



Talking turkey on the terrace

EMILY HOPE provides a step by step guide on how to get a gastronomic feast for Christmas from the local shops in Chiswick

With the millions of jobs to be done at Christmas, it's easy to be tempted to rush to the local supermarket and get all your festive food in one go, or even to have it delivered directly to your door.

But notwithstanding the hurly-burly of the season, it seems a shame not to make the most of the gorgeous shops on our doorstep. It's not that I particularly like queuing, or even that I get a puerile joy from dodging those eager traffic wardens who parade constantly up and down Turnham Green Terrace. I just like shopping there. It's better, and much nicer.

The turkey

Even standing in line at Mackens butchers is reasonably enjoyable; there's good-natured banter while you wait, and a truly scrumptious turkey at the end of it.

The secret of Mackens – and the other

shops along the Terrace – is their absolute dedication to the cause. Owner Rodney has used the same turkey farmer for the last 20 years because he knows and trusts him to look after the birds properly.

Rodney tells me, "I don't go shopping around for price. I know how our farmer and his wife treat and rear their birds and that's a big concern. He has five or six customers and that's it. They're all at the top end of the market, quality-wise. When I get them, I'm very careful with them and treat them as something special. Everything has to be just right – there's no room for any mistakes, especially at this time of year. It could ruin people's Christmas Day, and that would cost me my business."

The bird of choice these days is the Norfolk Bronze, back in fashion, according to Rodney, after a few years in turkey oblivion when whiter, prettier looking specimens were in vogue. But today it's all



about sourcing, provenance and going back to basics.

“You do pay a premium for organic,” Rodney explains. “But the real issue is actually whether they are free range and outdoor reared, not necessarily Soil Association certificated. There are a lot of foodie people in Chiswick and although these are tough times and cost is obviously an issue, people are prepared to pay for the best quality produce at Christmas.”

For those who don't like turkey, he suggests his personal favourite of goose or premier Scotch beef, perfectly aged after being hung for three or four weeks.

But of course one turkey doth not a Christmas lunch make. Here are some suggestions for the rest of your meal.

Cheese and specialities

No Christmas dinner would be complete without some top notch cheese, and Mortimer & Bennett sells lots of stilton, with the traditional variety Colston Bassett and the creamier Cropwell Bishop being hugely popular. This year, there's also a new kid on the cheese block – Stichelton – an unpasteurised stilton-esque cheese that is “quite simply fabulous”, according to M&B owner, Dan Mortimer.

“It's really caused an uproar in the stilton fraternity – it's just got that little extra flavour,” he says.

There are differing opinions on how best to eat your stilton too. Dan explains, “You can have it by the wedge, or cut into roundels or even as individual truckles. Then some argue for the tradition of pouring port inside the roundel, but others think that's just a terrible waste of good stilton. Personally, I like to have a bit of stilton in my mouth and then take a swig of port.”

Any leftovers, he advises, are best melted in baked potatoes, used in soup or squidged between prunes and bacon to make a truly wicked devil on horseback.

Other festive offerings Dan has sourced from around Europe include three types of panettone, marron glacé, Cédral lemons

and stollen from Germany, as well as plenty of very popular Parma ham. “I sell oodles of the stuff and usually have to get in at 3am to slice all the orders for Christmas Eve. One year I sliced one and a half hams on my own before we opened. My right arm felt ten feet longer than my left – but it's only once a year, so it's all good fun.”

Fish

Both local fishmongers recommend smoked salmon and scallops at this time of year. Fishworks always run a special offer on oysters around the festive season, while Covent Garden Fishmongers will source whole carp for anyone planning to celebrate in European style.

Vegetables

At the greengrocer, Andreas Georghiou sells first grade, British farm assured sprouts from Kent and an organic option to boot, as well as King Edward spuds, which he is confident will “crisp up beautifully”.

For fruit he recommends Cox apples for their milky texture, Italian nut and clementines from the Fondi mountains. “They are quite simply amazing,” he says. “Once you've had one you will not buy a satsuma or clementine from a supermarket ever again.”

Chocolate, pastries and puddings

On the sweeter side of things, Phil Neal, owner of Chiswick's ultimate chocolate shop Theobroma Cacao, has conjured up a few hand made treats for the occasion. Try chestnuts dipped in dark chocolate, hand-made drambuie or brandy truffles, candied fruit and even miniature hand-made white and dark chocolate Christmas puddings.

Further down the high road you'll also find cakes galore at the new Patisserie Valerie and spiced German biscuits at The Bread Shop.

Decorations

Of course while you're shopping for the actual meal, don't forget the decorations.



Something Nice do 36 different types of crackers and 24 designs of stockings as well as table decorations, glass baubles, candles and napkins.

Andreas concludes, “It's horses for courses nowadays. Christmas lunch can be fine dining, exotic and high brow or simple and classic with just the traditional basics, like sprouts and cauliflower. It's up to you.” ●

Suppliers

Mackens Butchers

44 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1QP,
020 8994 2646

Mortimer & Bennett

33 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1RG
020 8995 4145

Andreas Georghiou

35 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1RG
020 8995 0140

Fishworks

6 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1QP
020 8994 0086

Covent Garden Fishmongers

37 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1RG
020 8995 9273

Theobroma Cacao

43 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1RG
020 8996 0431

Something Nice

40 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1QP
020 8742 7135

The Bread Shop,

296 Chiswick High Road, W4 1PA
020 8747 8443