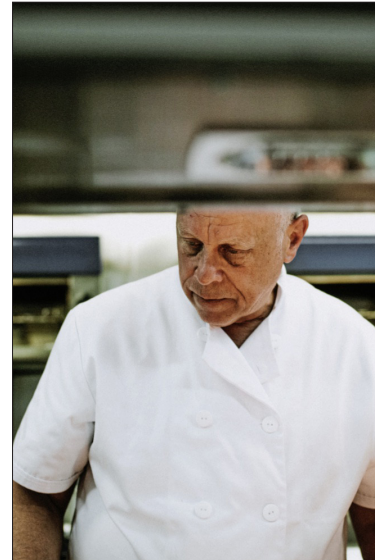




'I haven't any real ethos,
just fresh is best and seasonal...
That's how I create a dish'

It's not often that Guernsey residents get the opportunity to enjoy delicious dishes created by a Michelin-starred chef and TV personality, so diners at the Driftwood Inn are in for a treat this Friday when John Burton-Race arrives to cook up a six-course extravaganza.

Claire Menzies caught up with him ahead of his visit to find out more...



CELEBRITY chef John Burton-Race is bringing his love of local fish to Guernsey on Friday. He's cooking a six-course dinner for guests before

giving a talk at the Driftwood Inn at Perelle. In preparation, he'll be going out with local fishermen to hand-pick ingredients for his Driftwood Bouillabaisse.

Burton-Race is known in chef circles for, amongst other things, the two Michelin stars he gained at The Landmark London in 2002, and to foodies for his hit Channel 4 show French Leave and a host of recipe books.

For everyone else, ITV's I'm A Celebrity will be where they've seen his face before. Burton-Race is no stranger to publicity, either due to his spectacular culinary skills or his complicated and controversial private life. After he was kicked out of the jungle in 2007, his fellow contestants were left without their main cook – and he returned home to find he was left without his beloved restaurant hotel, The New Angel in Darmouth. His second wife Kim had discovered his illicit relationship with artist Suzi Ward (now his third wife) and sold the business from under him.

But back to the food. Because Burton-Race has more than enough to offer in this area to compete with his reputation for drama and intrigue. In fact it seems that his current career in chef consultancy has landed him on his well-travelled feet, having made peripatetic cookery a creative and fulfilling way to tour the globe. When I called him this week he was fresh from Vietnam. So fresh, he'd only been back in the country a couple of hours.

'I spend at least four months a year out there, then the rest of the time I'm writing recipes,' he

explained.

Born in Singapore, Burton-Race moved around the world as a child and credits this extensive travel with his enthusiasm for trying new foods with an open mind – the perfect start for a would-be chef.

Now based in Devon, he worked for Raymond Blanc at Le Manoir au Quat'Saisons in Oxford, and L'Ortolan in Berkshire before taking on The Landmark London. His cooking style was once described by critic Jay Rayner as 'bourgeois French food', but anyone who's been lucky enough to eat at his table recently knows he now favours a lighter touch. 'I've done five books, and I probably have got another three or four written and not published,' he said, when I told him of my friend's well-thumbed French Leave cookbook and its variety of great recipes.

'Because food is a bit of a progression. My style as I go along in my life changes all the time, it's a bit like painting. I like to think that classic is best in a way, but maybe the presentation of my food now is more modern. And people are more health-conscious nowadays. The emphasis is really not just on taste and texture but also about calorific value.

'In the old days all the sauces were thickened with either cream or butter or a bloody roux, and I don't do any of that. But when



it comes to making a meat dish, I always try to use the bones as the main flavouring agent for a sauce – whether I'm adding fruit to it or alcohol – without any of the heaviness.'

The menu he's created for his Driftwood Inn dinner looks to be a wonderful combination of fine dining and peasant food – bouillabaisse is about as down-to-earth as it gets, even before the chef climbs into a fishing boat to catch its ingredients himself.

So what drew Burton-Race to Guernsey? And how did he dream up this delicious-sounding menu?

'I met Jamie [Le Fric, of the Driftwood Inn] in 2002 at the Tresco Marathon for Cystic Fibrosis. Interestingly, Colin and Claire were taking part in that event and they're the two people who won tickets for a free meal at Friday's event, which is lovely. Jamie's very well known in the South-West, particularly

with the tourist board there. He's always nagging me to come over and cook. He started telling me about all the lovely seafood and everything else, and how appreciative Guernsey people are of good food. So I said well, because I haven't been before, I'd love to come.

