devastated *no man's land* at the fringes of Nottingham, making it into an international destination, and bringing home more prizes than can be counted on two hands (the best of all was the Sexiest Place to be Fed in the World from the Observer Food Monthly in 2007), has not been easy. They called them crazy. Imagining a fine dining establishment between soccer fields and bare countryside framed by the reinforced cement bridge spanning

the grey industrial estate was more than a bet: a poetic legacy on the same level as that of director Derek Jarman, who passed away in 1994. He lived the last years of his life in Kent, tending a metaphorical garden politically planted in the shade of the disturbing nuclear centre of Dungeness (the reference for his film *The Garden* with Tilda Swinton in the role of the Madonna).

"My restaurant is elegant, the rooms are welcoming. Guests are happy when they arrive and maybe even stay a couple of days. If they try both menus one after the other, on the third day I propose new or signature dishes before they order, but always with a made to measure approach," says Sat, who doesn't scrimp on anything. Last year, following the floods that hit the whole region, with ankle-deep mud everywhere, he re-invented himself as a chauffeur with a rented four-wheel drive to ferry clients from the nearest intersection over the sloping entry road that was underwater. It's no doubt easier to work at the Postal Ministry than take on, as Sat has, so many jobs at once.

## **PASS**

Now he is calmer, serene and smiling. He almost seems like another man. But for this new inner peace, Sat has had to wear himself thin. For years he delegated nothing, doing everything himself. Running around every day, faithfully present at every service, carefully cultivating each dish from A to Z, from the first contact with heat to the final garnish. But to go beyond this, he felt that he had to stand aside and give the brigade more space. For Sat, the heart of the action is out of the kitchen, at the pass.

"When I made this decision, for a time I felt out of place, marginalised, deprived of my role, almost emasculated. Symbolically it was the right thing to do, however. Handing it over to the head of the shop gave a new energy to the whole brigade. With the reins of the service in their hands they felt responsible, more autonomous, but also more respectful and involved with the job at hand. Now there is a concentration that was unthinkable before. There is adrenalin which is reflected in the moment when the research comes together, together with my chef John, when the new dishes on the menu are put into orbit."



## POTATO

"In 2010, I was in London for Identità Golose and I was onstage immediately after Bottura. Max talked for more than half an hour about his transformative products, and this fucking potato that, as it travelled, became a truffle, a potato who wanted to become a truffle. After the huge applause for Massimo, when I got up onstage I was feeling really down about my lesson that was as simple as you get, based simply on baked potatoes. I said straight away to the audience: "Ok guys, this is just a fucking potato that wants to stay a fucking potato!!!!!"

## PERISCOPE

"Ah! Are you going to Sat's on Thursday night?" asks Joe Warwick, British journalist and founder emeritus in 2002 of the World's 50 Best. "When you see him, ask him how his periscope is." Periscope? What do you mean Joe?

"Don't worry, just tell him I told you about it, he'll understand."

As soon as I say the word 'periscope' Sat breaks into a great open-mouthed belly laugh. "Fuck you Joe! It was supposed to be a secret, but he has told everyone. Amanda and I had planned a weekend break in a splendid Relais in the heart of England. It was princely; we had a jacuzzi in the middle of the garden. I was relaxing in the warm water. But seeing Amanda take off her clothes one at a time was better than a strip tease. By the time she got to the tub it had had a big effect on me. 'Come on, Amanda, get a move on,' I shouted. 'Come on, come on!! I've got the periscope up!'"

It might be the bitter chocolate with caramel ice cream yoghurt, or the close contact with cumin and grated lime, but the effect of the spicy dessert even melted the tongue of my spouse, Catherine Petrini-Perrier: "Look, I'm not Amanda and I know nothing of Sat's periscope, but anatomy aside, Sat is really very seductive. Have you seen his hands? Graceful, elegant and tapered, they look like the hands of a classical music pianist. What a contrast with his big, manly body! These are the details that make him even more attractive. I wouldn't want to be his wife with all the women that must be buzzing around him day and night like flies."

So, Mrs Morelli, how about you think about your numerous female readers for once? What about if Sat the Toy Boy was the cover boy of the next number of Cook\_inc?

### Restaurant Sat Bains with Rooms

Lenton Lane  
Nottingham NG7 2SA  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 115 986 6566  
[www.restaurantsatbains.com](http://www.restaurantsatbains.com)

DART ASSOCIATI



Bontà  
Stellata



### Pearl barley – belly pork – turnip

#### Truffle butter

100g winter truffle  
100g beurre noisette  
20g brown chicken stock  
20g balsamic vinegar

Warm the beurre noisette and add the chopped truffle.  
Blend to a purée and add the brown chicken stock and balsamic vinegar.  
Season with a little salt.

#### Pearl barley

200g pearl barley  
500g white chicken stock

Soak the barley in cold water overnight.  
Rinse and drain the barley.  
Bring the barley and stock to a boil.  
Simmer for 25 minutes until tender.  
For the crispy barley: place a little of the prepared barley in a dehydrator at 55°C for 12 hours; fry in sunflower oil at 220°C until golden brown, and season with a little salt and store in an airtight container.  
When the normal barley is needed, it is reheated with a little white chicken stock, we then season it with the truffle butter, parmesan and a little salt.

