

**MARMALADE MAKER** Clare Gault never imagined a life potting up preserves. Her earlier career was spent on the seas – building (and later crewing) yachts in Mallorca, training as a flight engineer on cross-Channel hovercraft, controlling port traffic with the Maritime and Coastguard agency at Dover, and piloting ship-to-shore boats for cruise ships everywhere from the Philippines to the Antarctic.

'I often try to track back to where my interest in food first came about,' Gault says. While living on a boat during her 20s, she worked her way through a copy of Delia Smith's *Complete Cookery Course*, making meals for the other members of the crew. She also ran a beach café in Kent for 'a couple of fantastic seasons' when back on shore. But throughout her maritime career, she remembers, 'cooking was very much a hobby, just hosting

# Well preserved

Stirring up award-winning marmalades at home in Devon

friends for dinner or Sunday lunch.'

When she turned 40, in 2013, Gault decided to 'throw myself into food'. A six-month course at Ashburton Chefs Academy in Devon taught her the skills of a professional, but it was a year later, while working as a kitchen manager for a gourmet pie company, that she potted her first marmalade. 'We shared a business unit with a man who made chutneys and, with his mentoring, I started to test my skills.'

She prepared a pink-grapefruit marmalade for family and friends, and submitted a jar to the Dalemian Marmalade Awards, then promptly 'forgot all about it'. When it won Silver in the 'home-made' category, Gault was inspired to launch her business, Clare's, at the end of 2014. She has since won more than 45 awards, and still works from her kitchen table, 'with four or five pans on the go'.

Gault's Seville-orange marmalade with Dartmoor honey (a Double Gold-award-winner) calls for 1.6kg of oranges for 15 jars. The thinly sliced peel is simmered for a couple of hours to soften,

**From top** Clare Gault handmakes her preserves in small batches; she pairs Seville oranges with Dartmoor honey for one popular marmalade. **Interview by Amy Bryant. Photographs by Robert Darch**



before granulated sugar is added, along with half a kilo of honey, which she sources from a beekeeper near her home on Dartmoor. 'The honey softens the citrus tartness, and you can smell its wild-flower scent,' she explains.

Having brought the liquid to a rolling boil, Gault then looks for a set, which she tests by dropping a little of the mixture on to a metal spoon to see if it crinkles as it cools. She pots it in jars that she sterilises in the oven ('I live with constant blisters'), managing 100 jars a day, which are sold for £4.25 each. 'I'm never going to be a millionaire,' she says with a laugh.

Today her marmalade – including a version of the pink-grapefruit variety made with Exmoor gin, as well as her latest Seville recipe (starring Cornish sea buckthorn) – is sold in local delis and shops, and at Fortnum & Mason's Piccadilly store, in addition to being shipped across the world. 'Even the postman likes to come round to the kitchen to have a smell.'

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