



Off Menu – Ep 227 – John Robins (Live)

Ed Gamble

Well, welcome back to the Off Menu Live Tour Show Episode Bonuses.

James Acaster

And this is the second of our Bristol Hippodrome Residency episodes.

Ed Gamble

We call them 'residencies', yes.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

It was recorded at the Bristol Hippodrome on 12th October 2023, with our brilliant guest, John Robins.

James Acaster

John Robins. We love John Robins so much, very excited to hear his dream menu.

Ed Gamble

We'd already had Elis James. Time to complete the set.

James Acaster

We'd already had Elis James, which was, like, that's what you have to do. If you want to get John, you have to put up with Elis first.

Ed Gamble

Yes, it's the package deal.

James Acaster

Yes. So luckily it came good, and we got what we wanted out of the deal.

Ed Gamble

Yes, we did.

James Acaster

And we got John.

Ed Gamble

We got Bobbins.



James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

There's call-backs, as always, to the first half, but please don't worry about that. Don't get your knickers in a twist.

James Acaster

Don't worry about it. And the audience, on the night, as a secret ingredient for John, chose baked beans.

Ed Gamble

Baked beans. Which is quite a big secret ingredient.

James Acaster

The musical fruit. So, you know, John likes music.

Ed Gamble

John likes music, John has a very good routine about farting, so who knows, what will John say? I mean, we know, we were there.

James Acaster

Yes, we know, we were there.

Ed Gamble

Yes. This is the Off Menu Menu Live of John Robins.

James Acaster

John Robins.

Ed Gamble

Welcome to the Off Menu Podcast, taking the lasagne sheets of humour, pouring over the bolognaise sauce of the internet, adding the béchamel of friendship, and creating a podcast lasagne which is a fucking pie, unlike the ones in pubs.

James Acaster

That is Ed Gamble, my name is James Acaster, together we own a dream restaurant, and every single week we invite a guest in to choose their favourite ever starter, main course, desert, side dish, and drink. Not in that order. And this week our guest is John Robins.

Ed Gamble

John Robins, very exciting. Very excited to finally have John on the podcast.



James Acaster

It's a long time coming, we cannot wait to hear John's choices. You all know the secret ingredient already, keep that in your heads, but for now, here it is.

Ed Gamble

The Off Menu menu of John Robins.

James Acaster

John Robins.

Ed Gamble

Well it's our first-, of course, I should have known, the first live guest to bring a printout of his menu with him. Of course.

John Robins

Yes. Did it on my laptop, and it's all centre-aligned, like a proper menu.

James Acaster

Sorry.

Ed Gamble

Sorry. Yes.

John Robins

Has he done a guff?

Ed Gamble

We can't start now, sorry. Yes, because James is a genie, so he needs to make his proper entrance. John, feel free, if you want to rub the lamp. Otherwise the audience can rub the lamp with their minds. Would you like to physically rub the lamp, or should we leave that up to the audience's minds?

John Robins

I'd quite like to physically rub the lamp.

Ed Gamble

Okay, well please, you are most welcome to physically rub the lamp.

John Robins

Which end?

James Acaster

Surprise me.



Ed Gamble

It's a very sensitive lamp so, sort of, wherever you rub it, it's going to explode. The tip's always a good-

John Robins

Well, there's a, sort of, tawdry option, isn't there?

Ed Gamble

Yes, there is, yes.

John Robins

But I'm not going to start this gig in the gutter.

Ed Gamble

Unfortunately we've already done that, John.

John Robins

Yes, I tried to avoid listening earlier, because I didn't want to hear what the secret ingredient was.

Ed Gamble

Good man.

John Robins

But I did listen for about two seconds, heard you saying, 'You fuck a beetroot, it makes your dick go red-', and then I turned it off.

Ed Gamble

So if you just want to wank off the neck, that'd be great. Cheers, John.

John Robins

I'm rubbing. Oh my G-

James Acaster

Welcome, John Robins, to the Dream Restaurant, we've been expecting you for some time.

Ed Gamble

Very exciting, big jump out of the lamp that time as well. And I love to see someone rub the lamp and then immediately run away.

John Robins

Well it was more than I expected. You've really pulled out all the stops here, I have to say.

James Acaster

Thank you, John. The banter before was a little bit stressful on the old knees.



Ed Gamble

Yes, we've not done much banter while James has been in the lamp before.

John Robins

Oh, okay.

Ed Gamble

But he's been doing yoga, you know? The guy can squat.

John Robins

You've got a bit of lamp cramp.

James Acaster

Yes, I've got some lamp cramp, and it's a bit damp in there.

John Robins

Yes. You've got some damp lamp cramp.

James Acaster

I've got some damp lamp cramp, and no mistake.

John Robins

Well I was just going to say, because you don't often print stuff you've written off anymore, I did spend an inordinate amount of time on the fonts. I went through all of the fonts in Word, and there's a lot of them. You get a little preview of them. Some of them look nice in bold, some of them lose a little bit of the je ne sais quois in bold. And I felt like a-, would it be a maître d', is that who would type?

James Acaster

Yes, I guess so.

John Robins

Because I was learning lots of menu terms as well.

Ed Gamble

What's great about you spending ages on the font is, you are the only person who's going to see that.

John Robins

I gave a copy to Benito as well.

James Acaster

I know what you mean though. I type up Word documents for myself, not that I'm going to print, but, you know, for work stuff, that only I'm going to see it, and the first hour is just going through the fonts, choosing the font size, basically just on the title. And then I need a break.



Ed Gamble

Anyway, you went with Wingdings and you don't know what your menu is, right?

John Robins

Yes, no idea.

James Acaster

It's always tempting Wingdings, isn't it?

Ed Gamble

I say, if I pop my head around a restaurant door, and I'm deciding whether I want to go there, if the menu's in Comic Sans, there's no fucking chance I'm eating there.

John Robins

Right.

Ed Gamble

That is the worst font for a menu to be in. Discuss.

James Acaster

Or anything to be in. To be honest, I don't trust anything in Comic Sans.

Ed Gamble

No?

James Acaster

No. If I saw anything that was, like, Comic Sans, I'm not going in there.

Ed Gamble

Even if it was, like, fire evacuation instructions?

James Acaster

Yes, especially if it's that. If it says, 'Fire evacuation door,' and it's in Comic Sans, well I'll take my chances, thank you very much. Some fucking baby's written it.

John Robins

You wouldn't want the, sort of, bumf on the back of a packet of condoms in Comic Sans, would you?

James Acaster

The bumf.

Ed Gamble

Absolutely amazing. How often are you reading the bumf on the back of a condom, John?



John Robins

Well, you know, you like to see what other authors have enjoyed them. I want to get a feel for the, sort of, characters and stuff.

Ed Gamble

Yes. 'I'll be with you in a minute, dear, I'm just reading the bumf.'

James Acaster

So what maitre d' terms did you learn? Or are you going to tell us that during the course of the meal?

John Robins

Well, do you want me to, sort of, reveal the broad stroke of my menu now?

James Acaster

Is that what you say when you're reading the back of the condom?

John Robins

Oh God, I love humour, I do. I'm on tour at the minute, and you've just reminded me why I do my job, because it isn't what I'm doing.

James Acaster

Yes. You did proper Fred Flintstone legs there, 'Yabba dabba doo,' stuff. You can reveal the broad strokes if you want to, we don't know what's on there, so, like, we probably can't dictate when would be a good time to deliver the broad strokes.

John Robins

Well do you want the good news or the bad news?

James Acaster

Let's go for the good news first, followed by the bad news, please.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

The good news is, I've really, really thought about it.

Ed Gamble

Yes. I mean, that's not news to us, you printed the fucking thing out.

James Acaster

We can see that. This is the first time this has happened. We haven't had a chat at the top of any of the other podcast episodes we've had about selecting the font.



John Robins

The bad news is, it's twelve courses.

James Acaster

A lot of respect here. Some people who aren't clapping who have train times in their heads. I can see a few people going, 'Not ideal for me. If they can rattle through some of those courses, that'd help me out.'

John Robins

Well we can do, because it's a taster menu, is what it is.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Yes, but, do you know what, Robins, just take your time, because, if anything, I would love to make Damien late home.

Ed Gamble

Now, of course twelve courses does feel like it goes against the format of the podcast somewhat, John, would you say?

John Robins

Well, do you know, what I figured was, it's a dream restaurant, right? This is not a real restaurant. And I was thinking-,

Ed Gamble

Pretty disrespectful but go on.

John Robins

No, what I mean is-,

James Acaster

No, John, you're right.

John Robins

It's a restaurant of the mind.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Where anything is possible.



Ed Gamble

Yes. Apart from breaking out of the strict course format.

