



William in the distillery and, below, the crisps that are also made from his crops



do certain things," he said. "The biggest thing I have learned so far is knowledge – it's a wonderfully powerful thing." William predicted there was a future for farming but he warned against the dangers of being complacent. "It's definitely an industry to get into but for newcomers without anything to put into it it's a tough call," he said. "But we're in a recession and it's a good time to be starting a new business. "Tyrrells was a very exciting time.

People were interested in where food came from – interested in the whole story. "It's important to find a unique selling point for your product." William admits it has sometimes been difficult going back to basics and starting a new company from scratch but on the whole he is doing what he set out to do: having fun. "I'm on a new learning curve – some days I wish I could go back to the hassle of dealing with supermarkets but it's great to have a challenge," he said.



Naked Chase apple vodka

LOCAL FOOD HEROES



Shaun Naen

Stephen Wheeler, commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, shares some of the successes and challenges of local food producers

SHAUN Naen is head chef and lecturer at Renaissance, the training kitchen and restaurant at Gloucestershire College in Cheltenham. Every year he takes under his wing around 10 Stage 3 aspiring chefs and coaches them in 'reality' kitchen – the last step in a three year learning journey before they venture into a professional environment. I asked Shaun how he inspires his student chefs. "I like to make working in a kitchen exciting," he says. "I make it challenging and always different, and teach them how to counteract the stress of restaurant service with what I call kitchen 'karma'. I always take an immense pride in their achievements once they've left college." So where did Shaun learn his kitchen 'karma'? "I was born in Borneo," he explains. "My grandmother was a superb cook, and created dishes for the family, fusing the Indian and Chinese culinary influences of Malaysian cooking. She had one large pot on a charcoal fire – here I have seven different industrial ovens." Intent on becoming a top chef, Shaun left Borneo and trained in England, and then at a top cookery school in Paris. Back in England, he went on to win numerous accolades including Chef of the Year.

Recently Shaun had the honour of preparing lunch for the Queen at Gloucestershire College. "Cooking for Her Majesty was definitely my greatest achievement," he said. "I had to compile five different menus and submit them to Buckingham Palace. She chose venison, which we sourced locally in Gloucestershire. The hardest part was keeping it all secret for three months." Shaun spends time each year visiting schools in Gloucestershire, talking to pupils about the importance of cooking skills and diet. He told me that he would love local chefs to visit his college kitchen to give talks and demonstrations. "My 'reality' kitchen would benefit enormously from some other 'reality' chefs at the stove," he says. So how would Shaun survive if he were to find himself stranded on a desert island? I would just need some rice and salt. The rest I would hunt, fish and forage for quite happily. I would make my own special rosehip gin, but my luxury item would have to be chocolate." I left with the feeling that Renaissance chef-students are in the extremely capable hands of this modest yet passionate Gloucestershire Food Hero.

