

HEARTY MEALS... IN A MOUTHFUL!

WHAT should you serve your guests this New Year's Eve? Traditional classics like Beef Wellington, Chicken Kiev, casseroles and pies are the height of party food fashion — but with a nifty little twist.

These hefty, filling dishes have all been turned into tiny canapes — a single mouthful that conjures up a whole hearty meal.

'People like these mini dishes because they are instantly recognisable,' says Caroline Hall, who knows a thing or two about canapes.

She is the co-founder of Rocket Food, a company that regularly serves small bites to the great and the good at venues such as the British Museum and Kensington Palace. This month, their Smoked Trout Royale was awarded Canape of the Year by Country Life magazine.

But given that most of us will be serving shop-bought rather than chef-crafted canapes at our parties, can the cheat's version measure up? How easy are they to prepare? And are you paying big bucks for petite portions?

We asked Caroline to blind taste test canapes from the biggest supermarkets.

BEEFY BITES

Waitrose 12 Mini Beef Wellingtons, £7
Cost per 100g: £3.04

Full-size comparison:

Waitrose Easy To Cook Beef Wellington, £12.99
Cost per 100g: £3.71

CLAIRE COLEMAN says: These are super-easy to prepare — just bung on an oven tray — and hurrah to Waitrose for designing all their canapes to be cooked at the same temperature.

EXPERT CAROLINE'S BLIND TASTE TEST: The pastry is good, really crispy, but there's not enough filling. Is it beef? It needs more of it. A beef puff? A beef pie?

Oh, I wouldn't have had it down as a Wellington. There's none of the pate or mushroom, and no real depth of flavour.

VERDICT: 6/10

BABY BURGERS

Waitrose 12 Cheese Burgers in Brioche Bun, £7
Cost per 100g: £2.69

Full-size comparison:

Heston from Waitrose Brioche Burger Buns, £1.39, and Waitrose Aberdeen Angus beef burger, £1.69

Cost per 100g: £1.92

CLAIRE SAYS: I was really surprised that these said microwaving gave best results. The buns tasted

Beef Wellington. Chicken Kiev. Fish pie. Mini versions of classic dishes are all the rage as canapes – our blind taste test reveals the yummiest for New Year's Eve

by Claire Coleman

soggy, there wasn't enough relish and it was all a bit average.

CAROLINE SAYS: I think it's meant to be a burger but it's really quite bland. It needs something stronger, or the acidity of a gherkin. I would be really disappointed if I'd bought these.

4/10

FISHY FLOURISH

Waitrose 12 Fish Pies in Charcoal Pastry, £6.50
Cost per 100g: £2.40

Full-size comparison:

Waitrose Fish Pie, £3.99
Cost per 100g: £1

CLAIRE SAYS: These are the star of Waitrose's show this year on the canape front — and they certainly look striking, if only because the grey pastry (it contains charcoal,

an ingredient said to have detoxifying properties) stood out from the rest of the beige food.

CAROLINE SAYS: This is a take on fish pie, isn't it? The middle is really quite nice. But the pastry's a bit bland and hard. I'd never have guessed it was charcoal pastry. What will they think of next? It's a good size, though. It can be eaten in one, and they look good.

6/10

PULL OF PORK

Co-op Irresistible Hirata Buns with BBQ Pulled Pork, £4.50
Cost per 100g: £2.45

Full-size comparison:

Co-op Mexican Pulled Pork, £4 and Co-op Burger Buns, £1
Cost per 100g: £1.29

CLAIRE SAYS: Although these

were done in the microwave, it was quite a faff. You had to heat the buns, then heat the meat then combine and drizzle with sauce. Tasty, but tricky.

CAROLINE SAYS: Barbecue? Barbecue pork? I like the bun, it's really soft, and the pork flavour is good with the sauce, but they just need a little something to lift them. If this had a bit of sliced spring onion inside, you'd be away.