James Acaster

I'm sorry, am I the only one who saw me explode out of a fucking lamp?

John Robins

So I was thinking about, you know, what are my favourite meals from restaurants, or my favourite meals I cook, and when I was putting them together I thought, 'Well that's not a dream restaurant, that's a day in London. And £100, which I'm not willing to spend. And the stuff I like that I cook at home, I can cook at home.' So what I've gone for is all the things I know I will never be able to taste again.

Ed Gamble

Okay.

John Robins

So it's either quite specific in time, stuff there's no way I could track down, or stuff that I no longer eat. It's that, basically. So it is literally, if I turn up to my dream restaurant, and I could go through a trip through all the things I know I've had for the last time, I would get to experience them once again, and enjoy those memories.

Ed Gamble

Now, the way you're saying this, and knowing you very well.

John Robins

Tears.

Ed Gamble

I suspect some of this menu's going to be very sad.

John Robins

There is one where I'm going to cry.

James Acaster

At least one, I'm sure.

Ed Gamble

Should've fucking laminated that menu, mate.

James Acaster

When we did our dream menus, Ed and I, for the 200th episode, we chose multiple courses, more so than usual, but we did that by employing the hacks that past guests had utilised. So we will see, as we go along through this, what sort of hacks you're employing, if they're stuff that have been, you know,



allowed in the podcast before, fair enough. And we can let the audience decide as we go along as well, because you're here, we've got to utilise you.

Ed Gamble

Absolutely.

James Acaster

If we can just allow, 'I would like a tasting menu', and that be the explanation.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Are you ready to start? So we always start, John, with, 'Still or sparkling?'

Ed Gamble

Water.

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

You looked then as if you hadn't thought about that.

John Robins

Well I thought, 'What if he's talking about conversation?'

Ed Gamble

Also that question. We want both answers, please.

John Robins

I would like sparkling conversation.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

And still water, because I don't trust people who like sparkling water.

James Acaster

I'm just looking around, and a lot of happy people clapping that, but everyone not clapping it, absolutely like you just said you're a Tory.



John Robins

Oh, a Tory would full-on go sparkling.

James Acaster

Yes, they would.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Yes, sparkling is for Tories.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

Is there a worse sensation or feeling in the world of drinking, than when you are super, super thirsty, you grab a plastic bottle of water, you down it, it turns out it's sparkling, and you're, like, 'I want to call the police.' This feels disgusting, it's in no way hydrating, and this is a very unpleasant sensory experience.

James Acaster

I'd say swallowing a cocktail umbrella, that's the only thing I'd put above it.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

I've done it, man.

Ed Gamble

What?

John Robins

Well imagine swallowing a cocktail umbrella out of a bottle of sparkling water, when you're very thirsty, on a hot summer's day.

James Acaster

No thanks. I wouldn't like it.

Ed Gamble

No. You've convinced me. Sometimes I like sparkling water, but not any more.



John Robins

I also don't trust people who don't like tea and coffee, and that is only made worse if hot chocolate is their drink of choice. Which I find genuinely disturbing.

James Acaster

There will be some people-, this is Bristol, so statistically there's a lot of people here who just drink hot chocolate.

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

Yes. That is right. I've met people, you go, 'Do you want a tea or coffee?' And they go, 'Yes, a hot chocolate, please.'

John Robins

Yes, absolutely mad.

James Acaster

No way.

John Robins

You're allowed that on bonfire night or Christmas.

James Acaster

Or Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

John Robins

Well I looked it up, like, a Costa hot chocolate with whipped cream is 480 calories.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Imagine if you're having three of those a day.

Ed Gamble

No one's having three hot chocolates-

John Robins

There are people for whom it is their go-to.

James Acaster

Not a day.



Ed Gamble

With whipped cream?

James Acaster

Not a day.

John Robins

Yes, marshmallows.

James Acaster

A day?

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Who do you know who's ever done that, a day.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

Well I'm pretty sure star of Beef and Dairy Network, and three-bean-salad Ben Partridge is a hot chocolate guy.

James Acaster

And he has three a day?

Ed Gamble

Yes, but he's not waking up in the morning and being, like, 'Don't talk to me until I've had my hot chocolate with whipped cream.'

James Acaster

I think of Ben Partridge every time I have corn on the cob. That's true, because I went round someone's house once, and Partridge was eating corn on the cob. And so I said, 'Are you eating corn on the cob, Ben?' And he went, 'Yes, I just thought to myself today, "It's been a while since I've had corn on the cob," so I've had corn on the cob.' And I went, 'Oh, very nice.' And I think of that every time I have corn on the cob.

Ed Gamble

What a weird conversation to have witnessed as well.

James Acaster

Well, yes.



Ed Gamble

Firstly, you're fucking starting it off with walking up to someone eating corn on the cob and going, 'Are you eating corn on the cob?' 'Yes, I thought the other day I hadn't had corn on the cob for a while, so now I'm eating it.' Just like two robots pretending to be human.

James Acaster

It was his entire meal. Genuinely, he was just eating corn on the cob.

John Robins

Well, I love corn on the cob. It's a very good example of the theory of calorific availability, because obviously every food you get has the calories on the side, but what that doesn't take into account is how many of those calories you actually absorb and digest. And as we all know, our old friend corn, not all of it's staying indoors.

James Acaster

No.

John Robins

So were you to eat a full meal of corn on the cob, you'd feel nice and full, but actually you'd be saving a bit cal-wise, because you don't digest half of it.

James Acaster

Popadoms or bread? Popadoms or bread, John Robins? Popadoms or bread?

John Robins

Well-,

Ed Gamble

Really scared you there, didn't he, John?

John Robins

Yes, really, really, really scared me.

James Acaster

I've never seen him scared before. That's the first time I've seen him scared. Just, quickly, Ian, are you alright after that? I tried to give you a little head's up, brother. Just a little look at you, it's coming, Ian.

John Robins

Well, it's bread.

Ed Gamble

Yes. 77% of you should be cheering right now.



John Robins

I'll tell you for why, because I've got a very specific rule whenever I have a curry. Which is I never, ever, ever order popadoms. Wait for it. I never, ever, ever, ever order popadoms, instead, I order two curries.

James Acaster

Okay. Also, you never, ever order rice, am I right?

John Robins

Well-,

James Acaster

You see rice as a con with curries, and you get very passionate about that.

John Robins

Well, I see carbs as a con in all forms of cuisine.

Ed Gamble

Apart from corn on the cob.

John Robins

Apart from corn on the cob. No, I will share a rice, share a naan.

James Acaster

Corn on the cob.

John Robins

That's my golden rule. If you're going for a curry with me, we're sharing a rice, sharing a naan, because I'm not filling up on carbs when there is curry at play.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Thank you. I'll either have a starter and two curries, or a side and two curries, and I won't even finish half a rice or half a naan, because I want the prime cuts, those juicy sauces. And in lockdown I taught myself how to make British Indian-restaurant curries using a YouTube channel called AI's Kitchen, where he tell you how to make the base gravy, all of the different things in all the different curries. He's a very charming guy. I've had the pleasure of not only meeting AI, but cooking a curry in his kitchen.

James Acaster

Wow, that escalated.

John Robins

Yes.



Ed Gamble

And how long have you and Al been together now?

James Acaster

I've never met Adrienne.

John Robins

Me and Al have the sort of bond that only a curry master and his student can have, but once you learn how to cook an actual curry that you get in a curry house, the world of curries just opens up.

Ed Gamble

Specifically curries, yes.

John Robins

Because it's, like, 'What's my favourite one?' It's just a different set of spices. It's just a little bit less of this and a bit more of that. So you can have every curry you want. Unfortunately, because my house is very small, when I make the base gravy, which is a whole day's work and it's great fun, the whole place stinks of onions for two weeks, but I've come to accept that, and no one else ever comes into my house, so it's fine.

James Acaster

There's the sad story.

Ed Gamble

Here we go.

James Acaster

Sad story number one, if you'd all keep a tally. His house stinks of onions for two weeks, but it doesn't matter, because no one ever comes to see him.

Ed Gamble

Ding, chalk it up.

James Acaster

And he's friends with someone he watched on YouTube. Somehow that's sad as well.

Ed Gamble

Is that two sad stories, or are we going with that as one?

James Acaster

I think it's one story. There's a lot of little sad bits in there.

Ed Gamble

Yes.



John Robins

So, bread.

James Acaster

What kind of bread are you having?

John Robins

Well, I want to be able to dip it in a bit of olive oil and balsamic vinegar. I want it to be really nice balsamic vinegar, you know, where it's thick. Like, a supermarket would sell this as a drizzle, but it isn't a drizzle, this is just how thick balsamic vinegar can be.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

And I actually want the olive oil to be slightly bitter, and I want the balsamic vinegar to be super sweet. And I'm going to be mixing those up, I'm going to be playing with ratios.

