





Chicken

ON THE MENU

Luc Hoornaert and Kris Vlegels

 | LANNOO



Chicken on the menu

Without chicken, humankind would never have become the species it now is: the top of the food chain. And vice versa. Alongside humankind, chicken has spread all over the world and its diversity has increased enormously. For thousands of years, the range of human cultures has not only found its counterpart in the biology of the chicken, but certainly also in the nutritional importance of our most important ‘companion animal’.

This book is a magnificent illustration of this interdependence. It reflects our various cultural individualities as well as the beauty created when local characteristics merge in a broad world view. It links tradition to the present day and to a clear vision of the future which, I am convinced, will be based on sustainable food and the right outcome of global versus local.

*Koen Vanmechelen,
artist and former chef*

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BOYS ARE LUCKY

If you are born as a male animal in our part of the world you are lucky because, as a rule, people mostly eat female animals. Females are just more cost-effective (female calves will produce milk later on and give birth to more calves – hens lay eggs, and so on...). We apparently think it costs too much to rear a profitable male and release it into the food chain.

Nel Schellekens thinks differently. She thinks that people ought to eat everything and not cherry-pick so fussily. Why should a bent asparagus stem be worth less than a straight one? Why don't we eat meat from male animals as we used to? The arrogance of the contemporary consumer apparently has no limits. An awareness campaign by the government is urgently needed to give people a wake-up call. Or is it normal that almost all young cockerels disappear into the gas chamber immediately after being born, going from there via the shredder to become a source of protein for farmed salmon? Complete madness.

Chicken with balls

Meat from cockerels is tasty and nutritious, but it tastes and feels totally different to meat from hens. The chef must use his experience and adjust the method of preparation to ensure that the meat is good to eat.

A chef with balls

Nel Schellekens is a truly phenomenal person with drive to match a Duracell Bunny. She is a veritable missionary for nose-to-tail eating. Fergus Henderson from London, the other star of this movement, might be the uncrowned king, but Nel is the queen. She is genuinely a woman on a mission: a mission to disseminate delicious food. She lives for delicious food herself and it makes her profoundly happy. Nel is Slow Food, but at a gallop. I sometimes wonder where she gets all her energy to keep fighting such a losing battle against mass consumption.

She is a whirlwind that never seems to abate, but in the midst of this apparent chaos and commotion, she still manages to find the peace and focus to cook an essential dish. She was of course almost literally brought up cooking. Her Aunt Anneke got her to chop off young cockerels' heads and clean them out completely when she was a

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child. Her principle of never throwing anything away dates back to those days.

She is keen to share her passion for delicious food with everyone. She reigns over her underrated restaurant, De Gulle Waard in Winterswijk. It is a real pleasure to see a chef at work who knows where she has come from, where she is now and where she wants to go. She has her very own style in the kitchen and that creates a measure of calm. The creative process takes place deep in her heart and soul and is not dependent on any high tech demo by a conceited tattooed chef at a hot-shot culinary fair. Preparing a meal is a natural process of evolution and the sharing of skills.

Nel is undoubtedly one of the most underrated chefs I know but she is gathering a following and touching a chord with her purity.

Michelin man

The laying hen's little brother. No, it's not fat, but it does taste very good. This gentleman cockerel has the unique characteristic of blowing itself up like a Michelin man when cooking. Its thin skin bulges alarmingly, but it won't burst. And it stays that way until you open the oven...

Gizzards

Gésiers – as they call preserved gizzards in France – are a delicacy. Birds have a muscular stomach called a gizzard. Their food enters through the crop. From there

it goes through to the gizzard where it is kneaded and ground before entering the digestive system. That is why a chicken's stomach is a muscle, just like the heart. It also has the structure of a muscle.

Cleaning gizzards

A muscular stomach has two compartments held together by a thick yellow skin. If you need to clean them yourself, first cut the stomach in two. Remove the food that is usually still in there. Rinse well. Now cut off the two bundles of muscles to the left and right behind a membrane. You can't miss them; they are like red diamonds. Now remove all the membrane.

'Salad of chicken, cockscombs and cockerels' testicles'. Hmm. This certainly isn't your everyday dish. A long time ago it would have been though.

