

gf

# opinion

12 pages of food issues, including teaching boys to cook and a look at Fairtrade

## Why Food is a Feminist Issue

This month we're celebrating our food idols, who have inspired our cooking and paved a path for the rest of us by promoting equality and fairness in the food world. With International Women's Day and Mother's Day in March, our idols suggest how we can all make a difference in our own way.

*feature* NATALIE HARDWICK *photographs* STUART OVENDEN





# The Pivot Book

## Susie Orbach

Psychotherapist, broadcaster, author and campaigner [@psychoanalysis](https://twitter.com/psychoanalysis)

Susie's 1978 book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, was a game-changer. Her 'anti-diet' guide scrutinised compulsive eating in a way that set the tone for decades of debate on the female body: 'I was slightly self-critical about my body image when I wrote the book, but when I compare that to what teenagers are like today, it wasn't in any way severe,' says Susie. 'Today nobody feels comfortable with their body and beauty is the only thing that matters. Social media has built on the fact that we've had 40 years of undermining women's bodies.'

Her work with the campaign group Endangered Bodies goes some way toward safeguarding against this. 'In 2015, we successfully challenged Facebook to take off the "feeling fat" emoticon. That was a real win.' The group's next target is cosmetic surgery apps for children.

Susie also runs a psychotherapy clinic – something her 2016 BBC Radio 4 show, *In Therapy*, draws upon – and has advice for people with a negative body image: 'There are a lot of commandments on the body these days. As a result, we often lose the capacity to know



when we're hungry and how to relish good food, so take time to rediscover appetite, desire and satisfaction.'

### What's the good news?

'More men are cooking, and in city centres it's easier to get hold of fresh food. Plus, everyone is so crazy about food that doing your own thing doesn't seem odd.'

### How can we all help?

'We need to stop telling people how great they look because they've lost weight – talk to each other about other attributes rather than our appearance. But the main thing is to learn to eat with pleasure – for some people, eating has become a form of torture.'

### My food idol

'It's the quiet work that never gets recognised that we should celebrate, so I'd say those women who've been trudging along trying to do their best, getting food on the table and looking after their kids and partners.'





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# The Maker

## Ruby Tandoh

Author, journalist and cookery writer [@rubytandoh](https://twitter.com/rubytandoh)

Fearlessly outspoken, Ruby, a finalist in 2013's *Bake Off*, has tackled food and feminism head-on. Her recent award-winning cookbook, *Flavour*, advocates eating what you want, when you want, and her critique of the 'clean eating' movement was one of the most talked-about pieces of food writing in 2016, and triggered an ongoing backlash against the fad.

'I think at the moment the prevalence of clean eating is a big concern for women in particular,' she says. 'The reframing of diets as some kind of quasi-spiritual, moralistic quest is really damaging for anyone who ever wants to have a normal, healthy relationship with food.' Drawing upon her first-hand experiences with eating disorders, Ruby spoke out after becoming riled by the new wave of health advocates: 'I saw how so-called wellness was gaining traction in the mainstream, and how it was providing an outlet for really dangerous, niche nutritional conspiracies, and it made me want to act. When you see people all around discussing how carbs make you 'heavy', or 'sluggish' - or how sugar is like crack - that's not conducive to a thoughtful, supporting culture around food and eating. It's all so sensationalist.'

### What's the good news?

'I'm really pleased that Instagram, and other social media and blogging platforms, have given women - primarily young women - a lot more sway in food circles.'

### How can we all help?

'By supporting the work of women and also people of colour in food. Also, don't put your money in the pockets of faddy diet movements - donate to food banks instead.'

### My food idol

'The American writer Nora Ephron. She absolutely loved food, and it plays a big part in her movies and essay collections. She's the greediest, rudest, most arrogant, entitled, loud-mouthed woman I've ever read. I love her.'





# The Chef



## Monica Galetti

Restaurateur, chef and TV personality [@MGaletti01](#)

She's been a senior chef at London's esteemed La Gavroche, a BBC *MasterChef* judge, a working mum, and now a restaurant owner, with her debut venture, Mere (open this month) – but Monica says she never felt the need to prove herself as a female chef.

