

I'm writing this on a hot, very hot, day in August. I'm sitting on a comfy sofa in the corner of the garden room, willing the breeze to come in and save me from melting.

The cafe is in full swing, a classic sunny Rafikis day. The garden is full despite the heat, and though we are attempting to provide as much shade as possible, it is still scorchio out there. The cosmos in the Moroccan silver teapots are still valiantly flowering, but we've sadly lost our much anticipated Echium. The crazy huge Russian vine is providing beautiful shade for those willing to duck under and sit under its shedding arms.

Staff are bustling to and fro and customers seem happy chatting, reading, relaxing and enjoying the food. What a joy to see! I so appreciate the staff's ability to stay alert, lively, and polite on these hot days - it's so very easy to loose our minds and our usual calm disposition when we feel like we're over heating! Most of our customers are wonderful but some have certainly suffered in the heat and had unusual seasonal grouchiness! If this feels like you right now (haha!) take yourself to Ashburton swimming pool just down the road, it's a wonderful refreshing outdoor space, or to our heavenly and precious River Dart. Every time you swim there you feel renewed and capable of anything once more! We all escape the cafe and get there as soon as we can after closing.

I'm so proud of our kitchen team, working so hard and staying so positive in this heat - being near ovens and griddles in the kitchen is hard core - and I'm thankful for the wonderful food coming out on this season's menus. Ours is not a shouty kitchen or a stressy kitchen, but a very happy kitchen with the only issue of it being open is sometimes to lower our laughs or banter..

Head chef Ben is running a tight and happy ship keeping everyone cheerful, luckily for us Will has returned to us after a few years as head chef of the Mill on Dartmoor and plant enthusiast Heston has returned again having completed his Masters in Bristol, now taking on falafels with gusto. Sad to have said goodbye to Billie and Jas earlier in the summer (and for me sad to loose women in the kitchen to be honest!) but very happy to welcome super capable and calm Darren to the team. If you don't know me, Susie, Rafikis owner, I'm also found in the kitchen. I still love devising the menus and recipes, to be able to create with the seasons, and changing monthly (day menu) and weekly (Friday evenings) keeps us all on our toes.

I love Thursdays when the weekly organic produce comes in and this is the season of abundance! What a joy to work with! We are blessed with such great local growers around here and we endeavor to use them wherever possible. This is good for our community, for our local environment - using organic means less pesticides and more pollinators - and for ourselves - the food is tastier and healthier. Today Rachel from Cuddyford delivered an abundance of wonderful salad - such variety of leaves and flavours - as well as fantastic Thai basil that she's growing specifically for us to go in our Banh Mi. Yum! Aiden, from Green Ginger has provided us with fantastically flavoured Turkish chillies, raspberries and gorgeous tomatoes, Francesca from Sparkwell Orchard has arrived with boxes of cucumbers and long aubergines, lovely Matty drops off fantastic bunches of parsley and homemade apple juice from the Apricot Centre, and Riverford have delivered rainbow carrots, courgette, beetroot, and the sweetest sweetcorn. What a wonderful harvest! How lucky are we to access all this incredible food! My hope is that it doesn't go unnoticed in the flavours of our food this month. We've never claimed to be 100% organic but we have steadily been working towards being more organic and using more local produce than ever before.

Yes we have had to put our prices up but that is much more a reflection of rising costs in other areas - especially electricity, water, and wages - rather than changing our veg suppliers. In my opinion it's always worth paying more for locally grown and organic food.

We hope Rafikis demonstrates well that you can have delicious meat free food so that if or when you choose to eat meat you buy really good meat occasionally rather than some shitty cruelty and hormone filled cheap stuff every day.

Anyway back to the heat and the growers. I have such admiration for anyone able to produce anything at the moment. Such a hard time for farmers and gardeners with so little rain. Our Rafikis garden at home that usually provides us with masses of fresh flowers for the tables and loads of herbs for the kitchen is so dry and parched the yellow tones are more like an African landscape than the usual green idyllic Devon. My dahlias have struggled to bloom as I just cannot spare enough water for them this year ...you may notice an exceptional amount of fennel blooms in our vases, along with other hot weather lovers like verbenas they are doing really well! I have loved having Grace regularly come and volunteer in the garden recently. She can see the potential of the lovely plot like me, and I really hope others will join us to learn, get their hands in the soil, or just relax outdoors. I have been experimenting with cordial making with my friend Sarah this year, so on top of our usual elderflower cordial we also have lemon balm cordial, and kola syrup. This kola herb is very happy in the garden and when you rub the feathery leaves it emits a strong cola smell. We're infusing this syrup with vanilla pods and mixing it with Devonian sparkling water and Devon Cove white rum for a very Rafikis take on a classic rum and coke. Delicious! We've also made thyme syrup to which we will add elderberries for a medicinal tonic later in the year.

