

DANIEL DE LA FALAISE

Interviewed by [Eduardo Gión](#)
Portrait courtesy of [Molly de la Falaise](#)



Daniel de la Falaise was one of the most relevant models of the 90's and has been photographed by the greatest. Then his life took an interesting twist. He became the right-hand man to his famed uncle Mark Birley working as a chef in his restaurant, Harry's Bar. In this exclusive interview he opened up about food, the sex of the vegetables, his new book, and his grandmother, the great Maxime de la Falaise, who was Warhol's muse and a key person in Daniel's life.

*"If anybody even tries to whisper the word 'diet'... you can go f*ck yourself."* Jennifer Lawrence

“When I am leading a brigade of cooks, I am a chef. Cooking is a craft”

They say you are the most elegant chef in the industry...

Surely there are plenty of elegant chefs: Alice Waters for instance. She is the very essence of elegance. We were taught as children that manners don't cost you a penny... that life's challenges present the opportunity for simple, neat, and graceful solutions.

Did you perform in a play with the great English actor Michael Gambon besides being a model?

Yes, 20 years ago, I was in a play with Michael Gambon - a four hander (Michael, Alec McCowan, Sarah Woodward & I), at the Aldwych Theatre, in London's West End. A dream come true, I had fallen under his spell years before; breath taken by the epic intimacy of his stage craft. Eight shows a week for six months. It was an extraordinary journey and exhilarating fun. We played to a thousand people a night, the Prime Minister, the Prince of Wales, Lauren Bacall, they all trolled through. Sir Michael is a wicked and mischievous man, a master “corpser”, he throws his voice to the edge of your ear and whispers obscenities the moment you need to concentrate.

You were photographed by artists such as Steven Meisel, Mario Testino or our mutual friend David LaChapelle. Can you talk a bit about that experience?

I was lucky to work with some great photographers too which was an insight to the world behind the lens and encouraged me to pick up a camera myself: Arthur Elgort, Max Vadukul, Richard Avedon, Steven Meisel, Bruce Weber, Francesco Scavullo, Deborah Turbeville, Mario Testino, and many others including of course the Crow.

How did you first get interested in becoming a chef?

Life on stage and in front of the lights was fun and I learnt a lot, but one was only ever an element of a production. The kitchen offered me the opportunity to fine tune a sensory project from beginning to end: from the soil to the plate, from the garden to the palate of the customer.

Did you start working on the premises of your

“The kitchen offered me the opportunity to fine tune a sensory project from beginning to end”

uncle Mark Birley place called Harry's Bar?

Yes, uncle Mark gleefully thrust me into the kitchens of Harry's Bar to see how long I'd last. I completed my apprenticeship under the tutelage of the Milanese tyrant and culinary genius, Alberico Penati.

When did your interest in food begin?

Cooking and gardening have long been family passions, and “to cook” the action, that has always congregated us.

You use only source products without intermediaries, buy directly from people who work in their orchards, make their honey, or bread. Don't you believe in markets?

I love markets, especially if the people trading at them are independent producers.

What products do you grow and grow in your garden and farm?

Essentially herbs; I am surrounded by a wealth of peasant producers, masters in their own way of some particular delicacy.

Tell me which foods are suitable for each sea-

son, what are you mostly using in the summer?

My wife Molly and I live in peach country. This time of year: a tomato, sweet onion, and white peach salad dressed with olive oil, *fleur de sel*, seasoned with a dusting of flowering basil makes for a happy addition to the lunch table. And melon country: a chilled melon and cardamom soup served with an iced blanc de blanc is a good way to calibrate the temperature and palates of summer dinner guests. For breakfast: figs and prosciutto, a garlic or a ginger fried egg, with grilled sourdough and salted anchovies that have bathed overnight in olive oil and parsley. And fruit: damsons, plums, mirabelles, figs, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, peche de vigne... according to our two-year-old son all these are more than welcome at any time of day or night.

Speaking with Ferràn Adrià for the previous issue of ODDA, he told me that he is not an artist but a craftsman. Do you believe that cooking is crafts instead of art?

I am a cook. When I am leading a brigade of cooks, I am a chef. Cooking is a craft. A work of art should—to my mind—hit a universal note of beauty, and or emotion.

If there is an artist in the kitchen it is surely Mother Nature herself. Cooking is essentially about sustenance; that, and sensory marvel.

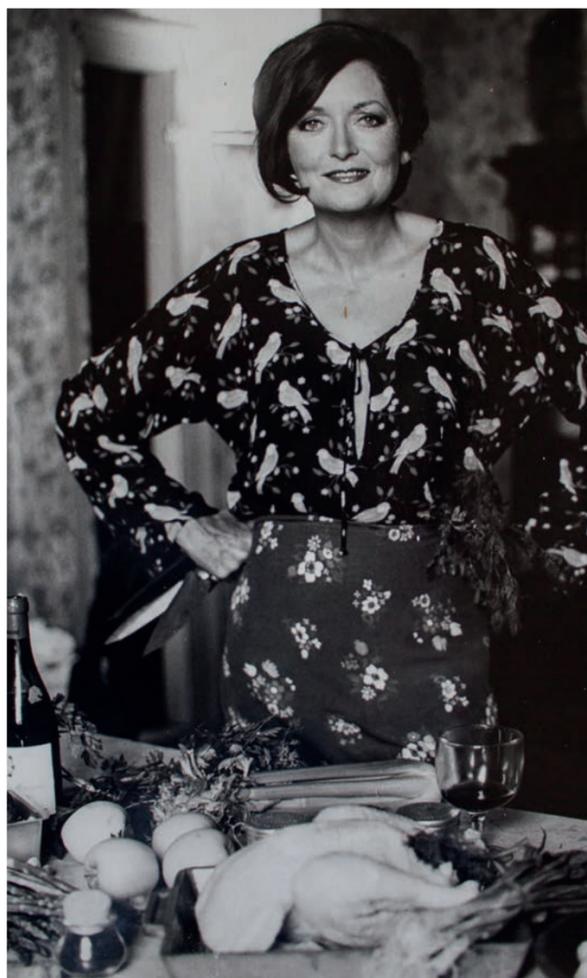
You have said that some foods are sensual and even sexual, erotic. Do you work on that concept?