'I don't know why gender has to be made into a big deal. For me, it's about getting a kitchen crew together, not about the guys working better than the girls. It's a male-dominated world, and has been since I started, but I believe that once you have a chef's jacket on, it's fair game for anyone.'

Monica, who was born in Samoa and part-raised by aunts in New Zealand, sees herself as a feminist. 'I'm a huge supporter of women, and would love to see more in my kitchen. Feminism is a way of setting an example to your daughter: you can be strong, wear what you want and earn as much as the guy next to you. There's too much pressure on our little girls to be perfect and slim. Just let them be, let them live – let them eat.'

### What's the good news?

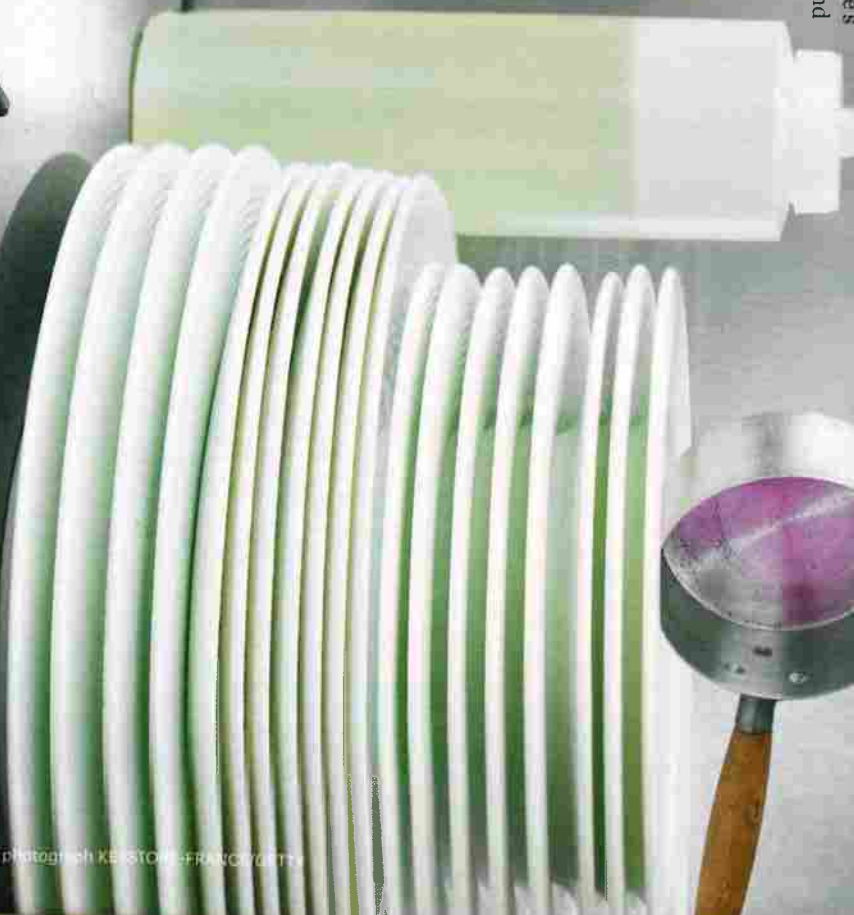
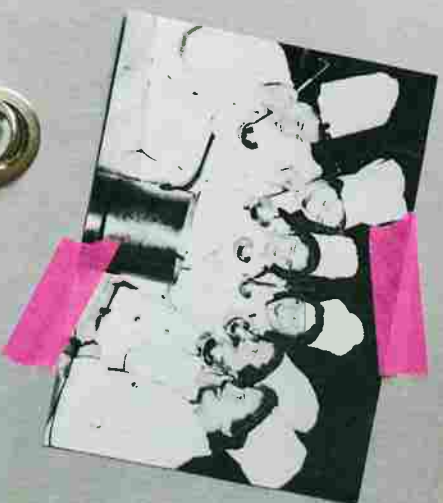
'We now have great role models like chefs Claire Smyth and Angela Hartnett. There aren't as many in the high-end of restaurants as there are men, but lots of women are doing their thing in food, they're just not as well-known.'