Ed Gamble

John.

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

I don't think you heard the question. What fucking bread do you want, mate?

James Acaster

Not, 'Have you ever had a threesome?'

John Robins

I don't have to answer that question, do I?

James Acaster

No. I already know the answer.

Ed Gamble

No. I'll be with you in a-

James Acaster

Wish I didn't.

John Robins

Well it'd be another sad story.



James Acaster

Another sad story.

Ed Gamble

The truth is, he nearly had one, but he was reading the bumf for too long.

James Acaster

Right, ready to go-, ladies?

John Robins

You make me laugh so much I've got heartburn.

James Acaster

This early on in the meal?

John Robins

Bread-wise, I just want a really crusty, doughy, white bread and-, like a focaccia, but not one that makes you feel like you've just, sort of, eaten a fried breakfast. I don't want it too oily.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

We had some banging focaccia today, at Sonny Stores. What a restaurant.

James Acaster

Great.

Ed Gamble

What great focaccia. Not too oily, little bit of oil, but really fluffy and warm in the middle. Fantastic stuff.

James Acaster

What was it that they brought out before the whole meal, that we didn't order, but they just brought out?

Ed Gamble

I can't remember the name of it now, but it was like a-,

Audience: Farinata.

Ed Gamble

That.

James Acaster

Is that what you were talking about earlier?



Ed Gamble

Say the name of it again?

Audience: Farinata.

Ed Gamble

Farinata. It was, like, a chickpea pancake.

James Acaster

Farinata.

John Robins

Lovely.

Ed Gamble

It was absolutely delicious.

James Acaster

I was seriously thinking about them afterwards, and thinking about how they might be on my dream menu now, because they were good, from that place.

Ed Gamble

Yes, good shit.

James Acaster

Sorry, John. It's your time.

John Robins

Well on the focaccia I'd like some quite chunky salt crystals on the top, and maybe a bit of rosemary, you know, in the general vicinity.

Ed Gamble

So you don't necessarily want it on it, you just-

John Robins

I want to know they've met, but I don't need to know the details of where, or what went down. I certainly don't want to be chewing on a rosemary stalk, but I want to be able to say to the bread, 'Have you met rosemary?'

James Acaster

I think we can arrange that for you.

Ed Gamble

Yes, we can definitely arrange that.



John Robins

I mean, the fact is, I'm not eating any of this bread in the restaurant, because I've got thirteen courses to get through here.

James Acaster

You've got a lot of courses here.

Ed Gamble

Thirteen now.

John Robins

That would be absolute madness, if I filled up on bread, and didn't get through any of this.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

See I'm going to ask your dream starter now, but I don't know if that's what we're about to be told.

John Robins

Well I'm happy, because this is your vibe, man.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

I've always said it, this restaurant is your guys' vibe, so if you want to veto anything, or get the audience to veto anything, that's fine, but I'm starting with an aperitif.

James Acaster

Okay.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Yes, great. We've allowed that hack before, we've done it plenty of times.

Ed Gamble

Absolutely, yes.

John Robins

So, bearing in mind these are all the things that I know I'm never going to taste again, my aperitif is banana antibiotics.



Ed Gamble

It is popular.

James Acaster

Again, I feel like-, and I don't want you to feel like I view Bristol as just a fucking place where all babies live, but any date of the tour that wouldn't have gotten applause, but tonight.

Ed Gamble

Yes, banana antibiotics.

James Acaster

I know what you mean, yes.

John Robins

You used to get it in a little bottle. It would be in the fridge. I would've last had that in, like, 1988 or 1989 or something. I remember the taste vividly. It was like pure, industrial banana flavour, in form so pure, even if you had, like, one of those foam bananas it wouldn't come close. And I'm never going to have it again for two reasons. Firstly, it would be absolutely bizarre if I went to my GP and said, 'I'm ill, but I don't like the tablets, can I have some of that stuff you give kids?' Secondly, I'm allergic to amoxicillin, which is what-,

James Acaster

Mate, I didn't know that, I'm sorry.

Ed Gamble

Is that number two? Is that sad story two?

James Acaster

Made me feel sad for him.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Didn't know he was allergic to amoxicillin.

John Robins

I think the first few times I had it I was fine, otherwise I would not remember enjoying the taste, but I just haven't had penicillin for, like, forever. And you know what it's like when you haven't tasted something forever.

James Acaster

Yes.



John Robins

But I thought that would be such a flavour of childhood.

Ed Gamble

Do you want it in, like, a shot? Do you want a little shot of it?

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

Yes, so that's how you're going to kick off the dream meal.

John Robins

Yes, a shot of that. Yes, I just want it to arrive, one shot glass of banana antibiotics. And also, if I get an infection at any point during the rest of the meal, I'm going to be okay.

Ed Gamble

Absolutely.

James Acaster

It's a weight off your mind, straight out the door.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Do you know what, I think that's a great choice. I think we've all got, you know, some people might be more Calpol-leaning in the room, and being Calpol kids, but I think even the Calpol kids could get onboard and recognise that nostalgic-, just wanting to drink the medicine all the time.

Ed Gamble

Yes. That's great. A shot of that. That would be amazing if you're in the pub and, like, your lairy mate goes, 'Right, who's having shots?' and they come back with banana antibiotics. 'Just keeping us all safe guys.'

James Acaster

'Who's allergic to amoxicillin? Be honest. Drink plenty of water.'

Ed Gamble

So are we moving on to more things in the realms of starters now?

James Acaster

Is this called 'starter', this next course? What would you call this?



John Robins

No, I did have to Google quite a lot of phrases.

James Acaster

Okay.

Ed Gamble

What have we got now, Flintstones' vitamins?

John Robins

So we go from the aperitif to the hors d'oeuvre.

James Acaster

Now, I don't think anyone's employed the hors d'oeuvre hack.

Ed Gamble

I think it's a legit hack though.

James Acaster

But it's a legit thing.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

I think it would be churlish of us.

Ed Gamble

James has been doing his word-a-day calendar.

James Acaster

You learnt 'hors d'oeuvres', I learnt 'churlish'.

John Robins

Well maybe it's good if you veto when I give you the name of the course, before revealing the thing.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

I think, hors d'oeuvres.



Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Hors d'oeuvres.

John Robins

Okay.

James Acaster

Yes, what's your hors d'oeuvre?

John Robins

Pickled Scrumion McCoy's.

James Acaster

Jesus. You could blindfold me. 'What guest is in?' John Robins. McCoy's, very happy to hear McCoy's get a shout-out though.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

I don't think I've had-, pickled what?

John Robins

Well, exactly, here's the rub.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Pickled Scrumion McCoy's were released in 2011 to coincide with the Rugby World Cup.

James Acaster

It's another sad story looming.

John Robins

I saw them first at a BP garage, and I thought to myself, 'John, you are dreaming,' because pickled onion's my favourite flavour of crisp, McCoy's at the time were my favourite style of crisp. I could not believe it.

James Acaster

I think we've all had those moments, and it is exciting.



John Robins

And usually, when a crisp is limited edition, like, there's a few out at the minute and it's all various variations on beef. Or, like, Texan Barbecue, and you know it's just going to taste of paprika and sugar. So I never buy any of that, sort of, limited edition stuff, but I thought, 'Pickled Onion McCoy's.'

James Acaster

Please, Pickled Scrumion.

John Robins

Pickled Scrumion McCoy's.

James Acaster

Rugby scrum.

John Robins

And I bought three bags, and I sat in my car, and I tasted heaven. I then, of course, did what I think we would all do in a similar situation, bought so many bags that I just felt so sick. I felt like my skin was drying out, like I was going to have a heart problem. And then they stopped making them at the end of the Rugby World Cup. And I messaged McCoy's on Twitter, I said, 'When are they coming back though?' And they did one of those, sort of, slightly annoying messages where they were, 'Never say never.' And I was, like, 'Yes, but when?'

James Acaster

To be frank, you're lucky you got a reply, John.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

'When are they coming back though?' Ignore that.

John Robins

Well, it wasn't from McCoy him or herself.

James Acaster

DP McCoy, yes.

John Robins

I don't know whether it's Sylvester or DP. Is that the jockey?

James Acaster

DP McCoy?



John Robins

Racehorse owner?

Ed Gamble

Anthony McCoy?

John Robins

Anyway, I don't know who McCoy is.

Ed Gamble

It's neither of them.

John Robins

They did return for the 2015 World Cup, but as far as I'm aware, they've not returned for subsequent World Cups.

James Acaster

So when they returned for the 2015, how did you feel then?

John Robins

A lot of people sent them to me in the post, because I'd gone on so much about them the last time. I tried them again, they were still the most delicious crisp I've ever tasted in my life.

