

Weekend Festival Food

FESTIVALS FOR FOODIES

The Big Festival

With fare by Robin Gill, Neil Rankin, Jack Stein and Sophie Michell. **Aug 25-27**

Camp Bestival

Zoe's Ghana Kitchen reigns supreme, but don't miss Makatcha. **Jul 27-30**

Festival No 6

Thai gurus Som Saa in one corner face off seafood gods Claw in the other - for healthy competition. **Sep 7-10**

Lost Village

Hawksmoor's Sunday Roast will cure a hangover by the lake. **Aug 24-27**

Standon Calling

Brunch is bottomless at Le Bun Diner with Bloody Marys galore. **Jul 27-30**

Wilderness

Book ahead to banquet à la Thomasina Miers, Yotam Ottolenghi and Nundo Mendes. **Aug 3-6**



Grub's up and coming

The gourmet gang have taken over festivals, and haute cuisine is a headline act in itself, says **Claire Coleman**

THINK of food at a music festival and it's not that long ago that the best you could have hoped for was a limp veggie stir fry –

mostly it was a staple diet of pucks of solid brown meat, unrecognisable as burgers, slammed in spongy white buns. But, as anyone who has been to a festival recently will attest, times they are a-changing, and the culinary offerings at this summer's big events are as much of a draw as what's happening on the main stage. From Hawksmoor at Lost Village, to Som Saa at Festival No 6 and even Yotam Ottolenghi at Wilderness, it's a veritable gourmet extravaganza.

One person who has witnessed the evolution of festival food is Nigel Birch. He describes himself as a food-trader curator and this year will be responsible for the food at a number of events, including Standon Calling, Hertfordshire's Glastonbury.

'I started working with some people who were fed up with greasy burgers and wanted something different, so we took a bunch of cool street-food guys from London's burgeoning scene to the Secret Garden festival,' he says. A decade on and festival food has evolved beyond recognition.

'We're a much more food

literate society,' says Birch.

'There's a wider variety of people to cater for – different tastes, different cuisine interests, different dietary conditions.'

And many of the people filling these festival sites tend to be food trucks, as they're used to working in a small space and pushing out a huge number of dishes quickly.

'Restaurants have all day to prep, cook and serve, but if you're a street-food trader, you probably have a window of three hours to make your money, so you know

how to serve as many people as possible as quickly as possible. It's a bit different at festivals such as Wilderness, where there are a huge number of catering options; it's almost a food festival rather than a music festival, and a trader may serve 100 portions of something.

But at BST, where there are 65,000 people and 60 caterers, you need to be doing 1,000 portions.'

And while cooking at a festival might sound a lucrative prospect, Birch warns that just because you've got a successful restaurant, doesn't mean you'll have a good festival stand. 'Last year we had Gordon Ramsay's Maze and Hix at BST; they're not coming back this year, they couldn't cope.'

But chef James Lowe, of east London restaurant Lyles, relishes

the challenge. He's taken his cooking to Festival No 6 and Wilderness and will be at Lost Village in Lincolnshire this year.

'You need to be smart. If you're doing super-tricky fiddly food with 11 micro herbs and it takes 15 minutes to plate, you probably shouldn't do it at a festival.'

Birch agrees. He thinks the secret of being a good festival food trader is to do one thing well. 'When you see a menu with ten items on it, you know they'll struggle and have horrendous queues. No more than four maximum; the more choice you have the longer people take to choose, the longer it takes to prep, and the more you have to prep.'

But festival food is as likely to be sit-down banquets and pop-up restaurants booked in advance these days – bringing great expectations. Little wonder, then, that when Andy George and his co-founders were setting up Lost Village, food was high on the agenda.

'We're now in our third year and from the start, it was all about delivering an experience that we were passionate about, and that goes for the food, too. We look for people who do things differently.'

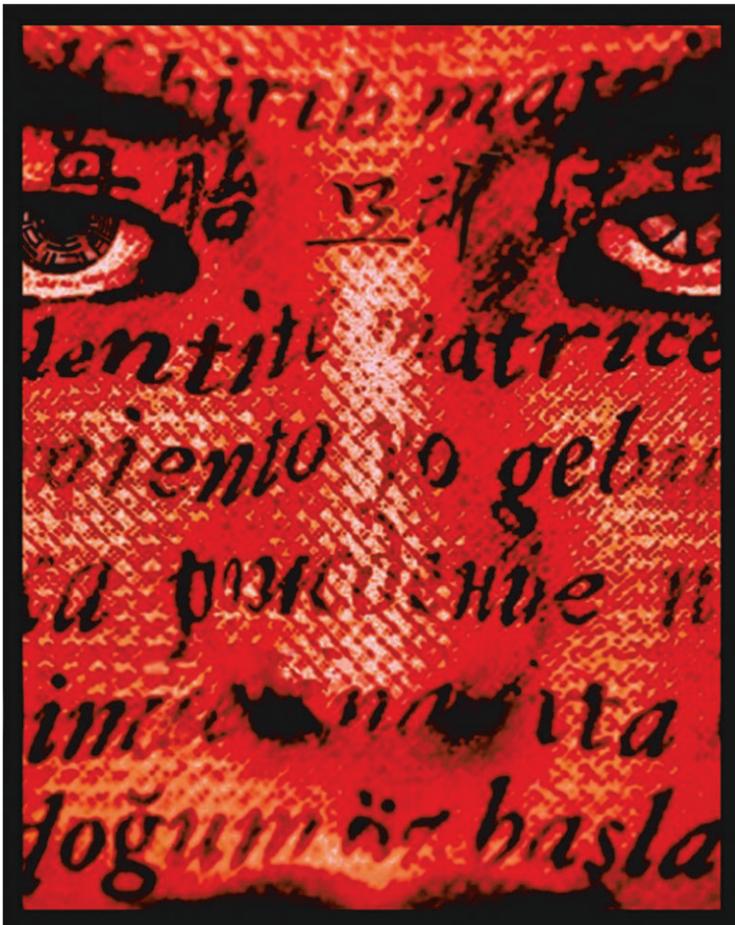
As well as having James Lowe hosting a banquet by the lake, they've landed a huge coup in persuading steak house giants Hawksmoor to go al fresco and bring their acclaimed Sunday Roast to the festival.

'I can't think of anyone better to be cooking the perfect hangover cure,' says George. Here's to that.



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