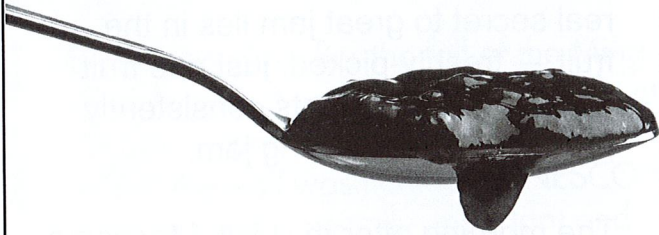


SATURDAY 14th JULY — FOOD WEEKLY

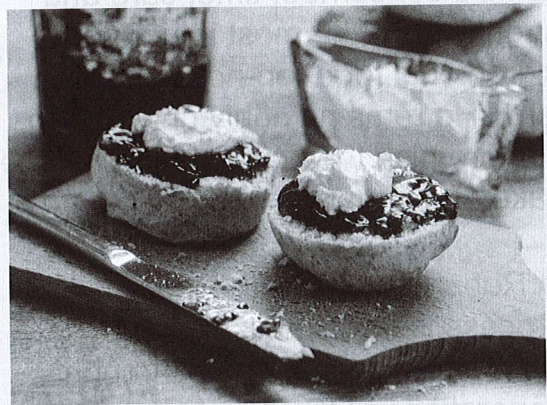


# Inside the World of Jam

*Reporter and self-styled jam enthusiast Benjamin Dejar lifts the lid on this much-loved conserve.*

I'll come right out and admit it: I'm a jam fanatic. I can't imagine a world in which my day doesn't begin with two slices of toast, topped with lashings of sweet, sticky jam. And while jam is mostly a breakfast food, I find it equally irreplaceable elsewhere. Without jam, a tea-time scone would be flavourless and disappointing, and I think we can all agree that a jam-free Victoria sponge would be an insult to cake lovers everywhere.


At breakfast-time I've often found myself pondering just how little I know about jam, despite the fact that I consume some every single day. So, armed with a pen and paper, I went to visit some of Britain's top jam-makers — fellow jam lovers who have taken their obsession one step further, dedicating themselves to making the very finest hand-made jams.



Scones are traditionally served with jam, as well as clotted cream or butter.

## Traditional flavours

My first visit is to Robert Jacobs, founder of Jam On The Range. When the season is right and the fruit is ripe, Robert, a retired

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farmer, retreats to the kitchen of his 18th-century Cheshire farmhouse, dons his apron and creates batches of hand-crafted jam. These spreads now have a small but devoted following in the UK, and Robert has recently ventured into international waters, with new customers in Germany and Switzerland.

His jams have received rave reviews from customers and critics alike, but Robert refuses to increase the number of jars he makes. As far as he's concerned, time, care and attention are the most important ingredients for a top-notch jar of jam. He remains nobly unwilling to compromise these values just for the sake of a larger profit.

In Robert's kitchen, the jam-making process is traditional: his recipes have been passed down through generations of the Jacobs family. He still uses almost identical techniques to his ancestors, although Robert admits he has "made a few tweaks" over the years in the name of perfecting the taste and texture.

When I ask him exactly what goes into his jam to make it so delicious, he chuckles heartily.

"If I told you, I'd have to tell everybody," he says. "And then where would we be?"

He does eventually give me one scrap of information. Apparently, the

real secret to great jam lies in the fruit — freshly-picked, just ripe fruit from top-quality plants consistently produces better-tasting jam.

The morning after my visit, I try some of Robert's classic strawberry jam with my breakfast, and struggle to stop myself from gobbling up the rest of the jar by the spoonful.

## New frontiers

Robert's flavours are traditional — he mostly produces strawberry, raspberry and blackcurrant, all of which are well-recognised flavours that appear regularly on the breakfast table.

But for Lara Fontesca, who owns and runs jam company Urban Jam, there are no limits to the flavour combinations that can go into a jam.

Urban Jam HQ is in the kitchen of Lara's Manchester home. She has transformed it into a full-time workspace where she can cook up her unusual jams, which range from the relatively run-of-the-mill (such as the bestselling apple and cinnamon flavour) to the outlandish.

"I'm working on a tomato ketchup flavour at the moment," explains Lara as we tour her bright, airy workspace. "If nothing else, it'll completely transform the way people look at the humble chip butty."

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Lara Fontesca experiments with alternative flavours.

Lara began crafting her own jams three years ago, when her children became bored with the spreads she purchased from her local supermarket.

“Setting up the business has been a huge challenge,” she tells me, “but I’ve never been tempted to give up. For me, there’s nothing more

rewarding than using my imagination to transform the humble pot of jam.”

The jams that she makes are nothing short of spectacular. I’ll admit to grimacing in dismay when I heard that she wanted me to try her famous bacon sandwich flavour jam, but the explosion of flavour on my taste buds is more than enough to convince me of her expert skills as a jam-maker.

I end up with a large jar tucked into my bag for later, along with a few other flavours that caught my eye.

As I’m heading towards the door, I can’t resist asking Lara one last question, from one jam enthusiast to another: what is the secret to a truly brilliant jam?

“Patience,” she says without hesitating. “Patience and a working fire alarm.”

And, with that knowledge under my belt, I head out of Urban Jam HQ, already making plans for tomorrow’s breakfast.



*Open the flap for the start of the text.*