



Photos by Chloë King

RAW FOOD

at Tilton House

As one who often claims to ‘love food too much to limit my options,’ I’ve come to Tilton House for a Raw Food Creation Weekend, to find out what I’m missing.

My abiding memory of vegan cuisine is of Bonnington Cafe in Vauxhall. It had been a squat café in the eighties, and when I found it ten years ago it still had some of that vibe. Maynard Keynes’s former residence, now a B&B that specialises in wellbeing workshops and retreats, couldn’t be more different from that shabby little café. The house is cleanly designed, airy and opulent, nestled in deep countryside just a stroll from Charleston.

Teaching the workshop is John Bayley, the resident head chef and proprietor of the Lewes vegetarian, vegan and raw catering firm Cashew. John apprenticed with Chad Sarno at his acclaimed London restaurant Saf, and has over ten years’ experience making meals taste good, without meat. As I introduce myself to the other members of the group, it becomes apparent that everybody else seems to have been ‘into raw’ for some time.

I learn from them that raw is about promoting health by eating food ‘as alive and nutritionally rich as possible,’ which in a strict sense means avoiding anything processed, frozen or heated beyond 46°C. Our conversation is peppered with talk of carcinogens, free radicals and enzyme inhibitors. This isn’t the cooking my granny taught, it’s more like science. While John demonstrates how to make crackers from almonds, golden flax seed and root vegetables, I’m amused to find that our ‘lab kit’ includes a dehydrator. The almonds - as with most of the nuts and seeds

used in raw cooking - are soaked overnight to activate enzymes that make them more nutritious and easier to digest. John grinds the ingredients finely, spreads the mixture thinly onto a Teflex (antimicrobial) sheet and dehydrates it for four-six hours. The resulting, futuristic crackers are light, crisp, powerfully savoury, and unlike any others I’ve tasted.

We then make soft ‘cheese’ with a base of soaked, ground cashews mixed with a probiotic and left overnight. We experiment with seasoning: adding nutritional yeast flakes for ‘cheesiness’, herbs and spices. The preparation involves a lot of stirring, tasting, and beautiful presentation, but with the cheese at least, I’m finding it hard to suspend disbelief.

We eat this for lunch in the conservatory, along with some seriously good salads and John’s chocolate tart, which defies all my expectations of ‘worthy’ food. It’s so delicious I feel sad I can’t attend day two, which is all about sweets.

Then in the afternoon we are shown some more recipes and let loose in the kitchen. As a keen and fairly experienced cook I find it enlightening how much of a novice I suddenly feel. Apprehensively holding a beetroot, it dawns on me how much I rely on traditional methods to create flavour, texture and balance, then I get in touch with my inner kid, and get grinding.

A whirlwind of chopping and blending results in a buffet as bright as one of Vanessa Bell’s bedrooms, that fills me with ideas to take home. *Chloë King*
The next Raw Foods Creation Day is 29 May. Evening classes focussing on plant-based fine dining run on the first Tuesday of every month.