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MEDIA24
 Published by Media24 Weekly Magazines. Printed by Pearl Media Cape.

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LET THE PHOTOGRAPHY COME AWAY FROM US! SA
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YOU NEWS

THINK your job is glamorous? Imagine cooking for the British royal family. For more than a decade Carolyn Robb worked in the kitchen at Kensington Palace in London, preparing meals for Prince Charles, Princess Diana, and Princes William and Harry. And yes, several times she got to cook for the queen!

Born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal, Carolyn went to the UK when she was 20 and studied at Tante Marie School of Cookery in Surrey. Her cooking skills caught the eye of Charles and Diana when she briefly worked for the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, who also lived at Kensington Palace. When a chef's position became vacant in the Prince and Princess of Wales' kitchen they invited her to fill the post.

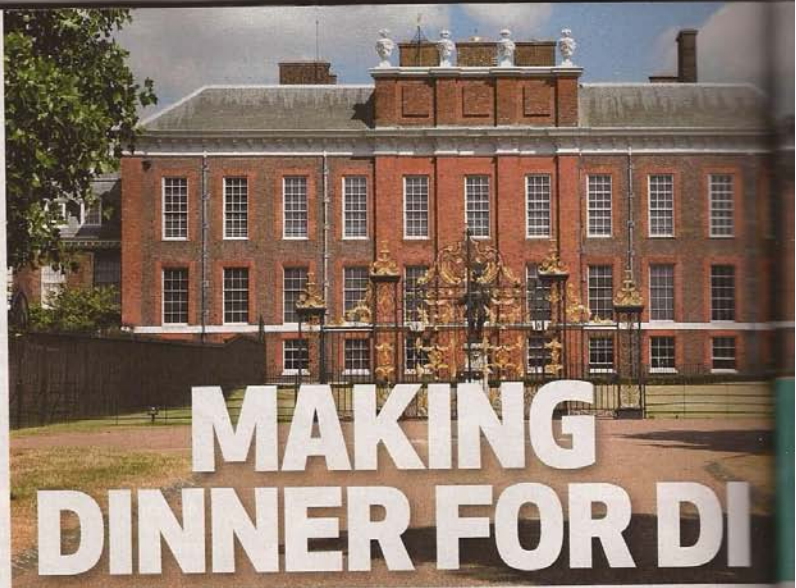
Carolyn recently released a cookbook, *The Royal Touch*, in which she shares some of the recipes she served when she was working at the palace between 1989 and 2000. We caught up with her to find out about her time in the royal household – what it was like working for Charles and Diana, what ingredients were forbidden and whether Wills and Harry were fussy eaters.

How did you feel on your first day on the job? Very excited to be there and quite nervous! I met Princess Diana first and she had a wonderful way of putting you at ease the moment she spoke to you. Both she and Prince Charles were very kind and caring employers.

Do you remember the first meal you served them? I remember making passion-fruit ice cream for dessert, but I don't remember the rest of the menu.

What did the royals like eating? What were some of their favourite foods? They enjoyed good home-cooking and much of the fresh produce we used was home-grown. A large variety of fruit and vegetables were grown in the kitchen garden at Highgrove House in Gloucestershire, Prince Charles' country estate. Vegetables included everything from lettuce, tomatoes and asparagus in the summer to leeks, potatoes and beetroot later in the year.

What was it like cooking for the royals? They were great to cook for and always

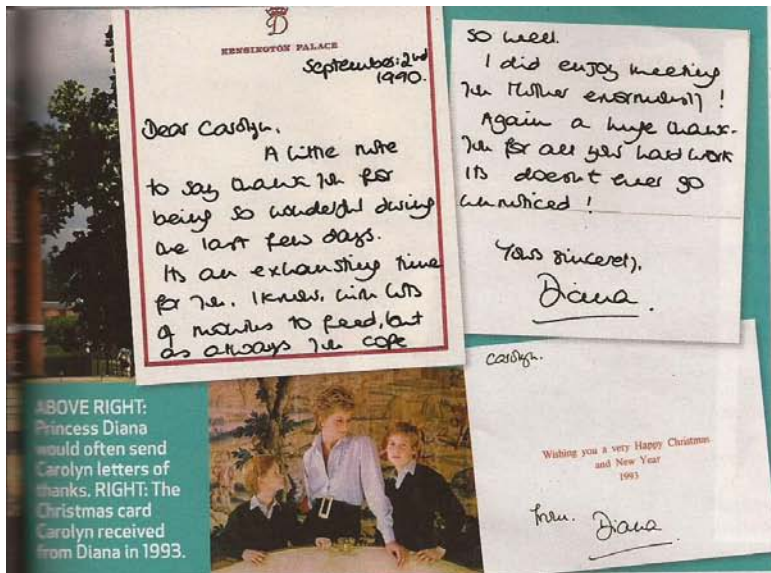


MAKING DINNER FOR DI

Carolyn worked at Kensington Palace until 2000 – now she's written a cookbook of recipes she prepared in the royal kitchen By JANE VORSTER



For more than a decade Carolyn Robb worked in the kitchen at Kensington Palace in London (ABOVE).