James Acaster

And you just want a bag of them?

John Robins

I don't even want a bag. I'd actually, because it's a hors d'oeuvre, I would just like a little stack of maybe, like, five. In descending, like, circumference. Just so it looks neat and, sort of, nicely presented.

James Acaster

Yes, sure. Yes, that's nice.

Ed Gamble

Do you remember what any of the other Rugby World Cup flavours were?

John Robins

No.

Ed Gamble

No?

John Robins

No is the answer. No. I was trying to think of Rugby puns then, but I'm not much of a rugby chap.



Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

All I've got is Rugby Salted, that's pathetic.

John Robins

That's quite nice.

James Acaster

Absolutely pathetic. It's the word 'rugby' in there.

John Robins

I like Rugby Salted.

James Acaster

Rugby Salted. They're not doing that one are they. Salt and Winnegar, because you can win? I don't know. Absolutely pathetic.

John Robins

Well it would have to be a flavour they don't already do.

James Acaster

Yes, I forgot about that. A Lasanrugby.

Ed Gamble

Lasanrugby?

John Robins

Lasanrugby.

James Acaster

Yes. A lasagne one.

John Robins

Is that because Ed was talking about lasagne earlier?

Ed Gamble

Yes, because we were talking about lasagne.

James Acaster

Yes.



Ed Gamble

And then that's directly led to you saying, 'Lasanrugby'?

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

But lasagne flavoured crisps are exactly the sort of crappy limited edition they would do, where it is just, sort of, cheese, and (beef, and paprika.

James Acaster

Imagine this though, with what you said about stacking them up, if there was, like, each layer of the lasagne is each different crisp. And if you layer them up right.

Ed Gamble

So pasta flavoured crisp.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

Bolognese flavour.

James Acaster

Yes. Béchamel.

Ed Gamble

Béchamel flavour, maybe, like, a parmesan-y one.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Parmesan crisps would be nice.

James Acaster

I think they exist.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

God dammit, I was going to make my millions.



Ed Gamble

I think it's a lovely hors d'oeuvre.

James Acaster

That's a lovely hors d'oeuvre, John. And it's another lovely memory.

John Robins

Yes, of a short-lived promotional crisp. Ah, memory.

James Acaster

So so far we've got being ill, and eating in your car.

John Robins

Yes, do you know what, it's a while until I get to food that I eat with other people.

Ed Gamble

Do you remember when you told us you ate a prawn sandwich out of the bin?

John Robins

Yes, I remember when I told you I ate a prawn sandwich out of a bin, in confidence.

James Acaster

Made you sick. And you were trying to crack the code as to what had made you sick on the group. And we all suggested, maybe it was that prawn sandwich that you told us you ate out of the bin yesterday. 'No, because it was a clean bin, and it'd only been in there for an hour.'

John Robins

I will repeat what I said to you at the time, which was, 'I think might be allergic to onions.'

James Acaster

Your next course, John.

John Robins

Well, it's an amuse-bouche.

James Acaster

Absolutely, you can have an amuse-bouche.

Ed Gamble

Yes. I mean, I think that traditionally comes as the first thing you eat, to amuse your bouche.

James Acaster

Before the hors d'oeuvre.



Ed Gamble

I think your bouche has been taken through the fucking wringer already, to be honest. It's had banana antibiotics and a pickled onion crisp.

James Acaster

You're not tasting any of this menu after that, but by all means-,

Ed Gamble

Yes, your bouche is not laughing.

John Robins

Right.

James Acaster

But amuse-bouche, yes, we'll let you have that. I mean, if you want to switch around the titles after this you can, this is the order you're having them in, and amuse-bouche is definitely-, we've done that before.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

I've done that before.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

So I've made a fool of myself in maître d' school by putting amuse-bouche third. It should be first.

James Acaster

Yes, if you came out third and said, 'Here's an amuse-bouche,' they would go, 'Well, this restaurant doesn't know its stuff. And we thought we could trust them after the medicine and the fucking petrol station crisps they gave us.'

John Robins

God, there's a lot of rules in my dream, isn't there? But I like that.

Ed Gamble

Obviously the dream restaurant can look however you like and it can be transformed for different courses. Would you like the hors d'oeuvre to be served in your car, outside a petrol station?



John Robins

Do you know what? Yes. I'd like the banana antibiotics to be served in my childhood kitchen, if that's okay?

James Acaster

Yes, great.

Ed Gamble

Would you like to be a child when you have it?

James Acaster

Yes, yes.

John Robins

I think, no, that would be very confusing from a, sort of, therapy perspective. Yes, I would never stop crying. If I, as me now, came back as a child, in my childhood kitchen, and tasted something I haven't tasted for 35 years, I would cry all my tears and probably just dissolve into a paste.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

And then the tears would clear, and you'd realise that you were suddenly in your car, outside a petrol station.

James Acaster

And it's the Rugby World Cup.

John Robins

I'd be, 'Great, Pickled Scrumion's back.' Cheer me right up. So my amuse-bouche is a stolen Portuguese breakfast buffet roll, containing cheese, onion, tomato, butter and mustard. And that's to be enjoyed on the twelfth hole of a golf course, because every year-,

James Acaster

Things just got more depressing, Alex Horne's there.

John Robins

Alex Horne is there.

James Acaster

Yes. Even worse than being on your own.



John Robins

That's mean. So every year I go on a golf trip to Portugal, and one of the most fun bits of the trip is the buffet breakfast. I love a buffet breakfast, and they have mad stuff, and often the translation on the little cards is quite strange. So this year they had, 'Pig snout salad,' 'Moist bread with garlic,' was one of them, but the best bit about the buffet breakfast, and all of the places that have buffets in golf courses have this, is signs saying, 'No food can be removed from the buffet.' And that's to stop people making their lunch at breakfast, whacking it in the old pocket, taking it out on the golf course with them, but we all do it and we've all got different tactics. And I'll have my cooked breakfast, and then I'll have, like, some pastries and maybe some fruit and yoghurt, coffee, go back for a second go at the cooked breakfast. And then I'll get my rolls, I get my cheese, I get a butter, I'll get a couple of napkins, and I just begin to assemble it all on my lap.

James Acaster

That's the least worth it thing I've ever heard.

John Robins

And do you know what, so, like, this gets more depressing, but I like it. So you make the little sandwich, you cut it, you fold over a slice of cheese, you put some butter in there, maybe onion and tomato, and then I make two. And the rolls are quite small anyway, so they're perfect. You put one in each pocket wrapped in a napkin, you take it out on the golf course, and you put it in the golf bag, and then you, sort of, grab them after about an hour and a half, whatever. At which point, always, a cart comes round selling exactly the same thing for, like, €3. I'll be, like, 'Ha ha ha, you're not going to get one over on me. I stole it from the breakfast. I'm not spending €3 on a nicer, fresher, bigger version of the thing that I made under a table and have had in my pocket for two hours, covered in sun cream, and bits of grass and mud. No, you've got to get up pretty early in the morning to beat old Johnny.' While everybody else is just buying their nice baguette from the guy and enjoying it.

Ed Gamble

Why do you make it on your lap?

John Robins

So they can't see it.

James Acaster

So they can't see it.

Ed Gamble

But what, is there a fucking, like, lifeguard in there watching you? You can just make it on the table, fold it up, put it in your pocket, surely?

John Robins

They know it's going on, right? It's like in prison.



James Acaster

Yes, it's exactly like prison.

John Robins

They know there's contraband, and they pick their moments. They know we're smoking a bit of blow, yes, but as long as you're discrete, they're not going to cause a problem. They'll turn a blind eye. If you start walking in there, making big sandwiches on the top of the table, not abiding by the lap rule. If you start carrying them out in broad daylight, not hiding them in a napkin in your pocket, or in the centre of the bible that's been hollowed out, you're going to start to attract attention, Ed.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Imagine, how long Alex Horne would last in prison.

John Robins

He always steals a boiled egg.

James Acaster

Surprising to no one. What a disgusting man. Steals a boiled egg and eats that while he's playing golf.

Ed Gamble

Yes. So that's why there's so many eggs in tasks on Taskmaster, right? It's just, fucking, from his suitcase on the way back from Portugal.

John Robins

Yes, he'll come back with about 200 eggs.

James Acaster

Next course.

John Robins

Next course.

James Acaster

I'm surprised you didn't drop that in on your bread course, that last one. You could've had that as your bread course.

John Robins

A bread course?

James Acaster

The bread course earlier, when you had the focaccia, but yes.



John Robins

Fuck, yes, I should've done that. Well the next course, you'll be glad to hear, is the starter.

James Acaster

Lovely.

Ed Gamble

40 minutes in.

