

Breakfast can be rather bleak during the working week – a slice of toast on the run or muesli consumed in front of your laptop. One of the joys of going away is having someone prepare a glorious breakfast – juicy fruits, home-baked breads and croissants, eggs that arrive on a whiter-than-white plate, carefully presented, with hand-picked flowers... heaven!

That's just what you get at King's Walden Garden Manor, in Agatha just outside Tzaneen. King's Walden has become a bit of a legend because of its starring role in Bridget Hilton-Barber's book, *Garden of My Ancestors* (Penguin – now into its third reprint). Recently, this aristocrat of the hospitality world underwent a refurbishment which managed an elegant sleight-of-hand: King's Walden got a totally new look, clean and crisp and modern, without losing its old-world charm.

Let me quickly say that the garden is still as magnificent as ever, still as soaked in family history and rich in lovingly tended flowers in every nook and cranny. But the interior looks as though a new broom has whisked through it, leaving the basic shape intact but giving it all a brisk shaking to settle into new lines and new colours.

A new broom has, in fact, had its way with King's Walden. Structural changes were made by award-winning architect Kate Otten, along with design ideas by Josie Grindrod, but King's Walden was then leased to a young Belgian couple, the Jacobs. Steven Jacobs has a background in food retail, and an absolute passion for food. Listening to him talk about baking bread is a revelation: "Every bubble in the dough is sacred," he told me.



Good morning!

Breakfasts at King's Walden are filled with sunshine flavours

The Jacobs have furnished the rooms in a style that works very well with both old and new in the building's structure. As you would expect of an upmarket, non-franchise place, each room expresses a little bit of individuality while harmonising with the whole.

And the food? Well, it is very heaven. Breakfast was a particularly enchanted hour; the sun filtered through the windows, dappling our tablecloth with light and shadow. Delicious coffee, lovingly brewed, arrived at appropriate intervals, along with a choice of home-baked breads that demonstrated Steven Jacobs' devotion to the craft. Every morning brought a new offering, an innovative way with eggs or an unusual salmon combination.

We persuaded Steven Jacobs to share some of his breakfast recipes with

Skyways readers. Steven is an instinctive cook, so you'll find much mention of 'to taste' in these recipes! Follow your own instincts – add more or less of any ingredient if it feels right to you.

Try them one Sunday, after you've visited an artisanal baker to buy the best bread you can get – and make sure you have the time to linger drowsily and enjoy a feast of the senses.

Breakfast at King's Walden reminded me of Joni Mitchell's song:

*Woke up, it was a Chelsea morning, and the first thing that I knew
There was milk and toast and honey and a bowl of oranges, too.
And the sun poured in like butterscotch and stuck to all my senses...*

Have yourself a Chelsea morning, courtesy of King's Walden Garden Manor!



Oeuf 'en cocotte', with fresh goat's cheese, cherry tomato confit, Parma ham, garden herbs and truffle oil

This is a version of a classic French egg dish, named after the dishes in which the eggs are cooked (little ramekins that look like mini soufflé dishes with enough space for just one egg). Steven calls it the "best comfort food ever".

(Makes 1)

1 egg

butter

1-2 tablespoons fresh goat's cheese (to taste)

Cherry tomato confit (to taste)

1-2 slices Parma ham, sliced

1 teaspoon flat parsley and dill, chopped

A few spears of pre-cooked asparagus, sliced into smaller pieces

Small dash of truffle oil

Dash of fresh cream

Black pepper (to taste)

Maldon salt (to taste)

Preheat the oven to 160°C.

Brush the cocotte (ramekin) with some soft butter, then start filling it with crumbled goat's cheese, herbs, Parma ham, sliced asparagus, a tablespoon or so of cherry tomato confit, crack open the egg and pour it over the top, add a dash of fresh cream, season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with a few drops of truffle oil.

Cook for 15 minutes in the oven au bain marie; best to add the boiling water when the ramekin is already in the tray.

[Ed: 'Au bain marie' means placing a container like a pan, bowl, ramekins or soufflé dish in a large, shallow pan of warm water either in the oven or on a stoveplate. The water protects delicate foods from direct heat and cooks it more gently. This is why it takes a little longer to bake the egg than you'd expect.]




**French toast with star anise
maple syrup**

- 4 thick slices of ciabatta bread
- 2 eggs
- 100ml milk
- dash of olive oil
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 1-2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 8 whole star anise

Beat the eggs together with the milk and the cinnamon; meanwhile heat the maple syrup gently with the star anise.

Soak the bread quickly in the egg-milk mixture and bake immediately in a hot pan with some olive oil.



**Smoked salmon trout with
fennel shavings, ricotta,
spring onions and olive oil**

Steven says, "This is not really a recipe, but just an idea of how to put things together on a plate, to combine and play around with flavours. Just use some of the ingredients below; you can also add some sliced radishes, freshly-grated horseradish or wasabi, grated lemon peel..." Mix and mingle!

Smoked salmon or salmon trout

Fresh fennel shavings

Ricotta

Lime

Olive oil

Black pepper

Maldon salt

Sliced spring onions

Rocket leaves