Cookery books of yesteryear contained many recipes for cockscombs. A famous one is what was known as the queen's tit-bit adorned by the comb as a crown. (See recipe *bouchée au roi* on page 20)

Another interesting cockscomb fact: a comb is rich in hyaluronic acid. This endogenous substance increases the elasticity of the skin and the mobility of joints. Hyaluronic acid is frequently used to combat the aging process. It can be swallowed and injected: it is used in fillers for lip augmentation, for instance. So, perhaps eating a cockscomb might help too?



HAYCOCK... A COUNTRY COCKEREL



INGREDIENTS

handful of unsprayed hay for stuffing and
optionally putting in the pan
1 cockerel
casserole or a cedar wood box
1/2 a bottle of beer
salt and pepper
1 sour apple and/or lemon, in pieces
oil infused with chopped fresh thyme and, for
garlic-lovers, some crushed garlic

METHOD

Method

Soak some hay (as much as will fit inside the cockerel) in beer. Do that a day in advance if possible, because it will make the hay softer and easier to stuff inside the cockerel. Season the cockerel inside and out to taste.

Once the hay is soft, squeeze it out a bit and mix some pieces of sour apple and/or lemon through it. Stuff the seasoned cockerel with as much as will fit.

1. Two methods

Big Green Egg or other barbecue with a lid:

Place the cockerel on a tray/dish/pan filled with some hay that has been soaked in beer. Sprinkle the cockerel with the flavoured oil.

2. Oven:

Place the cockerel on some hay in a casserole and place some beer in an oven-proof bowl next to it to keep it moist. Cover the casserole. After 25 minutes, remove the lid from the casserole and baste the cockerel with some oil.

Let it brown without the lid.

The cockerel will take 30-40 minutes to cook at 180 °C using either method.





CHICKEN, CHICKEN, CHICKEN, WHERE ARE YOU?

The etched phrase in the runout groove on my original vinyl version of Joy Division's *Closer* – one of my prized possessions – contains a few chicken tracks with the text *'Where has the chicken gone?'*

I could swear that Massimo Bottura is a fan of Joy Division. This fantastic chef is among the world's great chefs and, as far as I am concerned, is in all senses the closest to being a contemporary artist. His dishes evolve and reveal a glimpse of the way he interprets feelings, memories and emotions. His daughter Alexa used to play with her toy kitchen for hours and when she served her father with a pile of plastic vegetables, he asked what this delicious meal was called. With a straight face, she

replied: *'Chicken, chicken, chicken, where are you?'* They both dissolved in fits of laughter.

This popped back into his mind much later when he wanted to make a chicken salad with a very intense chicken flavour, but without a single trace of actual chicken. And so he made nine little piles of finely julienned vegetables in dense, intense chicken vinaigrette and when it was served he even sprayed it with roast chicken-flavoured 'eau de cologne'. And thus, chicken



POLLO ALLA DIAVOLA



INGREDIENTS

2 chickens ·
zest of one lemon ·
juice of one lemon ·
4 bay leaves ·
5 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil ·
salt to taste ·
black pepper to taste ·

For the salad

an aromatic salad of rocket, watercress, ·
valerian, poached green beans, ·
poached cauliflower florets, al dente ·
olive oil ·
1 tsp. chili powder ·
1 tsp. sun-dried tomato puree ·
a few drops of balsamic vinegar ·

For the sweet and sour sauce

200 g *glace de volaille* ·
20 g tomato paste ·
1 tsp. chestnut honey ·
1 tsp. red wine vinegar ·
1 fresh chili pepper ·

METHOD

Debone the chicken, retaining the bones and try to keep the chicken intact. Marinate the meat in the lemon juice, the zest, the olive oil and the bay leaves (in a vacuum bag if possible) for at least 24 hours.

Pat the chicken dry.

Season the chicken with salt and pepper.

Fry the chicken, skin side down, cover with kitchen paper and place a weight on top for about five minutes until the skin is nice and crisp; turn the chicken over and fry without using the kitchen paper or weight.

Leave the chicken to rest for a few minutes.

Mix the ingredients for the sweet and sour sauce and bring to the boil.

Cut the chicken in half and serve with the aromatic salad which you have dressed with olive oil and balsamic vinegar and 1 tsp sun-dried tomato paste. Decorate the plate with some chili powder.