James Acaster

Jesus Christ, it actually is. Sorry, John, go on.

John Robins

So the next course, every year for the past, sort of, six or seven years I've lived in Edinburgh, when I do the festival with George Egg.

James Acaster

Alex Horne-,

Ed Gamble

Alex Horne brought him back from Portugal.

James Acaster

Race to that, absolute race to it. 'Alex Horne.' I backed down.

John Robins

And people might know George Egg as the Anarchist Chef, or Snack Hacker on YouTube. He's got a channel where he hacks snacks, stuff you can, sort of, do in your car, which appeals to me.

Ed Gamble

John, are all your friends your favourite YouTubers?

John Robins

To an extent. I do have a YouTube channel with Alex Horne.

Ed Gamble

You do?

John Robins

I do. So living with him in Edinburgh is just such a treat, because he's a wonderful guy, but also he's not just a brilliant chef, but he loves cooking, and he gets excited about you tasting stuff, and he likes presenting it to you. You know, he's cooked me a six course meal in Edinburgh before, but what I would like to go for, my starter, is what we'd always have for breakfast together, which is George Egg's cuppy



egg, on veggie haggis, with a craft cheese slice, Kismet Mr Naga sauce, and a mocha pot coffee with evaporated milk.

James Acaster

Sounds very nice. It sounds lovely.

Ed Gamble

It does sound lovely.

John Robins

So I can talk you through it very quickly.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

Cuppy egg, you butter the bottom of a mug, crack an egg into it, put it in the microwave for about 45 seconds, it makes a perfect poached egg, but buttery. He puts that on the top of vegetarian haggis, which he's sliced into a circle that's been fried. Between those is a craft cheese slice. And then we went for a curry in Kismet, in Edinburgh, and the hot sauce was so nice that we asked if we could take some home with us. So they put it in a little plastic pot. And it was so delicious that if you just dip the end of, like, a fork tine into it, and dip a bit of the oil off, it's just wonderful on poached eggs, or on cheese, melted cheese. So we'd have that for breakfast, and make a little coffee in-, George has got, like, an espresso-sized mocha pot, and you mix it with evaporated milk, and it's just sweet. And it's, like, a shot of sweet, coffee goodness. And that will remind me of wonderful mornings in Edinburgh, with my dear friend, tasting wonderful food.

Ed Gamble

Yes please.

James Acaster

That's lovely, John. And George Egg is a magnificent chef.

John Robins

He is.

James Acaster

So I imagine that tastes very nice. And I think a few people in here might try that cuppy egg, because that sounds like something that-,

Ed Gamble

Yes.



John Robins

Well the cuppy egg is on his YouTube channel, so you can find out how to make cuppy egg, but also, that Naga sauce you can buy. If I mention, like, stuff you can buy, does it fucking ruin it for those suppliers, because they suddenly have a billion orders?

James Acaster

No. You're going to get some for free.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

The audience get them for free?

James Acaster

No, you will, not the audience.

Ed Gamble

No, they won't. You will.

James Acaster

But you will. It'll turn up on your doorstep, probably before you've even got home tonight.

John Robins

Right. Well I don't need any, because I've got some.

James Acaster

Yes, well bad luck, you're going to get some more.

John Robins

Right, well if you want that delicious chilli sauce, it's called Mr Naga, and it's basically, like, oil with crushed chillies, but it is fucking delicious, but do use with caution, for Christ's sake. It will bite you on the arse, both literally, and in a very horrible way, metaphorically.

James Acaster

You've had a few nightmares over the years, haven't you, with stuff like that.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

Yes, I've had a few close shaves.



James Acaster

Evenings like that.

John Robins

But I haven't actually shit myself since 2002.

James Acaster

Not true. Not true.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

Okay, yes, but I'd forgotten about that. There's no need to say it.

Ed Gamble

Just lying. Just lying, John. Throwing years around so confidently.

James Acaster

I guess, in a way, does that count as shitting yourself, that story? I mean, obviously I'm on the cusp of just describing it.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

I never had that combination again, of neck oil and bang bang cauliflower, with Frank's extra hot wings sauce. It was a fucking car crash.

Ed Gamble

Just saying that out loud, of course no one should have that.

John Robins

Yes, I know. Well I didn't know that-,

Ed Gamble

Neck oil, bang bang cauliflower, which sounds like a metaphor for shitting yourself. 'I've done a bang bang cauliflower in my pants.' Do you want to quickly run through the story?

John Robins

God, I had neck oil, and bang bang cauliflower, and it was just-, I was going through a bad period of my guts anyway. It was drinking quite a lot, the cauliflower and the batter was a fucking mistake, the sauce was just arrogant. And I was in a situation where I couldn't fart freely.



Ed Gamble

For me, that situation has never existed.

John Robins

Come on, Ed.

James Acaster

What time in the morning was it?

John Robins

It would've been, like, 1:30am, 2:00am.

James Acaster

1:30, and you were, at the time, in a relationship, and didn't want to fart in front of them.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Even though they were asleep in the bed.

John Robins

I think that's as much as I would like to say about that.

James Acaster

Yes, because you're a gentleman.

John Robins

Yes. I was actually-, yes, I was a gentleman. And what do gentlemen do in that situation?

James Acaster

They don't fart in the bed.

John Robins

They don't fart in the bed. They go downstairs, try to fart in some kitchen roll, and shit themselves. Have you not read any etiquette guides?

Ed Gamble

My favourite thing about that is, I understand going down stairs. I get that, 'I'll go in another room and I'll fart,' but then going, 'I need some sort of muffler.'

John Robins

I thought it would deaden the sound. It actually turned out to be a master-stroke.



James Acaster

What's your next course, John?

John Robins

It's a fish course.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

That's an existing course on a menu.

Ed Gamble

It exists.

John Robins

It's a trio.

Ed Gamble

Okay, so you've actually got a sixteen-course menu, right?

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

It was about nearly twenty years ago, Christ alive.

Ed Gamble

Come on, John, bring it back.

John Robins

No, that's, sort of, neutral. That's just, sort of, the trick of time. That's just, sort of, nostalgia, that's neither sad nor happy.

James Acaster

Also, judging by what you said earlier, twenty years ago is when, the time before, you shit yourself. As well.

John Robins

Yes, it would've been around that time, yes.



James Acaster

Circa that last shit.

John Robins

I kissed a girl at a festival.

John Robins

Wow, what an odd feeling I'm experiencing right now. In a room of 1,800 people, I say, 'I kissed a girl at a festival twenty years ago,' and hear a solitary man clapping. And we kept in touch, and I went to visit her in London, I was living in Bristol at the time. And it was just so exciting. You know, I was very young, and it was just exciting. And her friend had brought back some salmon from Alaska that had been cured in a way I have never heard of or seen before or since, and it had, like, the texture of jerky. So you could, like, tear strips of this Alaskan salmon. And it'd only been caught, I don't know, a month or so before, and then all this curing had happened. And we made sushi out of it. I'd never made sushi before, this was, like, insane, but you could cut it into little matchsticks it was so hard. And it was just the most delicious flavour, and I remember we were listening to the Rolling Stones Greatest Hits, and I'm not a massive Rolling Stones fan, but every time I hear those songs, I think of that Alaskan cured salmon, and I know I'll never ever get to taste that again, but it was also just the excitement of the trip. And I never saw her again after that. She moved on to bigger.

James Acaster

No, too nice of a day by the sound of things.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Lovely day, it's a lovely memory.

Ed Gamble

The problem is, now every time I hear the Rolling Stones, I'm going to think of you eating Alaskan salmon jerky.

John Robins

And that's alright.

Ed Gamble

It's alright, it's just quite weird, isn't it.

John Robins

Yes, but it's nice, but if anyone knows how to make Alaskan salmon jerky, I would actually like to know how to do that. Every time I mention I can't cook rice, I get a hundred people telling me, 'You want to try this method,' and I try it, and it tastes like fucking sludge. I don't want to hear another rice cooking



method ever in my life. However, if you've got a method for making Alaskan salmon the texture of jerky, I want to know.

Ed Gamble

I know this guy on YouTube who does it.

John Robins

Well then, I'll probably end up marrying him.

James Acaster

Wouldn't be surprised if we discover that this woman was Zoella.

John Robins

Do you know what, I think I'm going to leave it at that for the fish course.

James Acaster

I think so.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

I think that sounds like a nice.

John Robins

That's a nice fish course.

Ed Gamble

The Alaskan salmon sushi that you made?

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

No, I just want the salmon.

James Acaster

Okay.

Ed Gamble

You just want the salmon jerky. Okay, cool.



John Robins

Well maybe a little bit of sushi stuff on the side so I can maybe make one, but I did end up just, like, eating it direct.

