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# SHANGHAI JAM

*How did a former Cheltenham Ladies' College pupil turned racing-car engineer wind up selling homemade preserves in China? By Josephine McDermott*





**I**N THE AUTUMN OF 2009, while working for a company developing China's first Formula 2000 racing car in Shanghai, 25-year-old Amelia Heaton-Renshaw was lying in a park talking about how hard it was to find cakes in Shanghai. 'It dawned on me that jam would be a good thing to make,' she tells me two years later.

'My family always makes it, and there were no preserves on the market in China at that time.' Apart from imported, over-priced products, no one was selling homemade jam or chutney based on traditional, British recipes. Amelia left her job with Carbir Race Cars to take on the challenge. For her first fair at the British International School in Shanghai, she made several preserves, including plum, chestnut and dried apricot and almond jams, brandy and mandarin marmalade, and onion, pumpkin and raisin chutneys. 'I had a great reception,' she says. 'People gave me lots of feedback and ideas.' Now she has 17 jams and eight chutneys in her Amelia's range.

Her traditional Chinese lane house in Shanghai's former French Concession looks like an English country home with cut flowers, antiques and books everywhere, and wellies standing at the door. It's the same incongruous mix that defines her preserves – she uses seasonal Chinese produce such as figs, kumquats, loquats, mandarins and ginger in traditional British recipes, often borrowed from her mother.

Amelia is always thinking about new ingredients and if you mention a pickle that you haven't been able to find in Shanghai, it is quickly scribbled down. Strawberry jam and sweet onion chutney are her bestsellers. 'The idea is to support the Chinese market in the same way that I'd be supporting British produce if I were in England,' she says. 'There is a wider range here because the country is so large. Even if I'm using fruit from Hainan [China's southernmost province], it's not imported.'

She talks about the fruit she encounters as if describing meetings with new friends, her tone of voice showing the excitement she finds in sourcing new pectin-rich offerings. 'I've come across a few fruits I've had no idea what to do with,' she admits, citing durian, a large southeast Asian fruit with a thorn-covered husk and an offensive smell, and mangosteen, an Indonesian fruit with white flesh and purple skin. 'I love *yang mei* [Chinese bayberries] when they are not too ripe,' she continues. 'And I think jujube [southeast Asian tree] will be a good source of pectin. Green cooking apples contain lots of pectin but I haven't been able to get them here.' She admits she has so many new ideas that it's quite exhausting.

Amelia sets off to buy her fruit clutching a straw basket as if she were back home in Wiltshire about to scour the hedgerows – but she has to do all her sourcing speaking Chinese, plus a good deal of bargaining. She admits the language barrier can be difficult and it is also a challenge finding certain ingredients – such as Seville oranges and organic sugar. But her products are well received. 'Young white-collar workers are really keen to learn about other cultures and what we eat,' she says. Chinese customers like her chestnut jam as it has a similar texture to red bean paste. She has even given jam and chutney masterclasses to show people how to make and eat her exotic – to them – products.

Early experiments sometimes ended in disaster: Cape gooseberries made a jam that was too sweet but worked well in chutney; and Amelia once accidentally poured a load of boiling marmalade over the stove and floor. 'I walked away and thought "I can't deal with this now"; I sometimes still find marmalade down the side of the oven.' The entrepreneurial 27-year-old will soon increase production by using factory facilities and would love to open a British delicatessen one day.

'I've learnt a lot by doing this,' she says. 'I'm far more confident. I still have no idea what I'm doing, but I worry about it less. ♦



Josephine shopping in Shanghai

### KUMQUAT MARMALADE WITH BRANDY

**Makes 9 to 11 x 260g jars**

♦ 1,400g sliced kumquats

♦ 900g sugar

♦ 5 tablespoons of brandy

Slice the kumquats, removing the seeds. Leave to soak in water overnight – they should be fully covered. Next day, using all the water the kumquats have been soaking in, boil fruit until it's tender, then let it stand for another night.

On the following day, warm the fruit mixture and add the warm sugar and brandy. Wash jars in warm, soapy water and place in the oven (above 110°C) to sterilise and dry.

Bring the jam to a boil and boil until it reaches setting point of 118°C – see methods for testing when the jam is set in Tips for Jam Making (below).

Pour into sterilised jars; tighten the lids and vacuum seal for another 10 minutes in a vat of boiling water, making sure the jars are covered with an inch of water.

### STRAWBERRY JAM

**Makes 9 to 11 x 260g jars**

♦ 2kg strawberries (hulled, washed and cut in half)

♦ Juice of 6 lemons

♦ 1kg sugar

Put the strawberries and lemon juice into a saucepan and simmer until the fruit is soft and tender.

While the strawberries are softening, wash jars in hot, soapy water and place in a hot oven above 110°C, until they are dry, or the jam is ready.

Measure out the sugar and place on a tray in the oven to warm – it will melt faster when added to the jam.

Once strawberries are soft, add the warm sugar and stir until it has melted.

Bring to the boil and boil until it reaches 118°C.

Once the strawberry jam is ready, let it sit for 10 minutes before pouring it into the sterilised jars.

### TIPS FOR ALL JAM MAKING

♦ Warm the sugar before adding to the jam. It quickens the process and stops the jam from cooling down.

♦ Be sure the fruit has softened before you add the sugar – otherwise it coats the fruit and stops it from softening further.

♦ If you don't have a jam thermometer, test it is set by putting a little bit on a saucer and placing it in the freezer. If, after a few minutes it wrinkles when you push your finger through it, it is ready.

♦ If using a gas stove, stir the jam every now and again to prevent sticking and burning. When the jam is close to boiling, gently scrape the bottom of the pan – not too vigorously, as the jam sets better when not disturbed.

♦ While waiting for the jam to rest, put another saucepan of water on and bring to the boil. Place the jar lids in the water and boil for 10 minutes to sterilise, and do the same with a jam funnel too. Pour jam through the funnel into the jars, put on lids, tighten and place in the saucepan of water. Cover with an inch of water.

Boil for 10 minutes to create a vacuum between the jam and the lids. The jam will last for at least a year when stored in a dark, cool place.

♦ For more information: [www.ameliasmarketplace.com](http://www.ameliasmarketplace.com)