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Weekend eating

words gillian rhys

recipes mark hix

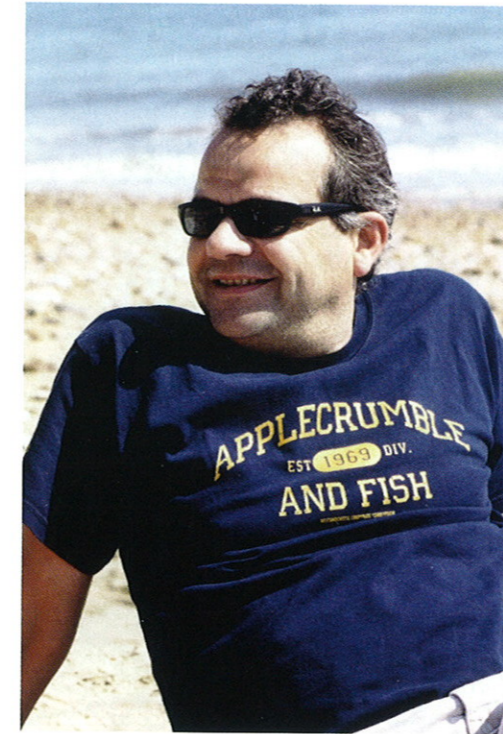
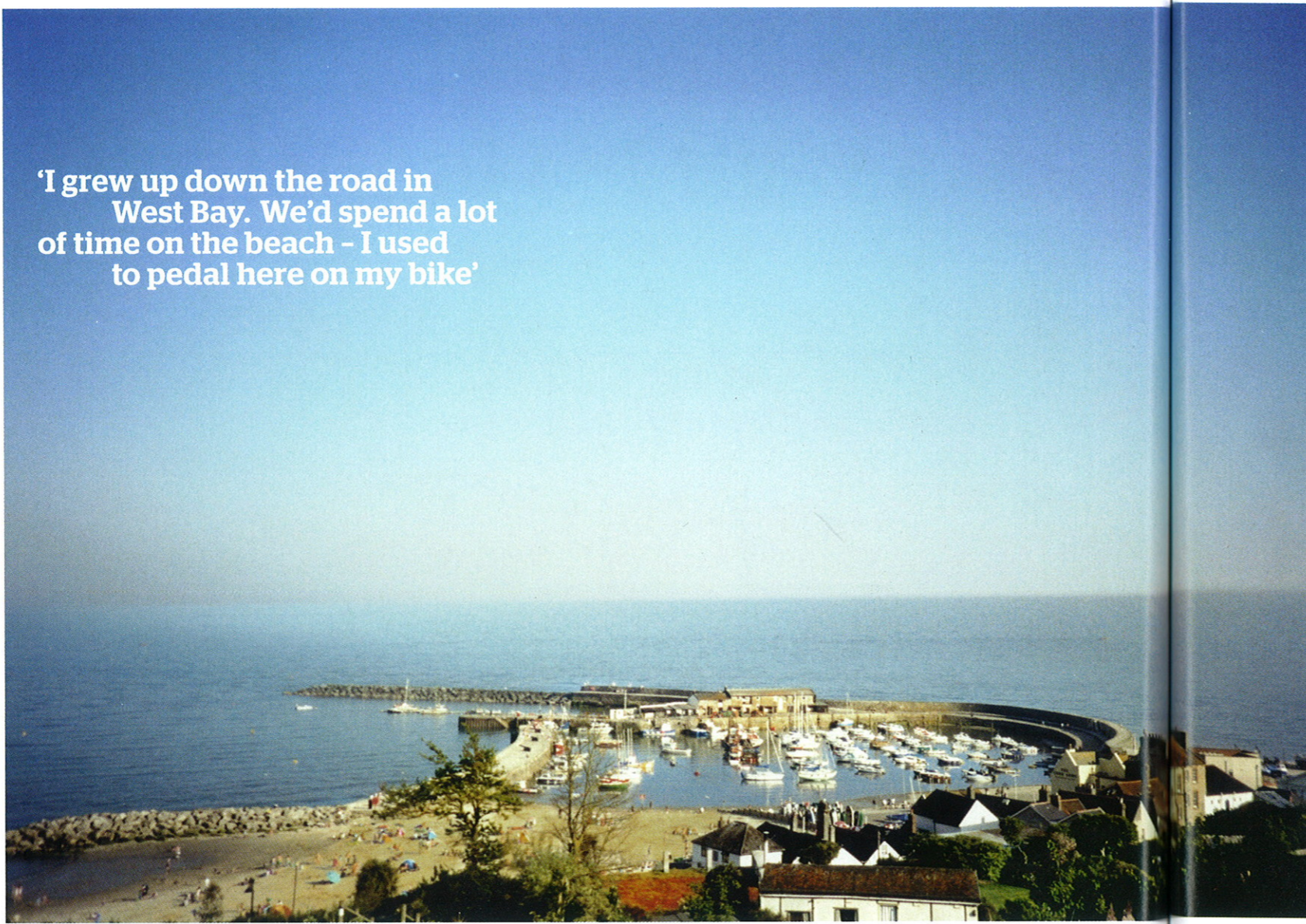
photographs jenny zarins

Sea, sand and sausage rolls

Dorset-born chef Mark Hix has been making waves on the Lyme Regis restaurant scene lately. But when sunshine strikes, he's straight down to the beach, hamper in hand. Here, he unpacks his picnic recipes...