James Acaster

Okay. Well maybe you just have that experience again for your fish course. You, with those people, making the sushi, sometimes just eating the salmon as it is, Rolling Stones playing.

John Robins

Yes, please.

James Acaster

That's nice. What are we talking now?

John Robins

Palette cleanser.

Ed Gamble

To be fair, you absolutely need that at this point.

James Acaster

Yes, I absolutely respect the palette cleanser. Yes, go on.

Ed Gamble

Yes, because, fucking hell, your mouth has experienced some wild shit so far.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Yes, it's been on.

John Robins

I mean, I've been to the toilet a couple of times in this restaurant. What is the toileting situation in this restaurant?

James Acaster

Whatever you want it to be.

Ed Gamble

It's your dream. It's your dream.

John Robins

Holy shit, really?



James Acaster

Yes. We could get the kitchen roll out if you'd like. Whole roll to yourself, little corner in the restaurant, go over, do some muffled guffs and then shit all over it. And then sit down again, and make sushi with those people.

Ed Gamble

Do you want a Japanese toilet?

John Robins

What's that?

Ed Gamble

Well, where do you start? It's a toilet from Japan.

John Robins

God, no.

Ed Gamble

It shoots, like, jets of water up your arse and stuff.

John Robins

No.

Ed Gamble

No?

John Robins

I cannot imagine that being specific enough to my body. What if it gets it wrong?

Ed Gamble

Well, John, I don't know-,

James Acaster

We're barely halfway through this menu. We don't have time to discuss where John's arsehole is.

Ed Gamble

I'd say, across the globe, 99.9% of people's anuses are in the same place on their body.

John Robins

No, I know that.

Ed Gamble

Plus it's, like, you can move the jet, right? So if yours is on your fucking back for some reason, you can still-,



John Robins

It feels odd, all of that. It's over-engineered is the word. I would just want a toilet that's a normal toilet.

Ed Gamble

Yes. Well can I tell you something else they do on Japanese toilets?

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

There's some toilets that play music to cover up the sound of what you're doing on the toilet.

John Robins

Now I'm interested. Yes.

Ed Gamble

Yes?

John Robins

Yes, but just the music.

Ed Gamble

Just the music?

John Robins

Well why not just a toilet with a jukebox in each cubicle?

Ed Gamble

We can do that. It's your dream restaurant.

John Robins

You'd want it to be regularly wiped down. Or maybe even-, no, Alexa.

Ed Gamble

You want Alexa in the toilet?

John Robins

Yes. 'Alexa, play Metallica. Loud.' But I would want just, like, individual, closed cubicles, with lids, roofs, whatever you want to call it. I don't like gaps anywhere. I want to feel like I'm inside, with a nice, dark brown wooden seat. A few people might've been wondering where that sentence was going. A nice toilet.

James Acaster

Soundproofed?



John Robins

Soundproofed to the-, yes, I mean, it's going to be soundproof, because you've got to get through, like, eight different doors to get there.

James Acaster

Gringotts.

John Robins

Yes. Yes, that's what I want the toilet in my house to be like, Gringotts.

James Acaster

Yes, I forgot who I was talking to. Of course he wants it to be-, as soon as I said it for a laugh, you're, like, 'Yes, great. Gringotts, please.' Okay, we'll give you a Gringotts toilet. What's the palette cleanser, John, because it's ten to ten, mate.

Ed Gamble

53 minutes in.

John Robins

Do you know what-,

Ed Gamble

53 minutes in and we're cleansing the palette, but don't worry, we spent five minutes on what the toilet's going to look like.

James Acaster

I can't believe we spoke to this lot in the first half. Could've just done 'first half of John's menu', interval, 'second-, ' No one would've complained. Instead we asked that prick why he was late for ages.

John Robins

I also want moist wipes in the toilet.

James Acaster

You've got it, Captain.

Ed Gamble

Flushable? Flushable moist wipes.

John Robins

Right. I've already cut three of the things I was going to have, because I don't need them.

James Acaster

Okay, you can just say them. Tell them quickly, we don't have to delve into them.



John Robins

Well the palette cleanser, when I was a kid my-, what?

James Acaster

They're laughing because another story's coming. They're laughing because some people have already left to get their trains, John.

John Robins

Do people not usually tell stories about the stuff they choose?

James Acaster

No, they do. They do.

John Robins

Okay.

Ed Gamble

They do, but maybe, like, four or five.

James Acaster

We haven't had Ustinov on yet, but go on.

John Robins

Well, when I was little, my mum's friend, 'Auntie Anne' and 'Uncle Bill', who weren't my real auntie and uncle-,

James Acaster

No details spared, please.

Ed Gamble

Please, and what were their dream menus from beginning to end?

John Robins

Okay. Auntie Anne used to make this crème de menthe ice cream, and it's good stuff.

James Acaster

Yes, I bet.

John Robins

And I would love, love to taste that again, because I've never even heard of anyone making crème de menthe ice cream, but it works.

Ed Gamble

Yes, that sounds good.



James Acaster

Yes, I love that. From Auntie Anne. Yes, great. Not your real auntie.

John Robins

Yes, pop that on the menu. We can move on to my main.

James Acaster

Sure. Is there anything in between there?

John Robins

No.

James Acaster

There's nothing in between that anyway.

John Robins

No.

James Acaster

Going for the main course.

Ed Gamble

Main course, please, John.

John Robins

So I don't eat meat anymore. I've eaten meat twice in the last ten years, and it was both accidentally, and it was horrible, but there is meat on my menu.

James Acaster

Okay. Is it from an animal that doesn't die?

James Acaster

Someone's not gone for their train yet.

John Robins

Why does that-,

James Acaster

Someone in the first half wanted magic meat from an animal that doesn't die.

Ed Gamble

Yes. We thought that sounded worse.



John Robins

No, the animal can die.

James Acaster

Okay.

Ed Gamble

Okay.

John Robins

As long as an animal just has one bad day, I don't mind. Right? That should be the rule about meat. You can eat meat if the animal has one bad day. If it's had a torturous, awful life, just so it can be served up to you, that's unacceptable, but if it's having a great time, then boom, gone, fine.

Ed Gamble

I suppose that is quite a bad day, isn't it?

John Robins

Yes. It's hard to come back from.

James Acaster

I don't know if you've been paying attention to most of your stories, John, but these animals have nicer lives than you do.

John Robins

Anyway, so my dad left when I was six.

James Acaster

Your real dad?

John Robins

Yes, real dad. Anyway, I went to visit him, first when I was about twelve.

Ed Gamble

In prison, probably.

John Robins

No. And he lives in Canada, and has done ever since I was very young. And I went on my own, and he took me to Schwartz's Deli in Montreal.

Ed Gamble

Yes.



John Robins

And it's an incredible place.

Ed Gamble

It's amazing.

John Robins

It's been there for probably 100 years, maybe more.

Ed Gamble

Yes, a long time.

John Robins

This incredible, traditional, family-run deli, and it was my first experience of salt beef. My dad says, 'You're coming to Montreal, I've got to take you to Schwartz's. You've got to taste salt beef.' And I was, like, 'What's this?' So I went in, and you basically get a salt beef sandwich. You get it lean, medium, or fatty. I said, 'Lean,' they all made fun of me, but it was fun because I was twelve, they were being very sweet. And I tasted salt beef for the first time in a sandwich as thick as my fist. It was literally that big. And it was the best flavour I think I'd encountered. And ever since then, I did this sorry-ass search for salt beef sandwiches in London, and compared to that they are abysmal and should be ashamed of themselves. And they're that thick, and they've got 1cm-wide slice of salt beef. And I'm thinking, 'What? It's that big. You literally have to dismantle the sandwich to eat it, that's how thick it should be.' You get these poxy little things with English mustard, which doesn't work. Anyway, I would have a Schwartz's Deli salt beef sandwich, lean, white bread, with pickles on the side.

James Acaster

That is great.

Ed Gamble

That place is amazing. I've been to Montreal three times. Every single time I've been, first thing I do, get off the plane, straight to Schwartz's. Always a queue outside, but I march up to the front of the queue and say, 'Hello, I am alone,' and you can get straight in.

James Acaster

Great.

Ed Gamble

There's always one seat.

John Robins

And I went to the one in New York, the Harry met Sally one.

Ed Gamble

Katz's.



James Acaster

Yes, Katz's.

John Robins

Katz's. It's great. It's really nice. It's on a similar par. It ain't no Schwartz's.

James Acaster

Yes, it's not as good. Do you want to hear a joke that I thought of while you were saying that, that the audience won't like but you will?

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

You were saying it's a family-run deli and stuff, you said, 'My dad said to me, "John, I've got to take you to Schwartz's, I've got to show you-,"' and I was going to say, 'What a family looks like.'