'His wife Suzie is a very talented interior designer and she's done the interior of the Driftwood Inn. She made a fabulous job of 24 Royal Terrace in Edinburgh. 'I've been doing a bit of reading up about ormers chiefly, and

the shellfish and other lovely ingredients, so I thought I'd give it a go.

'The idea of a bouillabaisse originated in the South of France, obviously. But that doesn't mean to say that you need to have rascasse. What we do need is a good selection of fresh fish, and because the base sauce is made with crab and lobster shells, all of which Guernsey's got, I can't see why we can't do an even better job than the bloody French!'

It's clear Burton-Race loves new places and new foods, and especially new people to cook for. His menu is enticing – and may be more of a surprise than his host expects.

'I'm really looking forward to it, but I'm going to need a bit of time to investigate so I'm going to come over a couple of days earlier.

'The Perelle bouillabaisse is a celebration of everything in the sea around Guernsey, because

Michelin-starred chef John Burton-Race. (Pictures by Matt Austin Images)



I've found out that I can get everything I need for it in the bay. 'I'm doing a beef dish, but one of the options is a fish course and at this time of the year brill and turbot are quite plentiful.

'I love brill, it's a beautiful flat fish, so I'm going to do a brilliant dish. Then I thought I'd do some sort of herb gnocchi with truffle for the vegetarian alternative. 'I'm thinking about doing a French classic dessert, like a far Breton or something like that. But not too heavy, because

the weather's pretty good at the moment so I might change my mind on the dessert when I get there. Because as much as possible I want what's fresh, in season and local to Guernsey. 'I've got a menu idea, but if I find something better last-minute, then using chef's poetic licence I'll change it.

'Promise me one thing though – don't tell Jamie, because he'll have printed the menus. That'll stump him.'

I'm willing to bear the brunt of any wrath, purely because whatever Burton-Race cooks up is likely to be worth the cost of a re-print.

His enthusiasm is catching. 'I'm excited, I love visiting different places. Everywhere I go around the planet I learn. And even though I'm getting older now I haven't stopped learning and I still love my job. I really enjoy and get excited

about my food.

'Whenever I'm in Vietnam or the Maldives or wherever I'm going, I try to find out what's swimming in the sea and then create a dish accordingly, not import frozen bloody stuff from England. That's really how I work.

'I haven't any real ethos, just fresh is best and seasonal – because it's always plentiful and cheapest to buy. That's how I work a menu or create a dish. 'That's always music to a Guernsey girl's ears, and it'll be just what his guests want to hear on Friday.

'I'm really looking forward to it. I went to Alderney once – it's much smaller but that was very nice. I was there with a few chefs for a food magazine and the idea was catch a fish, cook a fish. But Guernsey and Jersey take food a lot more seriously.'

A fan of islands, once he's flown home from here he's jetting off to other tiny isles – albeit more far-flung.

'I'm going over to the Maldives for a 10-day period, of which five days is seven-course tasting menus. I'm putting those together now,' Burton-Race says as we wrap up our chat.

And that there's an autobiography in the pipeline. But first, Friday's six-course extravaganza.

'I've got tentative ideas about the menu,' he muses again, 'but if I find something that I've just got to cook then I'll cook it – regardless of whether Jamie's printed the menus or not.' His diners are in for a treat.

Perelle bouillabaisse

For 5/6 people

500g crab and lobster shells
300g white fish bones, cleaned and chopped
20ml olive oil
Decent splash of cognac
Large onion, chopped
1 leek, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
4 garlic cloves, chopped
2 tbsps tomato puree
4 large ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped
Large pinch of saffron
2 sprigs of thyme
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs of tarragon
500ml water
350ml dry white wine
½ bottle of Noilly Prat
Juice of half a lemon
2 strips of orange peel
1 tsp orange juice

1kg fish, such as brill, hake, red mullet and John Dory, cooked
400g shellfish, such as lobster, crab, mussels and prawns, cooked
100g steamed samphire

Heat the oil in a large pan or cast-iron pot and throw in the onion, leek, celery, tomatoes and puree and cook for three minutes.

Add the garlic and stir for a minute. Add the fish bones, crab and lobster shells and cook for four minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour in the wine, Noilly Prat, cognac and water. Then add the herbs, citrus juices and orange peel.

Bring to the boil, the lower to a simmer. Cook for 20 minutes, skimming the surface regularly to remove the froth. Pass through a sieve a couple of times to remove the sediment.

Pour into bowls and garnish with the cooked fish, shellfish and samphire.

'The Perelle bouillabaisse is a celebration of everything in the sea around Guernsey, because I've found out that I can get everything I need for it in the bay'