Last night we sat out in the field with our goats and watched the solar eclipse. Drinking pastis in the heat as the tone of the evening light changed from golden to an eerie grey was magical. Kian's welding mask looked mental but was great for seeing it progress slowly and clearly! Then we put a mattress out in the field and slept out to watch the Perseid meteor showers, sleeping near the tree under which our dear Sidi dog is buried. We lost her in July and miss her so very much. Dogs are very special to me, as you know we welcome them (well behaved) to our place and Rafiki was my first dog, who lived a long and glorious life of 17 years. His picture is in the corridor.

Summers like this we definitely don't feel like we need to go abroad but if you do, just a reminder, we LOVE postcards at Rafikis! It's such a shame that writing and sending postcards is a dying habit, overtaken by a quick whatsapp or insta post. They are not as magical as getting a little greeting from a far off place actually in the post..even if it does often arrive long after you! Many thanks to loyal regulars who have sent cards this year and to past members of staff who have headed off on exciting travels. Thanks recently to Max, Zach, Heidi, and Ruby who've sent love from far off places and great to have some of them back to work this summer before they head to Uni. Though Devon is heaven and I'm so grateful to call it home, the world is big and wonderful and exciting and we should all head off to remind ourselves

of this whenever and however we can. This year I have been so lucky to spend time in Brazil with my daughter - both at Rio carnival and in the rainforest, and with my husband walking in the Picos de Europa. Thanks to my wonderful team for holding Rafikis together and allowing me to follow these dreams.

One big dream that is happening...fermenting but not yet ready...is the Rafikis Cook Book!!

I'm trying hard to be disciplined with putting time into the writing now. We have wonderful photos coming from two great photographers - Hannah Wilde and Hannah Collins - so it should look great as well as being full of tried and tested Rafikis recipes that are often asked for. If you are interested in being told when the book is about to be published please sign up to the 'cook book coming soon!' link on our website.

www.rafikiscafe.co.uk

Another dream for Rafikis was to always help contribute what we can, whether financially or with our space and time, to our community and to the wider world community. I am proud we continue to support The Gabriel Foundation every month - this year so far we have donated £1562 from the sale of Indian dishes - but I would like to do so much more. I am keen to get cooking classes for kids off the ground but still haven't found a way to begin, and to support local groups and artists needing space or a stage. Get in touch if you have any ideas.

We loved hosting the wedding party for Simon and Susan in July (do get in touch if you're interested in a private event like this) and look forward to hosting Kudu Kudu band on 21st Aug for some happy African vibes dancing in the garden.

Sadly we have had to cancel our planned Fire Feasts so far as I just could face melting behind the bbq in this heat and it felt a bit silly risking a fire. We will postpone until Autumn for those - keep an eye on the board.

Our next Thali night (always popular South Indian feast) is scheduled for Friday 28th August from 6.30pm. Look out for details on the board or insta.

Thanks so much to Briar Bakery for unwittingly kickstarting my writing again! I LOVE their quarterly zine! What a wonderful thing! It's so great to feel we are not alone, to hear musings from other businesses in Ashburton, to hear snippets of daily thoughts, problems and joys. How fantastic it would be if we could hear more from other places, shops, cafes, restaurants. I'm loving the low tech approach, the move away from screen based stuff to real printed material that AI has had NOTHING to do with.

Lets stay rooted in community, rooted in our earth, joyful with what abundance we have around us and as positive and loving as possible in the face of uncertain futures, bleak forecasts and selfish or negligent politicians. As Sarah from Briar so eloquently puts it - 'a focus on each other and an investment in real human connection feels like the true rebellion.'

I've been listening to Rob Hopkins - Reimagining the Future and his positive message sweeps away the despair and apathy that it is all too easy to sink into. Give it a read or listen.

As ever for me, Mary Oliver speaks better than I ever could at expressing a deep longing.

Mornings at Blackwater by Mary Oliver

For years, every morning, I drank
From Blackwater Pond.
It was flavoured with oak leaves and also, no doubt,
The feet of ducks.

And always it assuaged me
From the dry bowl of the very far past.

What I want to say is
That the past is the past,
And the present is what your life is,
and you are capable
of choosing what that will be, darling citizen.

So come to the pond,
Or the river of your imagination,
Or the harbor of your longing,

And put your lips to the world.
And live
Your life.