John Robins

That's humour.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

That's perfect humour.

James Acaster

It's John's type of stuff.

John Robins

That's my stuff.

James Acaster

Yes. That sounds great, John. What's your next course, and what's it called?

John Robins

Well I'm, sort of, skipping ahead now, because I'm guessing there's a little bit of business towards the end.

James Acaster

Maybe.

John Robins

Well, the next one, there's the cheese course, which is just very quick



James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Cheese course.

Ed Gamble

No, he doesn't mind a cheese course, yes.

James Acaster

No, this is good news. A cheese course is good news. That means that the desert is a proper desert, and we're not skipping it. If anything, I'm pro cheese course. And I once kissed a girl at a festival.

John Robins

So the cheese course is very simply, 'The Cheese'. Which is a cheese, it was known in my family as, 'The Cheese', and my step-dad, whenever he went down to Somerset, because he loved Somerset, so he'd go down to Somerset quite a lot, work down there. He would bring back 'The Cheese', which is a big wheel of cheddar in black wax, from a company-, it's the Maryland Farm Mature Cheddar Cheese. And anyone who tasted this cheese said, 'You've got to sort me out with some of this cheese. This is insane. I thought I knew cheddar.'

Ed Gamble

Everyone would say this, right? Word for word, everyone would say this.

John Robins

Honestly, everyone was saying, word for word.

James Acaster

I've got to get me some of this.

Ed Gamble

'I thought I knew cheddar-,'

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

And then they'd leave it there?

John Robins

They'd say, 'I thought I knew cheddar before I tasted "The Cheese".'

James Acaster

Write that on a tee-shirt.



John Robins

And the next time my step-dad went down to Somerset, I'd have to say, 'Can you sort my friend Sam's mum out with some of your cheese?'

Ed Gamble

Awful sentence out of context.

John Robins

So he'd be, like, well, I don't know, it's £15 for a fucking enormous, 4kg of cheese. And he'd say, 'Well, yes, they can pay me back and whatever, I'll bring it up.' Before you know it, he's bringing back quite a lot of cheese from Somerset into, you know, Avon and North Somerset.

James Acaster

Across the border.

John Robins

Well yes, it becomes a county lines drug operation, but, I mean, I'm not kidding. He would come back with, like, four wheels of this cheese. One for me, one for my friend Sam, one for my friend Sam's mum, one for, you know, someone else.

Ed Gamble

Fucking Sam can't share one with his mum? What's going on? Were they a broken home as well?

John Robins

No. Once you start eating this cheese, you just eat a whole wheel of cheese. It's mad. It's mad. And I'd go from mine, where we'd be eating the cheese. I'd go round to Sam's house, they'd be sat in their kitchen just cutting off slices of cheese, eating this cheese. It's so creamy, it's so tangy. Do people not usually talk this long about their choices?

James Acaster

They do. No, do you know what, John-,

Ed Gamble

I love it. I want to try the cheese.

James Acaster

To be fair, you're doing absolutely nothing wrong. If this was a studio-recorded episode.

John Robins

It said on the thing 'An hour and a half'.

James Acaster

Really?



John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Well then, you are in the right, and I don't know how I'm getting back to London today.

Ed Gamble

Do you want anything with the cheese?

John Robins

A taxi for James.

James Acaster

Do you want the full wheel?

John Robins

Do you know what, I do.

James Acaster

Yes. You can have the full wheel.

John Robins

About 5kg of cheese.

James Acaster

Yes, I think that's great.

John Robins

And if there's other people in the restaurant, which I hope there are, otherwise this is a depressing evening for me, we all get a little knife to, sort of, just scrape off little bits of cheese.

Ed Gamble

Lovely. Communal cheese, I like it.

John Robins

Desert?

James Acaster

Well, we haven't even heard your side dish, or your drink. I hate to draw this out even longer, but two of the key format points.

Ed Gamble

Yes.



James Acaster

Especially hearing what John Robins' current dream drink is, in 2023. I think if we skip that-

John Robins

No, we can't skip that. We can't skip anything.

Ed Gamble

Shall we do side dish first?

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

Side dish?

Ed Gamble

Side dish.

John Robins

Right, okay. Side dish is going to be from a breakfast buffet in the Bahamas. Fried salt cod with onions and Aunt May's Bajan hot pepper sauce.

James Acaster

That sounds great.

John Robins

I honestly, this salt cod, I never had it before, and it's, like, a buffet, so you can scoop it out, as much as you want, which is dangerous. And it's just, sort of, crispy, and salty, and it's cod. It's got onions in, they put a poached egg on top if you wanted a poached egg. And you'd cover it-, I'd never had Bajan hot pepper sauce before, it's insane man.

Ed Gamble

What's the hot pepper sauce called?

John Robins

I think it's Aunt May's.

Ed Gamble

Aunt May's. Yes, it's the one that looks like it comes in, like, a soda pop bottle, right?

John Robins

It looks like it comes in one of those, sort of, small whisky bottles. It's a, sort of, hip flask shape.



Ed Gamble

Yes, I've had it.

James Acaster

And just to be clear, that's not your real auntie. Aunt May's.

Ed Gamble

Onions making another appearance.

John Robins

Yes, tricky.

James Acaster

Got to be careful, mate. Messes with your stomach those do, especially bin onions.

John Robins

So my side dish would be that. The drink is, like, I don't know how to answer this question.

James Acaster

It's tough.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

You want to give them some background? Loads of people who don't know you.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

You just don't drink anymore.

John Robins

I'm an alcoholic.

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

And I've stopped drinking. And I, for two years, did a podcast, not a million years from this format.

James Acaster

Well, you ripped us off.



John Robins

We're all dining out on the Desert Island Discs gravy train.

James Acaster

Welcome aboard.

John Robins

So we would get people to create a dream pub, with all their favourite drinks. And, you know, I've spent more time in my life thinking about my dream drink than I have any other thing. I, like, would use it to get to sleep at night, I would think about my favourite drinks. And really, like, I think this quite normal, people who drink, you're drinking to try and fulfil a dream of what drinking is, or what it was. Like, whether it's to recapture uni days, or times when you were younger, or times with your pals, or drinking at Christmas, to try and just bring back that feeling. And you said once, when we were on holiday together, and I wrote it down, you said, 'You never quite get to where you remember being the last time.' And that is such a great way of describing that feeling of, like, chasing the dream drink. And there are a couple of drinks, well, there's a handful of drinks that are monumentally important in my brain. They just stand there, like monolithic memories, and that nostalgia is so powerful, but towards the end of my drinking, the cost of trying to recapture that feeling was so enormous that it stopped becoming about that, and I ended up basically drinking to just disappear. Like, turn my brain off completely and obliterate myself. So I had to stop. And I did. And the last year has been, like, amazing, and really transformative, but part of that process is not allowing myself to slip back into those fantasies about alcohol.

Or when they come up, use, sort of, certain tools I've learnt to separate myself again, and see that for what it is, and bring that to awareness, because otherwise I fall into a reverie about it. And it's mad, because I can walk past a pub, and see a couple sharing a bottle of wine, and think, 'Oh God, that was what it was like, that was so nice, I'd love to be able to share that bottle of wine. Look at the glass, that's a Sauvignon Blanc, there's the condensation running-,'

James Acaster

10:02 mate.

John Robins

But the problem is-, I was told 10:30, it's not my fault you've got to get a fucking train.

James Acaster

No, I just thought it'd be funny to do that then, because what you were saying was so lovely, and beautiful, and so important. And I was, like, 'It'd be really funny if I'm a dick now.' Yes. So do carry on, because it is good stuff.

John Robins

But, like, the problem with the fantasy is, I've never in my life shared a bottle of wine with anyone, because I've absolutely fucking hoofed it, and if I have been sharing it with a friend or a partner, left them going, 'Where the fuck did that wine go?' So your brain does this thing called euphoric recall,



where it basically invents memories that don't even exist to try and get you to drink again. However, there are a couple of alcoholic drinks that, were I to allow myself to go down that staircase, I just can't go there anymore, but they are huge in my head. And one of them would be a drink we shared in New York, that red wine that you bought in the shop, which is one of my favourite memories, but I can't allow myself for that to be my favourite memory anymore. So I think, probably, to step out of the past, and something a bit more optimistic, and a bit more fun. And something a bit more present, because, you know, a lot of these choices are things from years and years ago, and that's something I think I'd really enjoy, is to have my taster menu and my dream restaurant, a trip back through taste, and tastes, that I'll never be able to experience again, just for that one night, but in Edinburgh this year, in quite a full-on month, and after quite a tumultuous couple of years for me. I, totally unexpectedly, met someone. And she's absolutely amazing. And it was nuts how it happened.

