

enveloped in a simple, whitewashed room. The minimalist interior was not commonplace nor hip back then. Neither was extracting much of what usually stands between diners and their experience of food at a restaurant: garnishes, music, service charge, art, even flowers. “People used to come to the restaurant and think it looked like a schoolroom,” says Fergus. “They would eventually sit down, start browsing the menu, eat, and then smile. After that tricky first point, I’d say... we won them over.”

Fergus famously has no formal training in cooking—he trained as an architect, initially following in the footsteps of his parents, both architects who loved to entertain. They shaped his food philosophy from a young age; his mother teaching him how to cook, and his father how to eat. His first food memory: being given the reins to choose the dessert wine by his father and the sense of having made a decent choice.

From then on, Fergus’s significant food moments have been intricately intertwined with humor and camaraderie. His favorite part of an animal to eat, he says, is pig’s feet—he ate them on his wedding night: “The bond was made with this pig’s trotter. It’s hard to beat the bond of love.” He is certain you can overdo the cassoulet: “You eat it twice in a day, and you come to terms with the fact that there is such a thing as too much cassoulet.” And the crab on St. John’s menu is inspired, he says, by what he imagined might be Bond-worthy in the books he loves.

The original St. John has since come to include other ventures: St. John Bread and Wine in Spitalfields, the Neal’s Yard bakery, and even a winery in France—the result of long, sun-soaked quests in search of the best wine to bring back home for rainy days. More recently, a bakery arch in Bermondsey offsets gray mornings with pastries and fresh bread.

Fergus once said that “a restaurant is something you need,” akin to a pharmacy or a movie theater. It’s a statement that has never resonated more than in this moment in time. While he has found it odd not to see St. John every day, confinement has been soothing for the chef, and amplified his gratitude for the ritual of having a meal. “Time to sit down to eat is a pleasant change,” he says. “It is quite nice to have that enforced sitting-down-to-eat with none of the distractions of non-shutdown life.”

“St. John, it’s all been a joy, an adventure doing it,” he says. But what Fergus Henderson considers his most notable success might not be what you’d expect. “My family is my accomplishment,” he says, as Margot and his three children set up the table for lunch in the background, pans and pots clanging. He laughs. “It’s quite a soppy thing to say, but there we go, it’s all quite soppy.”

**1. What does the word “taste” mean to you?**

Lagavulin—the flavors of Scotland and the romance of London’s dodgy clubs.

**2. Do you have a motto that you live by?**

Don’t be afraid of your ingredients, otherwise they will misbehave.

**3. What was the last thing that made you laugh?**

Watching *Trafic* by Jacques Tati, by myself. I had serious hysterics and it dawned on me how weird it was to be laughing that much on one’s own.

**4. What are your favorite qualities in a human being?**

Generous, spirited, good-natured, stylish.

**5. Who is your hero?**

Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who built the Great Western Railway from London to Bristol. He then went on to build the *SS Great Western*, the *SS Great Britain*, and later the *SS Great Eastern* (for transatlantic shipping). There was no stopping him!

**6. What is your biggest flaw?**

My lunch habit is out of control!

**7. What is your best quality?**

I give a good lunch!

**8. What would your last meal on earth be?**

To begin, platters of sea urchins in their shells, then a large mountain of cheese like Comté, followed by bitter chocolate ice cream and dancing to Wilson Pickett to aid digestion.

**9. What does success mean to you?**

The sound of St. John when the dining room is packed with happy diners.

**10. If you had the power to change anything in the world, what would you change?**

I’d bring about world peace, true love, and harmony.