7/10

QUICK QUICHE

Tesco Finest Vintage Cheddar And Onion Mini Pies, £5
Cost per 100g: £1.39

Full-size comparison:

Tesco Cheese And Onion Quiche, £2.20
Cost per 100g: 55p

CLAIRE SAYS: Another one that was easy to pop in the oven. They looked a bit anaemic but I liked the fact that the cheesy mixture was soft at the bottom but there was a bit of crispness to the top.

CAROLINE SAYS: I'm getting

crispy pastry and cheese. Vintage cheddar? It's simple, the flavours are lovely, although a touch of mustard would be good. It's pretty substantial — you need two or three bites at it, but it's delicious.

8/10

PINT-SIZED PIE

Tesco Finest 12 Steak And Tribute Ale Mini Pies, £5
Cost per 100g: £1.39

Full-size comparison:

Tesco Finest Steak And Ale Pie, £3.10
Cost per 100g: £1.24

CLAIRE SAYS: I quite liked the look of these. They're almost rustic enough that you could get away with saying that you made them yourself. And there was no faffing around.

CAROLINE SAYS: Is this a steak and kidney pie? Oh, steak and ale. It's very good pastry — possibly the best of the shortcrust pastry that I've tasted, but the ratio of filling to pastry isn't quite right.

7/10





Picture: JULIETTE NEEL

Party nibbles:
Our canape expert
Caroline Hall gets ready
to give her verdict

Aldi Seasoned Sausages, £1.89
Cost per 100g: 84p

CLAIRE SAYS: Cook the sausages for 40 minutes, microwave buns, cut open, put the sausage in, add the relish. I'd just do cocktail sausages! Much less hassle and a bit nicer.

CAROLINE SAYS: I'm guessing this is a hot dog — but it doesn't taste like pork. And mulled wine in the chutney? I wouldn't have known. There's a lot of bread here.

4/10

ALE AND HEARTY

Asda Extra Special 12 Mini Cottage Pie Bites, £3.50
Cost per 100g: £1.35

Full-size comparison:
Asda Extra Special West Country Beef Cottage Pie with Ale, £3.50
Cost per 100g: 63p

CLAIRE SAYS: I was sceptical about these. You had to prise them out of their cases and they literally seemed to be a chunk of mince with pastry on top. I thought they'd just fall apart, but they didn't. They were quick to heat up and tasty, too.

CAROLINE SAYS: Oooh, a cottage pie. But there's no pastry, how lovely. I'm amazed they've managed to make it hold together. Is there a bit of cheese in there? This is very impressive all-round.

8/10

YUMMY YORKSHIRES

M&S 10 Mini Beef Filled Yorkshire Puddings, £7
Cost per 100g: £3.76

Full-size comparison:
M&S Beef Yorkshire Pudding Pie, £4.50
Cost per 100g: £1.50

CLAIRE SAYS: These looked good, and though you had to heat the gravy they only took five minutes. I'd add a blob of horseradish though.

CAROLINE SAYS: It's quite big, isn't it? I stuffed it down in one but that wasn't very polite. It's obviously a Yorkshire pudding with beef, and an extra flavour — mushroom? Nice.

7/10

TASTY TACOS

M&S 12 Chilli Beef Cheese Tacos, £5
Cost per 100g: £2.69

Full-size comparison:
Chilli Con Carne Meal For One, £2.80, and Mexican Taco Kit, £3
Cost per 100g: £1.54

CLAIRE SAYS: Confession: I forgot about these and left them in the oven far too long, so it's to their credit that they still tasted okay.

CAROLINE SAYS: I definitely got a hit of chilli beef and the taco is nice and crispy too. If I was serving these, I'd add a bit of sour cream on top and a sprig of coriander — that would give it a bit of colour.

8/10

TANGY TARTLETS

M&S 10 Goat's Cheese Tartes Tatin, £7
Cost per 100g: £2.92

Full-size comparison:
M&S Caramelised Onion & Soignon Goat's Cheese Tartlets, £3.25
Cost per 100g: £1.10

CLAIRE SAYS: These tasted delicious but I'd have been having a breakdown in the kitchen because you have to flip each individual tart out of its case and all the onion was stuck to the bottom. Nightmare.