### How can we all help?

'By showing that it's possible to work as a chef and that it's not as scary or tough for women as it used to be. I think a lot of establishments are trying to offer more flexible working hours, which helps.'

### My food idol

'My mom and my aunts, because they cooked delicious home food, and I think of that now and get homesick. Also Rachel Humphrey, the first female head chef at La Gavroche. She's amazing.'







# The Campaigner

## Carmel McConnell

Founder of Magic Breakfast ([magicbreakfast.com](http://magicbreakfast.com)), MBE, campaigner and social activist [@MagicCarmel](https://twitter.com/MagicCarmel)

Charity powerhouse and lifelong activist Carmel founded Magic Breakfast in 2003, which provides breakfasts for over 30,000 vulnerable school children in the UK. Each day, the charity delivers 467 schools with porridge, orange juice, bagels and cereal. It costs only 22p per child, but has been proven by a recent study to hugely benefit classroom learning.

'It felt incredibly Dickensian to have children missing their studies because they were hungry,' she says. 'In England, there are half a million children who arrive at school too malnourished to learn - 22p opens up four hours of learning. It's a no-brainer.' Carmel witnesses food poverty on a daily basis. 'Mothers take on a higher proportion of child-raising than men and are more likely to be missing meals.' She compares the challenges of running a family budget to those of managing a business. 'Women are the home economists and look after households on a tiny budget, juggling things and making cool judgement calls to make sure it all works. I think that's a genius talent. We should put up a statute to the working man who gets things done on no money.'

### What's the good news?

'One big thing is The School Food Plan, which has improved school food standards and provided universal free school meals for infants.'

### How can we all help?

'Make sure you're as kind to yourself as you can be. You can't save the world if you haven't bothered to save yourself. Everything radiates out from that.'

### My food tips!

'Prue Leith, Jeanette Orrey, the school cook who got Jamie Oliver into the school food movement; and writer Bee Wilson. Also, my mum Patricia was a Cordon Bleu chef. She died when I was nine, but she gave me a lifelong love of food.'



# The MENTOR

## Valentina Harris

Writer, broadcaster and founding president of Les Dames d'Escoffier London chapter. Her latest book, *Risotto! Risotto!* (£20, Absolute Press), is out now [@ChefValentina](#)

With over 40 years in the food industry, Anglo-Italian chef Valentina started her career in the tough kitchens of Rome. 'When I qualified in the Seventies, I witnessed the unbelievable behaviour that was apparently deemed okay in a kitchen environment: the bullying and brash machismo that male chefs all too often display.'

The work of Les Dames d'Escoffier International resonated with her because of these experiences. 'The organisation - named after the philanthropic social campaigner and chef Auguste Escoffier, whom Valentina calls 'the original kitchen feminist' - is a global collective of influential professional women who offer support, mentorship and funding for women in the industry.'

'The situation has improved for women since I started out, and they are now much braver in coming forward, but you still hear horror stories, and lots of women end up leaving the industry. We get them to believe in themselves, and also to speak out.'

### What's the good news?

'There are many more women now respected as chefs in their own right, but still not nearly enough. Also, the emergence of women as cheesemakers, winemakers, brewers and food entrepreneurs can only be a good thing.'

### How can we all help?

'We should be more vocal when witnessing discrimination, such as a lack of female representation on TV shows. We all watch programmes like *Great British Menu*, but how many people question why there are always so few women on the shows? We should write to the producers, use the power of social media or start a petition.'

### My food idol

'The writer Anna Del Conte, who, like me, has worked so hard to promote the values of Italian food and the philosophy behind it. Also, Angela Hartnett and Kim Woodward, the first female head chef at The Savoy Grill.'

