



Art from the heart

Susie Grindey is making a living doing what she loves – painting vibrant and humorous pictures of her favourite places. **Helen Blow** caught up with her at her latest exhibition in the Forest of Dean

One look at a painting by Susie Grindey and the world turns into a better place. Her pictures show the world as a fun place, full of colour and light and the happiness associated with holidays by the sea, sunshine and the simple pleasures of life.

And now Susie has branched out into ceramics, the first examples of which are on show and for sale at her latest exhibition at Taurus Crafts in Lydney in the Forest of Dean.

Susie has been art mad since the tender age of six and has always known that it is what she wants to do.

"It's the perfect thing where my hobby and my passion is also my job and I still can't believe that I make a living from it," said Susie, 36.

A mum of two young children, she lives on the very borders of Gloucestershire in



Tutshill with her art teacher husband Simon.

She supplies 10 galleries with her paintings and prints, which she says are particularly popular in places like her homeland of Wales, and Bath.

"I have a particular love of coastlines and quirky architectural features and most of my work is based on the surrounding area," she said.

"I first photograph a scene I want to paint and then make a sketch of any specific features such as clock faces or typography."

Her paintings are in gouache or acrylics and have a cartoon-like quality and are brightly coloured.

"When I first started approaching galleries I thought they may not be interested because of the cartoon-like appearance of them but they have snapped them up," said Susie.

"Although my paintings are not realistic, I do try to remain true to the place I am trying to capture.

"My art degree was in animation and graphic design and I try to translate movement and energy into the paintings.

"I like to think that the paintings could spring to life at any time."

Susie loves bright colours, textures, fabrics, old bits of paper and anything that sparkles. And they all feature in all of her paintings.

"I also sew a heart into every piece of work I do because I only paint places I really like. I hope my paintings are cheerful and make people smile when they see them," she said.

Her new ceramic pieces have been made by husband Simon and decorated by her, so it's a real family business.

"This is a new venture for us and we have been trying it out in Lydney and hoping they appeal to people," she said.

"While my paintings can be expensive, the ceramics are priced so anybody can buy them as gifts or for themselves."

Susie's exhibition continues at Taurus Crafts until Monday, January 4. Contact the gallery on 01594 844841.

Fran Winston head's up one of the West's best-known cookery schools, and her new book offers an insight into the tricks of her trade, writes **Chris Rundle**

Give Fran Winston the right ingredients and she'll make you a chef. Take one suitably motivated candidate, add a dash of ambition and place in Fran's cookery school for four weeks and she'll turn you out someone capable of working almost anywhere as a commis or sous chef.

And this will be someone far better qualified than many of the so-called chefs to be found running the microwaves in pub kitchens – but more of that later.

Bristol-born Fran has been in charge one of the region's best-known schools in Falfield, The Gables School of Cookery, near Thornbury, for about 10 years, since when hundreds of students have passed through her hands.

Her mission has always been focused on breaking cooking down to its simple elements, on brushing away all the mystique, disabusing people of the notion that there is something magical about preparing good food.

And, despite the recession, the customers keep signing up, not merely for the intensive four-week foundation course but for the one-day sessions concentrating on Thai or Indian food, or cooking for dinner parties.

The Gables is also the place to head for if you have landed a job running a ski chalet or cooking on board a yacht – because Fran will be able to steer you off the main culinary piste and show you the ropes.

"We had anticipated that things would start falling off a bit with the credit crunch because even I can see that treating yourself to a cookery course is a bit of a luxury," she said.

"But – fingers crossed – we haven't really suffered. We have had a couple of courses which were not as full as we had hoped, but nothing worse than that."

And is she serious about claiming to be able to turn an amateur into a chef within four weeks?

"Certainly OK, you're not going to train up a head chef, someone who could run a big restaurant kitchen, in that time, but we do turn out people who are employable as a commis or a sous at the end and who could hold their own in most restaurants.

"And I do try to discourage them from just getting jobs in pubs which only deep-fry or microwave because they are much more highly qualified than that.

"I despair of pub food. I went out with my husband not long ago and I didn't really fancy eating meat so when I looked at the menu they were doing omelettes. I ordered one and they said they couldn't serve it because they had run out.

"I pointed out the fact that there was a grocery shop next door and they could just nip in there and buy some eggs.

"They said they couldn't do it: the omelettes were delivered ready-cooked and all they did was microwave them. There was no-one in the kitchen capable of cooking one – what do you think of that?"

Fran's mission to demystify cooking has now moved into a new phase. With her Melbourne-based sister Kathy Woods she has produced her first cookbook, and its title – *Simply 3-5* – should give you a clue as to its content.

For within its pages Fran has whittled down dozen of recipes to their bare bones, so they use no more than three, four or five ingredients.

"Of course, people can add more if they feel like it, because cooking is all about trying



Cook's cheats

It isn't a sin to open a tin of cannellini beans if you need to cook a meal and you haven't got time to soak dried ones overnight

Fran has trawled through thousands of recipes and trialled hundreds of them over the last two years to produce a reference book with which, she says, she is delighted.

And, she believes, it's hitting the market at just the right time, with the number of people cooking meals from scratch up by 40 per cent in the space of a year, partly as a result of financial pressure, partly as a reaction against bland, standard supermarket ready meals.

"More and more people are definitely moving back to cooking and eating proper food – and this is just the kind of book to get them started," said Fran.

"I didn't want to produce a cheat's book, telling people to use ready-prepared this or that and essentially just putting together food other



Simply 3-5 In action at the school, above. Left: Fran Winston and her new book, *Simply 3-5*

WIN A COPY OF FRAN'S BOOK, SIMPLY 3-5

Now you can win a signed copy of Fran Winston's book. Called *Simply 3-5*, it aims to equip the widest range of people with the simplest way to create "brilliant dishes".

Fran says: "The key is that these are simple, real recipes which are tried and tested and which guarantee delicious food for cooks of any standard."

We have 12 copies to give away and all you have to do is name two ingredients used in cooking a Victoria Sandwich and send your answer with your name, address and daytime telephone number to Book Competition, Wendy Best, *Western Daily Press*, Temple Way, Bristol, BS99 7HD by January 16, 2009.

"I have really kept it as simple as possible, but we're also offering an email service for people who might get stuck and need extra help and guidance.

"The more I encounter people who have simply no idea about cooking – one of my recent students was an 18-year-old who had never even peeled a potato – the more I am convinced that a book like this is just what is needed at the moment."

Terms and conditions: The first 12 eligible entries drawn at random after the closing date will each win a copy of the book. Standard *Western Daily Press* terms and conditions apply – see public notices on Wednesday or log on at www.thisisbristol.co.uk/competitionrules