ABOVE RIGHT: Princess Diana would often send Carolyn letters of thanks. RIGHT: The Christmas card Carolyn received from Diana in 1993.

very appreciative. While Their Royal Highnesses (TRH) didn't come into the kitchen regularly, they were both very kind and thoughtful about writing a note of thanks when they had enjoyed something.

It was really a dream come true for me to be cooking for them. I vividly remember visiting Buckingham Palace with my father when I was seven. We stood by the black railings in front of the palace watching the Changing of the Guard, just like thousands of tourists do every year.

I'd never have dreamed that just 14 years later I'd be living and working at Kensington Palace, and visiting the kitchens at Buckingham Palace from time to time to meet with the chefs there.

I couldn't have been happier in the job, particularly as I was able to cook in the style that came naturally to me: simple home-cooking, with great attention to detail, prepared using a lot of home-grown seasonal produce. I'd like to think it was the very best of home-cooking.

Did you get to use really expensive ingredients? We never bought caviar or *foie gras* and generally didn't cook with any extravagant or super-rich ingredients. The food I made was simple, fresh, seasonal and healthy. When there was formal entertaining the presentation was perhaps more elaborate. This is what my book is all about – demonstrating that simplicity isn't out of place even in formal dining.

Were there any foods that they disliked and asked you not to cook with? Garlic wasn't popular! I think many people who

work closely with the public are careful about eating it.

What was the mood like around the dinner table at night? Was it very formal? The meals were served to the table by a butler. TRH lead incredibly busy lives and there were always members of staff around to do whatever was needed but each day was different depending on where they were and what they were doing.

What is the meal that really stands out for you from this time? When I cooked on HMY Britannia (the royal yacht) in Hong Kong at the time of the handover [in 1997 when sovereignty of the city was transferred from Britain to China]. We were there for a few very busy days. It was very exciting to be at the centre of such an historic event.

So obviously you weren't limited to cooking at Kensington Palace only – you travelled all over with the royals. Logistically this must have sometimes been a nightmare. Tell us about some of the challenges you faced sourcing ingredients and preparing them at other venues. Yes, I was incredibly fortunate and travelled extensively with TRH. The secret to a successful tour was meticulous planning beforehand. Some foodstuffs travelled with us and others were sourced locally, depending on where we were travelling to. TRH entertained even when travelling. I'd always take some basic kitchen equipment.

Did you ever cook for the queen? If so what

was she like? Yes, a few times. I met her on several occasions and my admiration and respect for her is huge – she's incredible.

I've heard that the queen packs her leftovers in Tupperware. Is it true that Prince Charles is also frugal? You're correct. His Royal Highness didn't like extravagance or unnecessary waste, so the kitchen was run carefully and food didn't go to waste.

Was Diana health conscious? She ate a very healthy diet, but I was never asked to count the kilojoules.

What were Wills and Harry like? Was it hard cooking for them or were they good eaters? As children they were very good eaters who tried new things – more than most children do! Many of the recipes in my book were enjoyed by the young princes. I cooked quite a lot of traditional British food.

Did you have any interactions with the princes? Did they ever pop into the kitchen to visit you? As young boys they loved to do things in the kitchen as all children do. As teenagers they wanted to know how to make a few simple dishes like bolognaise.

What are your favourite recipes out of your book? Many of my favourites are things that I grew up on, quite a few of which have subsequently been served in palaces and castles. I couldn't write a book without my favourite version of *melk tert*, which I find is well-received the world over.

If Prince William and Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, asked you to come and work for them would you consider it?

It would be an enormous honour to be asked but I have two young daughters who are my priority so it wouldn't be the right job for me now.

One of the reasons I enjoyed my time as a chef in the royal household was because I was single with no commitments so I could throw myself 100 percent into the job. I loved the schedule and all the travelling and was never rushing to get home to a family at the end of long days. ■



THE ROYAL TOUCH BY CAROLYN ROBB. PUBLISHED BY ACC EDITIONS, R450. FROM TAKEALOT.COM