'I grew up down the road in West Bay. We'd spend a lot of time on the beach - I used to pedal here on my bike'



Mark Hix

kicks off his Birkenstock sandals and settles down on the picnic rug. The group of adults and children already gathered laugh at his witty T-shirt. Bearing the legend 'Applecrumble and Fish', it's not only a play on a trendy American clothing brand, but also a nod to his restaurant, Hix's Oyster & Fish House, in Lyme Regis, just up from the sand-and-pebble beach where he's picnicking today. Mark's off-duty attire befits a man taking a break from running a burgeoning restaurant empire to enjoy a blisteringly hot day on the beach with friends. But the food he's prepared for lunch looks so beautiful that the crowd seems reluctant to touch it. "Come on, tuck in," Mark encourages the children as he reaches for a sausage roll.

The former executive chef of The Ivy and Le Caprice has been visiting this stretch of Dorset coast since he was a child himself, so it's no surprise that he's at home here. "I grew up just down the road in West Bay. We'd spend a lot of time on the beach - I used to pedal here on my bike." Now he visits every weekend because, as well as the restaurant, he owns a house ("a simple wooden lodge" - albeit one with an outdoor hot tub) on the cliffs overlooking Charmouth beach. "It's lovely to wake up to the sound of waves and have a view of the sea in the morning. We head down on the train on a Friday, and I always keep my diary free on a Monday in case the weather's good!"

Although he now has four restaurants in London, the Oyster & Fish House is close to Mark's heart. "I don't work there at weekends - I'd just get in their way," he says. "When I'm down here, I do lots of fishing from my little aluminium boat and pull my lobster pots. If I've caught some fish, I like to have a barbie on the beach."

There is more work afoot, though. Mark and his business partner, Ratnesh Bagdai, who's come along



Mark Hix enjoys a picnic with friends on Lyme Regis beach, *previous page*. Mark, *above right*, will be opening a new restaurant in the town, overlooking the historic Cobb harbour, *above*. The spread, *right*, includes sausage rolls, mackerel salad and barbecue chicken



today with his sons, Rishi and Rahil, are opening a second restaurant in Lyme Regis overlooking the harbour. "It's going to be very simple," says Mark, "with a bar where we'll serve small plates, tapas-style." The idea is that the bar will pick up diners drawn by the increasingly popular Fish House up the road. Mark's friends joke that he will do for Lyme Regis what Rick Stein has for Cornwall's Padstow - 'Padstein'. "We're thinking Lyme Regis could become known as Lyme Reghix," says Ratnesh. "Or Hixville!" someone adds.

By now, everyone is demolishing the sausage rolls - they are absolutely delicious. "If you take the trouble to use proper butter puff pastry and great-quality sausage meat, you're guaranteed a memorable sausage roll," assures Mark. The kids are also tucking into the barbecue chicken thighs, marinated in a spicy mixture of tomato ketchup and *dukkah*, a traditional Egyptian nut and spice mix.

Mark has replaced the predictable tuna salad with a smoked mackerel version. "This is a great alternative to tuna," he says. "Mackerel is a very underrated fish. It has so much flavour and is perfect for a dish like this."

The children break away and start an impromptu game with a tennis ball. Urged on by Mark, some of them begin to look for fossils along the beach, this being part of the Jurassic coast. In the background, there are shrieks as intrepid sunbathers venture into the cold Dorset waves. It's the picture of a perfect day at the British seaside.



SMOKED MACKEREL SALAD

Serves 6

Prepare 15 minutes

Cook 20 minutes

- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, sliced
- 2 thyme sprigs
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 2 tsp dijon mustard
- 350g new potatoes, peeled
- 150g green beans
- 4 smoked mackerel fillets, skinned
- 150g baby plum tomatoes
- 3 salad onions, thinly sliced
- 40g anchovies in olive oil, drained
- 24 black olives
- 2 little gem lettuces, leaves separated
- 8-10 basil leaves, torn in half

1 Heat the olive oil in a saucepan on a low heat; add the garlic, thyme and fennel seeds. Turn the heat down to very low and allow the mixture to infuse for 5 minutes, then whisk in the vinegar and mustard; season. **2** Cook the potatoes in boiling water until almost tender, then add the beans and cook for a further 4 minutes. Drain. Break the mackerel into large flakes.