CAROLINE SAYS: I'm getting goat's cheese and red onion. A tart? I like the sweetness of the onions and it works well with the acidity from the goat's cheese. I'd serve with a sprig of parsley or fresh thyme.

7/10

FINGER-FOOD KIEVS

Sainsbury's 10 Mini Chicken Kievs, £3
Cost per 100g: £1

Full-size comparison:
Sainsbury's Garlic Chicken Kiev, £4.25
Cost per 100g: £1.09

CLAIRE SAYS: These were easy enough to prepare but I wasn't wowed by the flavour and texture. Obviously you can't have melted butter in the middle as it would go everywhere, but this was a pretty poor imitation of a Kiev.

CAROLINE SAYS: I think they would call this a mini Chicken Kiev. It's not hugely garlicky, but then you probably don't want that at a drinks party. A bit of Maldon sea salt on the top before serving would help.

5/10

HOT POTS

Aldi Mini Casserole Pots, £3.29
Cost per 100g: £1.48

Full-size comparison:

Aldi Beef Lancashire Hot Pot, £1.99
Cost per 100g: 44p

CLAIRE SAYS: The idea was excellent — if a little fiddly. Beef brisket came in a sealed pouch which you cook, shred, mix with the gravy provided and place in the casserole-shaped pastry cases, then top with stilton crumbs and cook for another five minutes. But almost all of the gravy reduced to nothing.

CAROLINE SAYS: This is very dry. I don't really know what it is at all. With the blindfold off, I could guess that it was beef, but a casserole? Where's the gravy? And stilton crumble? I had no idea. What a pity. They've made such an effort with the casserole shape, and the size is really nice, but it's just too dry.

4/10

DINKY DOGS

Aldi Hot Dogs & Mulled Wine Chutney, £3.29
Cost per 100g: £1.42

Full-size comparison:
Aldi Brioche Hot Dog Rolls, 99p;

READY-MADE COCKTAILS TO MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE A PRO



« **TOTALLY TROPICAL**
Spiced Pineapple & Lime Daiquiri
50cl, £10, M&S

THIS is great for tropical cocktail fans. Lots of pineapple, spice and lime. Whoosh in a cocktail shaker and pour over ice into a glass. You could even add a pink umbrella. ★★★★★

BRITISH TWIST ON A CLASSIC COSMO

» *The Cocktail Picker's Club Strawberry & Rhubarb Cosmopolitan*
700ml, £16.99, cocktail-pickers.myshopify.com

A GEM. Really fresh and just sweet enough without being sickly. Shake like crazy and pour into a chilled martini glass. The bottle is great, too. ★★★★★



THREE TREATS IN ONE

« *Tipplesworth Cocktail Mixer Kit*
£12.95, 31dover.com
MIXERS for raspberry mojitos, espresso martinis and bramble cocktails. You have to add the right spirit to each one, so there's some stirring and shaking. All of them benefit from a good garnish. ★★★★★



« **NAUGHTY NEGRONI**
Fatman's Aged Negroni, 50cl £36, fatmanandfriends.com

NEGRONI fan Matthew Smallbane created this blend for his London restaurant. The flavours are reassuringly robust. Just find a clean glass and add lots of ice and a slice of fresh orange. ★★★★★



SWEETLY SOUR

» *Tails Amaretto Sour* 100cl, £20, tailscocktails.com
BY ADDING lemon and lime, Tails has created a perfect pre-dinner way to have amaretto without it being too sweet. Bung ice in a cocktail shaker, add your preferred measure and shake before pouring into a tumbler. Delicious. ★★★★★

FLING WITH NO ZING

« *Jose Cuervo Margarita Mix*
100cl, £5.95, 31dover.com
I'M NOT keen on this pre-mixed party in a glass. You add one part tequila to three parts margarita mix. But it didn't have the zing that a good margarita should bring. I'd rather take the time to make my own. ★☆☆☆☆

By HELEN MCGINN