

# A MASTERCHEF CHRISTMAS

Top chef, judge on TV's *MasterChef: The Professionals* and Merton resident, **Monica Galetti** tells Jenny Conlon about her latest project and what dreamy delights she's cooking up this Christmas

**A**s a judge on BBC fine dining series *MasterChef: The Professionals*, Monica Galetti may come across a bit stern, but the skilled chef and mother-of-one also has a softer side.

When we chat, she is busy preparing for the opening of her first restaurant but is also intent on organising a magical Christmas with her family.

"This year for Christmas we are in the UK and it will be a really precious one because it's the last one before our restaurant opens in January, so it will be really great to appreciate the time together with my little girl," she says.

Monica, 40, is one of a handful of top female chefs and has been vocal in the past about the difficulty of combining career and family. She worked her way up to senior sous chef after 12 years working at Michel Roux Jr's, two-Michelin starred Le Gavroche, but left last year to pursue her own projects.

Monica's new book *The Skills* came out in October and she is about to launch her first restaurant Mere (pronounced Mary), which is due to open in January.

"It's in the final phase at the moment and it's on Charlotte Street," explains Monica. "My food is very much ingredient-led. I like to create when I get the ingredients in front me and think, great, what can I do with this and bounce ideas with my head chef to create a menu."

"There's a bit of French influence on it and I am classically trained so there will be some influence from France but also a bit of European. I would like to introduce some of the influence my heritage too – New Zealand and Samoa."

With an busy 2017 ahead of her, the importance of time with family remains paramount for the chef. With Christmas a few weeks away, I just had to know what was on the menu in the Galetti household this year.

"We like a pretty traditional Christmas where we have roast goose and Christmas



pudding at the end. But for breakfast on Christmas Day we also love panettone, so that's a nice treat – actually, maybe I'll start that early on 1 December!"

As we talk all things festive, it's clear Monica loves Christmas. "I always look forward to Christmas, for me it's about time with my family and my closet and dearest friends." And thinking about her ideal guest list for her own table, she doesn't skip a beat.

"Two people I would invite would be a great aunt of mine, who I lost very early on when I started cooking. Oh, and I would bring Prince and David Bowie." It's been an exciting 2016 for the chef, she

muses, when I ask her to think back: "It's been a great year: my little girl is turning ten so we are celebrating with a 70s party; that's a big milestone for us.

"I've had amazing highlights, which involved a lot of travel this year from Singapore to Kenya and it's been very food orientated."

And what would she like to see beneath her tree on Christmas morning? "I always love it when Santa brings me a new pair of heels," she laughs.

We imagine Santa might just have more in store for her in the year to come. [Full](#)

■ Mere opens at 74 Charlotte Street, London in January 2017