#### Pork belly

1 x 500g piece of cooked and pressed pork belly

Cut the pork belly into small cubes and pan fry until crispy.  
Fold into the barley just before serving.

#### Pickled turnip

1 large turnip  
pickling liquid:  
25g water  
50g sugar  
50g white wine vinegar

Peel and slice the turnip on a mandolin into 1.5mm rounds; place in a *sous-vide* bag with the pickling juice and compress on full.

#### Roasted St George mushrooms

200g St George mushrooms  
1 tsp finely chopped shallot  
1 tsp finely chopped parsley  
salt to taste  
1 clove garlic, finely sliced

Warm a little olive oil and gently fry off the garlic for about 2 minutes.  
Strain the now flavoured oil into a clean pan and heat.  
Add the mushrooms and fry until soft (around 3-4 minutes).  
Finish with the shallot and parsley and season with a little salt.



## NG7 2SA

### **Horseradish custard**

*400g semi-skimmed milk  
6 eggs  
15g white wine vinegar  
Freshly grated horseradish  
Fine salt*

Whisk the eggs into the milk.  
Season with the horseradish, salt and vinegar to your liking.  
Place in a steamer at 90°C and cook for 15 minutes.  
The custard should be slightly set and served at room temperature.

### **Nettle soup**

*300 g nettle leaves  
150g white chicken stock  
2 chopped shallots  
Water  
Salt to taste*

Bring a big pan of water to boil.  
Add the nettles and cook for 2 minutes.  
Strain the nettles and refresh them in an ice bath.  
Sauté the shallots in a little oil until translucent.  
Add the white chicken stock.  
Bring to a boil and add the nettles.  
Transfer to a blender and blend on full-speed to a smooth purée.  
Pass through a chinoise sieve and season with a little salt.  
If the soup is too thick, add a little more chicken stock.





## Scallop - leek - ash

For the following recipe you are going to need 5 leeks, the green tops of the leek are going to be used for the ash, the middle part is sliced and used for the purée, and the bottoms are cut 10cm from the root: this is used for the braise.

### Scallops

Diver caught scallops, 1 large or 2 small per person

*Marmite butter –(Ed note: marmite is a spreadable cream of dark-based brewer's yeast and vegetable extracts, very popular in the United Kingdom. It has a very strong taste that is unique and extremely salty. In this case, it is mixed with butter.)*

Remove the scallop from the shell, discard the skirt and the roe: you only need the scallop meat.

Cut the scallops in half and reserve.

When serving, cook one side only and season with the marmite butter.

### Leek ash

leek tops (see note above)

50g hay

fine salt to taste

tapioca maltodextrin

Cut the leeks and separate the layers.

Lay them out on a baking sheet and cook at 250°C until they are black (roughly around 2 hours).

Turn the oven down to 100°C and cook for a further 1 hour.

Take out the oven and allow to cool.

Burn the hay with a blowtorch and leave to cool.

Mix the 2 together and blend to a powder.

Add a little of the maltodextrin to stop it clumping together.

Season with a little salt and strain.

Remove 20g of this and reserve in a sugar shaker, the remainder is going to be added to the leek purée.

### Leek purée

leek middles (see note above)

100g salted butter

50g sunflower oil

50g white chicken stock

fine salt to taste

5g squid ink

Melt the butter in the oil in a hot pan. Add the leeks and cook until translucent. Lower the heat a little and gently cook the leeks until golden brown. Add the chicken stock to deglaze. Place in a blender along with the squid ink and remaining ash. Blend until completely smooth. Pass through a *chinoise* sieve. Season with a little salt if necessary.

Spread half of this mixture, wafer thin onto a silpat non-stick baking sheet and place in a dehydrator. Dehydrate for 12 hours.

Store in an airtight container until needed.

### Braised leek

leek bottoms (see note above)

100g salted butter

Place the leeks in a sous vide bag with the butter.

Compress on full and steam for 30 minutes.

Leave to cool in the bag.

When needed, cut in half lengthways and char, cut side down, in a hot pan until black.

### Roast and pickled baby onions

10 baby onions blanched and peeled

**Pickling juice:** 25g water, 50g sugar, 50g white wine vinegar

Char the onions cut side down in a hot pan until black.

Remove from the pan and cover with pickling juice.

Keep at room temperature until needed.

### You will also need

Smoked herrings roe

**Umami vinaigrette:** 100g soy sauce, 10g kombu, 2 sheets of nori seaweed, 40g white wine vinegar, 75g sunflower oil, 5g of bonito

Bring the soy sauce, kombu and nori sheets to 80°C in a saucepan; remove from heat and let steep in the refrigerator for 24 hours. Bring it back to 80°C and add the vinegar, oil and bonito. Let sit for an hour and then pass through a *chinoise* sieve. Refrigerate until ready to use. When ready to plate, finish with smoked herring roe and umami vinaigrette.