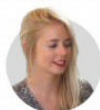


delicious. TEST REPORT

“Making soufflés daunted me, but not any more”

THE COOKERY SCHOOL



WHERE **The Cook School by Ballintaggart;**
ballintaggart.com
THE COURSE **Soufflé Mini**

Masterclass (£45 per person for a two-hour class, including tastings of the dishes cooked)

TESTED BY **Alecia Wood**

THE SETTING

It's beautiful. A converted stone farmhouse, Ballintaggart Farm is a boutique bed and breakfast, restaurant and cookery school in Perthshire's Tay Valley. Opened in 2016 by husband-and-wife team Chris and Rachel Rowley, the school offers mini masterclasses on bread, pasta and soufflés, plus longer weekend courses on subjects such as fish, baking and winter entertaining. Chris and a number of Ballintaggart's chefs studied at London's Leiths School of Food & Wine, and classes meld classic techniques with ingredients from local suppliers and producers across the Highlands.

THE WORKSPACE

Classes are taught in the light-filled main kitchen, and you work alongside staff prepping meals for guests. A large island serves as a workstation, with the addition of portable electric hobs for students.

DO YOU NEED TO BE A GOOD COOK?

The lesson moved quite quickly, so it's suited to confident home cooks looking to refine their skills. However, Jess Young – Ballintaggart's head chef and our class tutor – was a patient teacher who demystified what I've always thought of as an intimidating dish.

WHAT I LEARNED

Our group of three took a deep dive into all things soufflé, making a savoury blue



RIISING TO THE OCCASION
Head tutor Jess Young checks out some straight-from-the oven soufflés in a glorious setting

cheese and thyme version and a sweet spiced apple number. Rather than demonstrating the recipe, Jess guided us through the method, step by step. We learned that a savoury soufflé starts with a roux, made by gently cooking a paste of melted butter and flour in a pan until it smells biscuity, then slowly stirring in milk. For a sweet soufflé, we began with a base of crème pâtissière (milk, egg yolks, sugar and flour cooked until silky), then layered in our flavouring of choice.

The lightness comes from whisking egg whites in a scrupulously clean bowl until they form stiff peaks, then handling them carefully as they're gently folded into the base just before cooking. I learned the aim is to maintain as much air in the mixture as possible. Buttering the ramekins in an upward motion is another of Jess's tricks to help the soufflé rise. Dusting the buttered insides of the ramekins with breadcrumbs, parmesan (for savoury) or sugar (for sweet soufflés), also helps them reach for the sky.

The ever-pressing question is: will it rise? There was a real sense of accomplishment when ours lifted right up, and we sampled them straight from the oven. We may have

covered decidedly French techniques, but Ballintaggart gave the dishes a sense of place by using local ingredients – our soufflés used a veggie-friendly Highland blue cheese called blue murder, homegrown thyme and a compote made from apples from the property's own orchard.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Although we concentrated on a single dish, in learning to make every element of a soufflé from start to finish, we explored a number of fundamental French cooking techniques. I now not only have an impressive dinner party offering up my sleeve, but also a killer crème pat, roux and compôte to boot.

THE VERDICT

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

WHERE TO STAY

Mini masterclasses are offered to guests at Ballintaggart Farm or its nearby sister properties, East End Cottage and The Grandtully Hotel by Ballintaggart. Double rooms at Ballintaggart Farm start from £155.

RECIPE: BALLINTAGGART COOKERY SCHOOL; PHOTOGRAPHS: ALECIA WOOD; FOOD PHOTOGRAPH: CLARE WINFIELD; FOOD STYLING: OLIVIA SPURRELL; STYLING: LUIS PERAL

THE MAKE-AT-HOME DISH

VEGGIE RECIPE

Blue murder cheese and thyme soufflésSERVES 4. HANDS-ON TIME 30 MIN,
OVEN TIME 10-14 MIN

- 50g unsalted butter
- 30g breadcrumbs
- 30g plain flour
- Pinch English mustard powder
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- 300ml semi-skimmed milk
- 90g blue murder cheese (or other vegetarian blue cheese such as dorset blue vinney or stilton)
- A few fresh thyme sprigs, leaves picked, plus extra to serve
- 4 medium free-range eggs, separated

YOU'LL ALSO NEED...

- 4 ramekins; an electric mixer

1 Heat the oven to 230°C/210°C fan/gas 8 and put a baking sheet in to heat up. Melt 20g of the butter and brush it upwards over the inside of each ramekin. Sprinkle with breadcrumbs, turning to fully coat.

2 Put the remaining 30g butter in a saucepan over a medium heat to melt, then add the flour, mustard powder and cayenne and whisk until smooth. Cook for 1 minute or until it starts to smell toasty, then remove from the heat and gradually add the milk, whisking well after each addition to form a smooth sauce.

3 Return the pan to the heat and whisk the sauce as it comes to the boil, then lower the heat and simmer for 2 minutes until thickened. Remove from the heat, crumble in the cheese and stir until melted. Add the thyme, then transfer to a large bowl. Once cooled slightly, stir in the egg yolks and season generously with salt

and pepper (see Make Ahead).

4 Put the egg whites in a large, clean bowl and whisk to medium peaks using an electric mixer. Using a large metal spoon, fold a spoonful of the whites into the cheese mixture to loosen it, then quickly and carefully fold in the remaining whites, keeping as much volume as possible.

5 Fill the ramekins generously with the soufflé mixture, then run the tip of a dinner knife around the edge of each to loosen – this will help the soufflés rise as they bake.

6 Transfer the ramekins to the hot

baking sheet and bake for 10-14 minutes until risen but still with a slight wobble in the centre. Sprinkle with extra thyme, then serve straightaway with a green salad.

PER SOUFFLÉ 357kcal, 25.3g fat (14.1g saturated), 17.3g protein, 14.9g carbs (3.9g sugars), 0.8g salt, 0.3g fibre →

EXPERT TIP FROM TUTOR JESS YOUNG

- If you're hosting a dinner party, prep the soufflé base ahead of time and refrigerate, then fold in the whisked egg whites just before baking.