Nature employs cunning seduction tactics. An ingredient will first jump at the eye, then the nose, and if you are lucky it will taste just as it smells. We experience food through our senses.

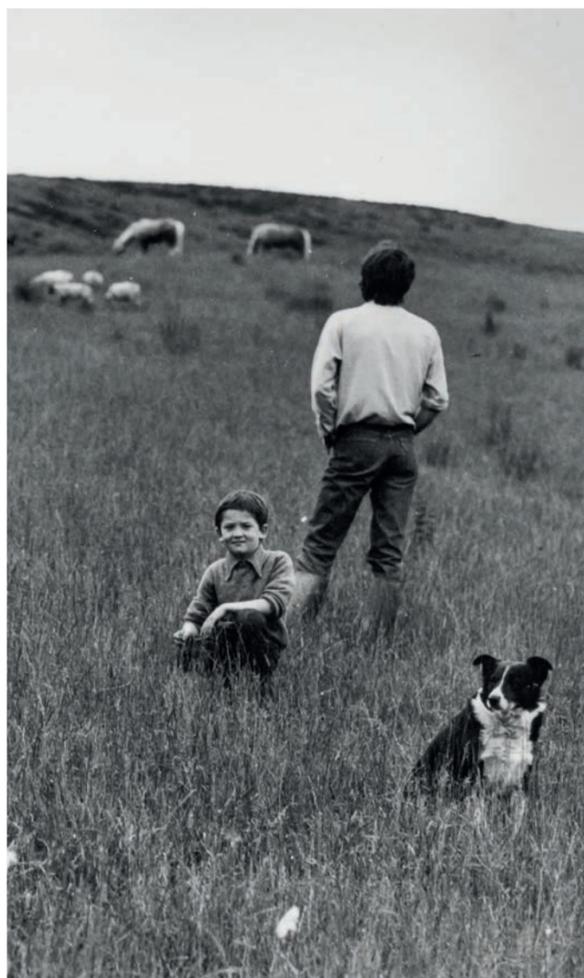
There is a wealth of natural flavour synergies that occur between the disparate realms of vegetable, herb and fruit: asparagus and tarragon, rhubarb and ginger, wild strawberries and flowering mint, a persimmon seasoned with acacia honey.

In my work as a cook, I find endless and curious joy in celebrating these natural associations across the transiting seasons, cultivating the notion that every vegetable keeps a mistress in the herb garden.

Reading interviews about you, I am surprised by the enthusiasm that you have when you



Maxime de la Falaise ©DLF Archives



Daniel de la Falaise and his father. Welsh moors ©Jean Shrimpton



Daniel de la Falaise and Christy Turlington ©Arthur Elgort

Speak about cooking and food. You have even often compared them with dancing. What is it about your kitchen creates so much happiness? Food should be fun. Cookery is too often taught in a way that prioritizes replication. This need not be so. Once you are familiar on a seasonal, sensual and textured level with the wealth of natural synergies that occur between the disparate realms that make up nature's bounty, and have mastered roasting, simmering, emulsifying, and are aptly extracting the vitality and essence from the ingredients at hand, then perhaps you are ready to cast aside the shackles of replication and improvise. Cookery, at its best, is a joyful journey of discovery and instinctive improvisation. The cook should live by his or her senses, in the moment, all whilst focused on converging food to table with the very minimum of transformation.

Tell us about your book *Nature's Larder: Cooking with the Senses*. The idea of my book is to suggest that curious and applied grazing equips the cook with a wealth of sensory references that in time act as guide and trigger to the imagination. They come to form a sensory flavour bank of sorts, one which in turn serves to crystallise cookery into a sensory vision that operates in two realms simultaneously: the outer reality of the produce available, and the inner potential of your imagination to compose menus in harmony to your mind's eye and palate. Naturally, the more you cultivate the inner realm, the more capable you become as a cook. You dare to improvise. As with everything, the challenge is to maintain a minimum level of curiosity and to have fun whilst you are doing it.

To finish, I would like to talk about you grand-

mother Maxime de la Falaise, model and muse of Warhol. She sounds like an amazing woman can you tell me a bit about her? Maxime was a wonderful cook. We spent a lot of time together in the kitchen. She wrote a food column for Diana Vreeland at *Vogue*, and a book entitled *Seven Centuries of English Cookery*, (the trials and errors of which were used to torture unsuspecting admirers for years). She threw legendary dinner parties wherever she landed: fanciful menus and eclectic guest lists. Her sister-in-law, Gloria Swanson, might turn up; Kenny Lane, Andy Warhol, Giorgio di Sant' Angelo, Fernando Sánchez, André Leon Talley were amongst her nearest and dearest. She cooked until she dropped. A vision of varnished nails clutching a clinking lipstick-stained glass of pastis shuffling about the kitchen.