3 Toss the beans, potatoes, mackerel, plum tomatoes, salad onions, anchovies and olives in about two-thirds of the dressing and set aside. **4** Pack the little gem leaves in a bowl and add the prepared mackerel salad. Spoon the rest of the dressing over and scatter with the basil.

Per serving 503kcal/
11.5g carbs/2.5g sugars/41g
fat/8g saturated fat/3.4g salt



BARBECUE CHICKEN THIGHS WITH DUKKAH

Serves 6

Prepare 15 minutes, plus marinating

Cook 1 hour

- 12 chicken thighs
- 3 tbsp tomato ketchup
- 1 tbsp worcestershire sauce
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 30g fresh root ginger, scraped and grated
- 1 tsp chilli powder
- ½ tbsp ground cumin
- 2 tbsp clear honey
- 2 tbsp dukkah (see right)

DUKKAH

- 50g shelled pistachio nuts
- 25g hazelnuts
- 25g flaked almonds
- 25g pine nuts
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- A large pinch saffron strands
- 12 black peppercorns, coarsely ground
- 1½ tsp sea salt flakes
- ½ tbsp caster sugar
- 1 tbsp thyme leaves

1 Score each thigh 3 or 4 times and place in a non-reactive container. Combine the remaining ingredients and mix with the chicken thighs. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

2 Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas mark 4. Transfer the chicken thighs to a roasting tray and cook for 1 hour, turning a couple of times. Add a little water if the marinade begins to catch. The chicken is ready when the juices run clear with no trace of pink.

3 Serve cold, or set up a barbecue on the beach to reheat.

Lightly toast all the nuts, then coarsely blend them in a food processor. Add the remaining ingredients and give the mixture a quick whiz again, making sure that the *dukkah* still has a coarse texture.

Per tbsp 89kcal/1.1g carbs/
1g sugar/8g fat/
1g saturated fat/2g salt

COOK'S TIP

Dukkah spice mix adds instant interest to food. Scatter over the chicken, or even onto the sausage rolls once you've taken a bite.

Per serving 261kcal/10g carbs/
9g sugar/10.5g fat/
2.5g saturated fat/1.1g salt





PEA SHOOT AND WATERCRESS SALAD

Serves 6
Prepare 5 minutes

- 1 tbsp cider vinegar
- ½ tsp tewkesbury mustard
- 4 tbsp rapeseed oil
- 80g pea tops
- 100g watercress
- 6 salad onions, thinly sliced on the slant

1 Whisk the cider vinegar, mustard and rapeseed oil together and season. Place in a jam jar or other container that you can pack safely.

2 Toss the pea tops, watercress and salad onions together; pour over the dressing just before serving.

Per serving 76kcal/0.4g carbs/0.4g sugars/7.5g fat/0.5g saturated fat/trace salt

SAUSAGE ROLLS

Makes 6
Prepare 20 minutes
Cook 20 minutes

- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 450g pork sausage meat
- 230g sheet frozen Cooks' Ingredients puff pastry, defrosted
- 1 egg, beaten

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, gas mark 6. With lightly floured hands, mould the meat into 6 sausage shapes. Lay the pastry flat on a work surface and cut it into 6 strips lengthways. Spiral each strip around a sausage shape, starting at one end and overlapping slightly as you go, so it wraps around the meat.

2 Place on a baking tray, brush with the beaten egg and bake for about 20 minutes, until golden. Leave the rolls to cool on a wire rack before packing them for the picnic.

Per roll 325kcal/24g carbs/2g sugars/20g fat/8.5g saturated fat/1.2g salt

IN THE COOL BOX

Soft drink The nostalgic tanginess of cloudy lemonade will take you right back to childhood beach holidays. **Waitrose Cloudy Lemonade; 59p/1 litre.**

White wine Recyclable plastic bottles are perfect for picnics; try this fresh, well-balanced chenin blanc. **Khulu Sky Chenin Blanc 2009 South Africa. Bin 507391; £5.99** (limited availability; also see waitrose.com/wine).

Rosé wine This is light yet full-flavoured, with plenty of character. **Chat-en-Oeuf Rosé 2008 Vin de Pays d'Oc, South of France. Bin 451231; £4.99.**



Mark tucks into the picnic spread, above, with business partner Ratnesh Bagdai and his sons, Rishi, 11, on the left, and Rahil, nine. Mark says the secret of making perfect sausage rolls, left, is to choose great-quality sausage meat and to use proper all-butter puff pastry



'When I'm down here I do lots of fishing and pull my lobster pots. If I've caught some fish, we have a barbie on the beach'

