



How we eat now

Kitchen adventures with Mary and Claudia

Our columnist **Emma Freud** invited *Britain's Best Home Cook's* Mary Berry and Claudia Winkleman to her home. Here's what happened next...

@emmafrend

It might not have been the safest question to kick-start an interview, but as I've known Mary and Claudia for years, I went with it anyway. 'As arguably the best cook in Britain, Mary – how do you find working with Claudia, who's arguably the worst?'

Let me explain how I got my intel. When I'm not writing this column, I'm director of Red Nose Day. In 2011, I asked Claudia to join Miranda Hart and Ruby Wax at 10 Downing Street for *Comic Relief* to cook a *MasterChef* lunch for David Cameron: it was not without incident. They created one course each under the watchful eye of Michel Roux Jr, and basically

trashed the PM's kitchen. So when I sat down with two of the stars of *Britain's Best Home Cook* last month, I asked Claudia if she had ever told Mary about this high-profile culinary experience. Mary looked alarmed. Claudia panicked. 'It's nothing Mary. Don't listen to her.' 'Tell her what you did,' I pushed. 'Okay, look... I had no idea what I was doing. I made a chilli but it didn't have any flavour – so I put in five more chillies. It nearly killed Michel. Steam came out of his ears. And at one point Miranda turned to me and shouted "have you got any mint?", so I passed her a chewing gum.'

As Claudia is now hosting the BBC's leading cooking show, I was keen to know if her cooking skills had improved. 'Yes' she admitted. 'I now manage to make things that are both raw and burnt. It's like I break science.' 'So you won't be bringing in any of your home bakes for Mary?', I asked, optimistically. 'Oh I already have. I made her my signature brownies'. Mary chips in. 'She did. Brownies should be beautifully soft and squishy in the middle, but these were crisp all the way through with a black tinge.' Claudia looked downcast. 'They were rocks, Mary'. 'Yes, they were rock brownies.' This cheered Claudia up. 'That's it – I've invented something new! Mary looked at them and said, "Oh".' Anyone who has ever watched the *Bake Off* will know that look. After the legendary, "Is this fondant shop-bought?" incident from series five, that look has been known as "The Death Stare".

Mary and Claudia had come to my home to chat about *Britain's Best Home Cook*, which is now mid-series. It shines the spotlight on home-cooking, a mission that Mary has been championing for decades. The programme follows untrained home-cooks who create dishes without any fuff, and Mary's ambition is that it will inspire viewers to do the same. 'I think that's what a cooking programme should be, but many of them are so complicated. With our cooks, they're not using endless gadgets. No layer upon layer and a drizzle on the top. There's not a spiralizer in sight –

“Miranda Hart turned to me and shouted 'have you got any mint?', so I passed her a chewing gum”

so it encourages people who haven't got a lot of equipment. I reckon with every programme, there will be one or two recipes that will make people say, "Gosh, I love that, I'm going to do that one myself". And that's all I want.'

I ask Claudia how many recipes she has under her belt now that she's shot the whole series. 'Would you include spreading Marmite on something?' she asks. 'I must admit she gave me all sorts of little tips and ideas as we went along,' Mary tells me. I asked if any of those tips involved packaged food and a microwave. 'Okay, it was mostly just heating stuff up,' Claudia admits, 'but I did introduce Mary to Uber Eats.'

What would Mary cook if she had Claudia over for supper? 'Well, first of all I would give her a bowl of blueberries because she does like a blueberry. Then I would probably do an Irish stew using the neck fillet, because I know she wouldn't understand the bones. And lots of different vegetables – she's rather keen on her vegetables.' 'Except for aubergines. They are the devil's work,' Claudia adds. 'They are not the devil's work, Claudia,' Mary says.

'For pudding I would do my most popular dish – ice cream with honeycomb. I make the honeycomb, crunch it up and then stir it into my basic ice cream recipe. Everyone thinks it's lovely.' And the ever-generous National Treasure kindly gave me the full recipe, which you'll find on the next page. It's honestly the loveliest ice cream on earth.

We then went to take a thousand photographs in the kitchen before I introduced them to my 56th birthday present to myself – Wilf, the baby rabbit. When the little chap jumped into an empty saucepan, there were squeals of delight at the Instagrammable moment.

And finally, we had to go there: 'Claudia, if Mary was coming to your house, which obviously she won't, but if you had to cook her a full meal, what would you do?' 'Number one, Mary will be coming to my house. The door will be answered by Elton John singing *Tiny Dancer*, then some trained dolphins will bring Mary to the table where my children are lined up wearing matching outfits, singing a welcome song in three-part harmony. My husband and I are wearing lederhosen as I think Mary would enjoy that, and her seat is actually a throne made out of sugar paste...' 'So, you'd get a takeaway?' I ask. 'To be honest, yes, but I'd definitely put it on one of my plates.'

The truth is, this show is their perfect vehicle – the brilliance and simplicity of Mary's vision for families to put cooking at the heart of the home, being presented by the funniest girl on TV who can't tell one end of a saucepan from another, but is excited to learn.

Turn over for Mary's honeycomb ice cream ▶



Good Food contributing editor Emma Freud is a journalist and broadcaster, director of Red Nose Day and a co-presenter of Radio Four's *Loose Ends*.

Mary Berry's real honeycomb ice cream

Dreamy, delicious and dangerous, once you have one mouthful of this ice cream, you'll want the whole tub! You can also serve these in eight lined ramekins – just tip them out to serve.

SERVES 10 **PREP 10 mins** plus at least 3 hrs freezing

COOK 10 mins **EASY** 

150g caster sugar

4 tbsp golden syrup

2 tsp bicarbonate of soda

600ml double cream

1 x 397g can condensed milk

1 Line a small baking tin with baking parchment. To make the honeycomb, gently heat the sugar and syrup in a deep saucepan for around 3-5 mins. Try not to let the mixture bubble until the sugar grains have disappeared. Once completely melted, simmer, without stirring, until you have a caramel the colour of dark honey (a few minutes).

2 Immediately turn off the heat and tip in the bicarbonate of soda. Working quickly, beat with a wooden spoon until it has all disappeared and the mixture is foaming. Pour into the lined tin, scraping down the sides of the pan (be careful as the mixture is very hot). Set aside to cool for around 15 mins until hardened. Break into bite-sized pieces.

3 Whisk the cream to soft peaks using an electric whisk, then stir in the condensed milk. Gently stir in two thirds of the honeycomb.

4 Line a 2lb loaf tin with cling film and pour in the cream mixture. Level the top and cover with cling film before freezing for at least 3 hrs, or overnight.

5 Remove the ice cream from the freezer 10 mins before you want to serve. Tip out of the tin, remove the cling film and top with the remaining honeycomb. Cut into slices. *Can be made up to a month ahead and kept frozen.*

GOOD TO KNOW gluten free

PER SERVING 506 kcals • fat 35g • saturates 22g • carbs 43g • sugars 43g • fibre none • protein 4g • salt 0.7g

tip

Be quick when making the honeycomb, it can't hang about! Be sure to stir it into the cream gently, otherwise it will start to melt. It's also important to have a deep pan for making the honeycomb to prevent it from boiling over.