And we met the first time we went for a walk up Arthur's Seat, and she took a chilly bottle, you know, those chilly bottles you use to keep water cool? Just like a fucking water bottle you thicke, but anyway-

Ed Gamble

Every added detail is making me so happy. James, you know there's a chilly-, you get them in different colours.

James Acaster

Even that person didn't applaud you meeting someone at a festival. At Edinburgh, met someone, they're amazing. 'Fucking hurry up, mate.'

John Robins

But, anyway, like all the great romances, I got a message on a dodgeball WhatsApp group.

James Acaster

Fucking-, the dodgeball WhatsApp group now.

John Robins

Saying, 'Is anyone up in Edinburgh looking to do stuff in the morning?' And I was, like, 'I'm sober this year. It's my first time doing Edinburgh sober, that is exactly what I want to do.' So I messaged her. And we went for a walk up Arthur's Seat, and she had a water bottle that she'd brought coffee in, because it keeps stuff warm as well as cold. I didn't know that.

James Acaster

I did.

John Robins

So we walk up Arthur's Seat, and we're just, like, talking about our lives, and never.

Ed Gamble

Fucking hell, did she get a word in?



John Robins

I'm actually a very good listener, Ed.

James Acaster

I'm inclined to say the last time you need to be talking about your life is when you're on your way to a fucking high ledge.

John Robins

So we got to the top. She had brought a couple of plastic cups, and she poured us out some coffee that she'd made, and a couple of pastries. And we talked, and had the coffee, and it was so nice, and walked back down Arthur's Seat. And by the time we got to the bottom, I think we were quite smitten. And it's just been amazing. And I would like to have that water bottle, full of coffee, and the pastries, as my drink.

Ed Gamble

Very nice.

James Acaster

That's lovely. That's very nice.

Ed Gamble

How's the old farting situation with this person?

John Robins

There's a much more light-hearted approach to the whole arena.

James Acaster

That's good. I'm glad to hear that, John.

John Robins

I mean, you know, I'm still being a gentleman, but I think when the time comes-

Ed Gamble

I wouldn't make an event out of it.

John Robins

I need to add you to the WhatsApp group. I'm sure it'll be absolutely fine. That's the last thing I was expecting to discuss, but yes, I'm sure that'll be fine. I'm not worried about it, that's the thing. I'm not worried. I don't worry anymore.

James Acaster

That's good. Well, I hope you enjoy every single fart. What's your next course, John?



John Robins

Well it's desert. I'm just going to finish on desert.

James Acaster

Okay.

John Robins

And it's a desert I used to have at a coffee shop in Thornbury, which is not far from here. And that's where I was brought up, and it's a coffee shop called Heritage. Yes, a few fans in. My mum would go there every Saturday to meet her friends, and I'd go down with my mum. And they had this cake, which I'm going to enjoy describing to you, James.

James Acaster

I'm going to enjoy listening to it, John. I love when people describe cakes.

John Robins

Okay, so the cake is a dome.

James Acaster

Great start.

John Robins

Okay.

James Acaster

Great start. Yes.

John Robins

Bottom layer, white chocolate sponge.

James Acaster

Great. Delicious.

John Robins

Layer of what I'm assuming is white chocolate, sort of, buttercream.

James Acaster

Lovely.

John Robins

Next layer, milk chocolate sponge.

James Acaster

Mr Cadbury has got involved.



John Robins

Then we go the, sort of, white chocolate buttercream again. I don't think it was buttercream, I don't like buttercream, but it was some sort of white chocolate.

James Acaster

Ganache. Let's say a ganache.

John Robins

Yes.

Ed Gamble

Yes, might be ganache. Yes.

John Robins

Top layer, white chocolate sponge. The whole dome is encased in white chocolate, like, thin, very thin white chocolate.

James Acaster

Very thin, okay.

John Robins

And then on top of it are shavings of white chocolate. Now, this may surprise you. I'm not a huge fan of white chocolate.

James Acaster

Yes?

John Robins

However, as a kid, this was the highlight of the week. By the people in the café, it was known as blonde bombshell white chocolate gâteau.

James Acaster

I like how you had to make sure they knew, this is the people in the café that called it that.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

John Robins

Yes.

James Acaster

Not myself and my mother.



John Robins

No, we did as well.

James Acaster

Yes, but it wasn't called something else, and you and your mum were, like, 'Want the blonde bombshell.' 'Come on, John, we're going to get that blonde bombshell.' 'Yes, mum.'

John Robins

So-,

James Acaster

Blonde bombshell.

John Robins

So that would've been, like, late '80s. And, Jesus, they're making very rude gestures if you're listening on the podcast.

James Acaster

Alright love? Scha-wing.

John Robins

No, we called it 'blonde bombshell' based on their lead, we followed their lead.

James Acaster

Yes, yes.

John Robins

And I just always used to have a big slice of that, and I've never seen it before or since. So I'd like to have that in my dream restaurant. And it would go very nicely with that coffee, I think.

James Acaster

Yes, it sounds delicious.

Ed Gamble

So the people who cheered heritage coffee, is it still going?

Audience: Yes.

Ed Gamble

Do they do the blonde bombshell?

Audience: No.



John Robins

No.

Ed Gamble

Okay, there you go.

John Robins

It's changed ownership since then. And I once went in when I was a kid, and I was playing around with a little-, you know those perfume dispensers were you actually press a little ball and it goes, 'pff, pff, pff'?

James Acaster

Yes.

John Robins

I was playing around with one of them, and it fell off and smashed-

James Acaster

Why?

John Robins

I don't know. I shouldn't have even started the anecdote. It smashed through another vase in a, sort of, continual, cut-glass, absolute smash-a-thon.

James Acaster

With Heritage cafe, I know they don't do the blonde bombshell anymore. Do they still do the MILF pie?

Audience: I think so.

James Acaster

Okay. Here we go. John, I'm going to read your menu back to you now, see how you feel about it. You would like still water. Poppadoms or bread, you want crusty, doughy, white bread and focaccia with chunky salt crystals and rosemary in the general vicinity, you'd like to know they've met, dipped in olive oil and balsamic vinegar, perfect ratios. Aperitif, banana antibiotics in your childhood kitchen. Hors d'oeuvre, a stack of Pickled Scrumion McCoy's, 2011, in your car. Amuse-bouche, stolen Portuguese breakfast buffet role, cheese, onion, tomato, butter, and mustard, at the twelfth hole. Okay, starter, George Egg's cuppy egg on veggie haggis, craft cheese slice, Kismet Mr Naga sauce, mocha pot coffee and evaporated milk. Fish course, cured Alaskan salmon, listening to the Rolling Stones Greatest Hits with all the people from the festival. Palette cleanser, your Auntie Anne's, not your real auntie, crème de menthe ice cream. Main course, Schwartz's salt beef sandwich, lean, with white bread and pickles. Cheese course, a full wheel of 'The Cheese'. Side, fried salt cod with onions and Aunt May's, not your real auntie, Bajan hot pepper sauce from a Bahamas breakfast buffet. Drink, Arthur's Seat, chilly bottle coffee with oat milk and some pastries. Desert, the blonde bombshell from Heritage cafe, 1989. John Robins, this is your dream menu. I mean, that is great, John.



Ed Gamble

Give it up once more for John Robins.

James Acaster

The magnificent John Robins everybody.

Ed Gamble

Bristol, thank you so much, you've been absolutely amazing.

James Acaster

Thank you so much, John.

Ed Gamble

Thank you so much for coming to see Off Menu Live.

James Acaster

Goodbye.

Ed Gamble

Goodbye.

Ed Gamble

There we are, fantastic. And of course, listen to Elis and John on Radio 5 Live, I think going to two podcasts a week soon, wherever you get your pods.

James Acaster

Thank you so much again, John. I mean, I was messing around on the episode about how long the episode was lasting, but I could have talked to John for another five hours.

Ed Gamble

No you couldn't, you had to get a train.

James Acaster

Yes, I had to get a train.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

But I would've loved to have done it.

Ed Gamble

Yes. Me and Benito went back to the hotel, and I had a charcuterie board.



James Acaster

Yes. Well you did, and then you sent me a photo of it, and instead of giving you olives, they'd given you cherries.

Ed Gamble

Yes. And you know what, it worked.

James Acaster

Yes, you were very happy with it.

Ed Gamble

It really worked. They were the cherries that you put in, like, and Old Fashioned, or Manhattan. You know, they were a cocktail cherry.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

And I've since been to the wonderful restaurant Black Axe Mangal, and they had a duck liver parfait with the cherries that you would put in a whisky sour, and it was amazing. So, you know, it was accidental, but they've hit on something pretty special. Okay, goodbye.

James Acaster

Goodbye.