

Food talk

This week, Brussels Unlimited launches a new food section, bringing you culinary news and reviews from across the city. First up we meet two people playing a part in Brussels' growing foodie universe.

In the best possible taste

Launched just two months ago, the Tasting and Living blog has already attracted a loyal following of food-lovers. It's the brainchild of Eric Sohl, a Belgian graphic designer who joined forces with a dozen or so friends and colleagues who had each considered starting a food blog, before dismissing the idea as too much work for one person.

Together, they've produced a site that covers booze, books, travel, photography and more. The bit we're most interested in, though, is the Tasty Brussels section, with its news, opinions, photos and videos. The writers come from all walks of life and from all across the world, united by a love of food. As Sohl says: "We're a mix – just like Brussels."

What he imagined would be an occasional hobby has become almost a full-time job for Sohl, but it's a task he relishes, particularly when the visitor count keeps growing and the positive feedback keeps coming. On an average day, the site gets 75 visitors, but interviews on FM Brussel and in *Brussel Deze Week* saw that shoot up to several hundred. "That snowball effect is addictive – it makes me want to do more," says Sohl. "The more people read our blog, the happier I am." tastingandliving.com



Chic eats going cheap

Ever wanted to splash out on fine dining but been put off by the prices? Well, now could be your chance. This week, the latest edition of Restaurant Week takes place across Belgium, and it's a great opportunity to enjoy a top-class three-course meal at bargain prices. At €22 a head for lunch and €27 for dinner, you don't need to break the bank to tuck into some of the country's finest food.

It runs from Monday (November 29) to December 5. See the website for details of all the restaurants taking part – and book early, because tables are bound to fill up fast. www.restaurantweek.be

Flore-star dining

From the Ritz to Ixelles – **Sally Tipper** learns to cook with a chef who proves that *haute cuisine* can be down-to-earth

On a wet and windy November evening, a welcoming light shines from the window of an Ixelles house. Inside, a young woman slices baguettes at a table set for 12.

This is Cuisine de Flore, and the chef is Flore Pincemin, a dynamic Frenchwoman who has spent two years nurturing her culinary dream in the capital of Europe. This kitchen is the embodiment of her desire to bring happiness through food, to strangers who soon become friends.

Flore's love for food began at a young age, surrounded by influential women who seemed to be always cooking, be it her grandmother, mother or one of five aunts. Cooking was in her blood. When her husband's career took him to Brussels, she grabbed the opportunity to give up her marketing job and follow her heart. So, after six months of training at the prestigious Ritz-Escoffier school in Paris, under award-winning chef Michel Roth, she was on her way to Brussels.

Though she doesn't live there, Flore's kitchen exudes that *comme chez soi* feeling: no pretensions, just furniture you'd find in Ikea and ingredients you could pick up at the supermarket or corner shop. It's deliberate, to give confidence to more nervous novices, to show there's nothing intimidating about cooking real food.

This evening's class throws together a mix of the city's residents – singles and couples, young and not so young, first-timers and regulars. We're there to cook a meal, then enjoy it together with a glass of wine.

While we pick at toasted baguettes topped with olives and basil, Flore introduces us to the dishes we're going to be cooking, and goes through the ingredients we might not be familiar with. On the menu is a very Belgian soup of *chicons* and beer, followed by chicken curry, with caramel muffins to finish. It becomes a little harder to concentrate once thoughts of hot



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caramel sauce and ice-cream are in my head.

She also teaches us a few basic skills: how to use a knife properly, how to slice an onion, how to peel garlic – so simple, but within 10 minutes, I've corrected 10 years' bad habits. Armed with our new knowledge, we get on with the cooking, each of us taking turns at chopping, slicing, stirring, whisking, crushing, frying, smelling, tasting, seasoning, before, finally, eating.

We sit down with a glass of wine and the fruits of our evening's labour in front of us. An hour later, we are still talking. The first-timers will return, and the regulars will keep coming.

The changing menus take in the seasons, as well as the world, from the Paris of the Ritz, to Flore's own corner of Brussels, to Asia and beyond. All the ingredients come from local markets and neighbourhood shops – but the secret ingredient is Flore herself.

Classes are given in French and English. Several options are available – cook and eat at the

workshop, cook and take away, parent-and-child classes, corporate team-building events, and coming soon, 'Cook and Date'. You might just find your soul mate across a crowded work bench...

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Got any food news you'd like to share? Get in touch via email at foodtalkbrussels@gmail.com or on Twitter – @FoodTalkBxl