

Telegraph Magazine
Healthy, local food in unlikely places

If you can't stand the heat...

A raw-food kitchen could be just the thing. **James Vaughan** gets a lesson in the healthy art of cooking without an oven

JUST LIKE THE REAL THING

Conventional foods in the raw

- ✦ 'Pasta' The raw cook achieves the same effect with shaped vegetable strips, eg, beetroot ravioli, courgette tagliatelle or carrot spaghetti
- ✦ 'Chocolate mousse' Dates, avocados, vanilla pod, carob powder, agave nectar, water. Serve with orange zest
- ✦ 'Nougat balls' Sunflower seeds, almonds, mesquite meal, agave nectar
- ✦ 'Scrambled egg' Almonds, sunflower seeds, turmeric, sea salt, water
- ✦ 'Wraps' Liquefied banana or sliced coconut flesh, dried in the de-hydrator
- ✦ 'Cake base' Raw walnuts and raisins blended (and pulped), together

It's a weekday evening in west London and a dozen or so people have come to a cookery class with a difference. What's unusual is that there's no cooking involved. Look around the room at the Raw Food School and there's not an oven to be seen, much less a microwave. Instead, husband-and-wife team Andrew Davis and Angela Miller stand at the front of the class, armed with nothing more than a food blender and a carrot-peeler.

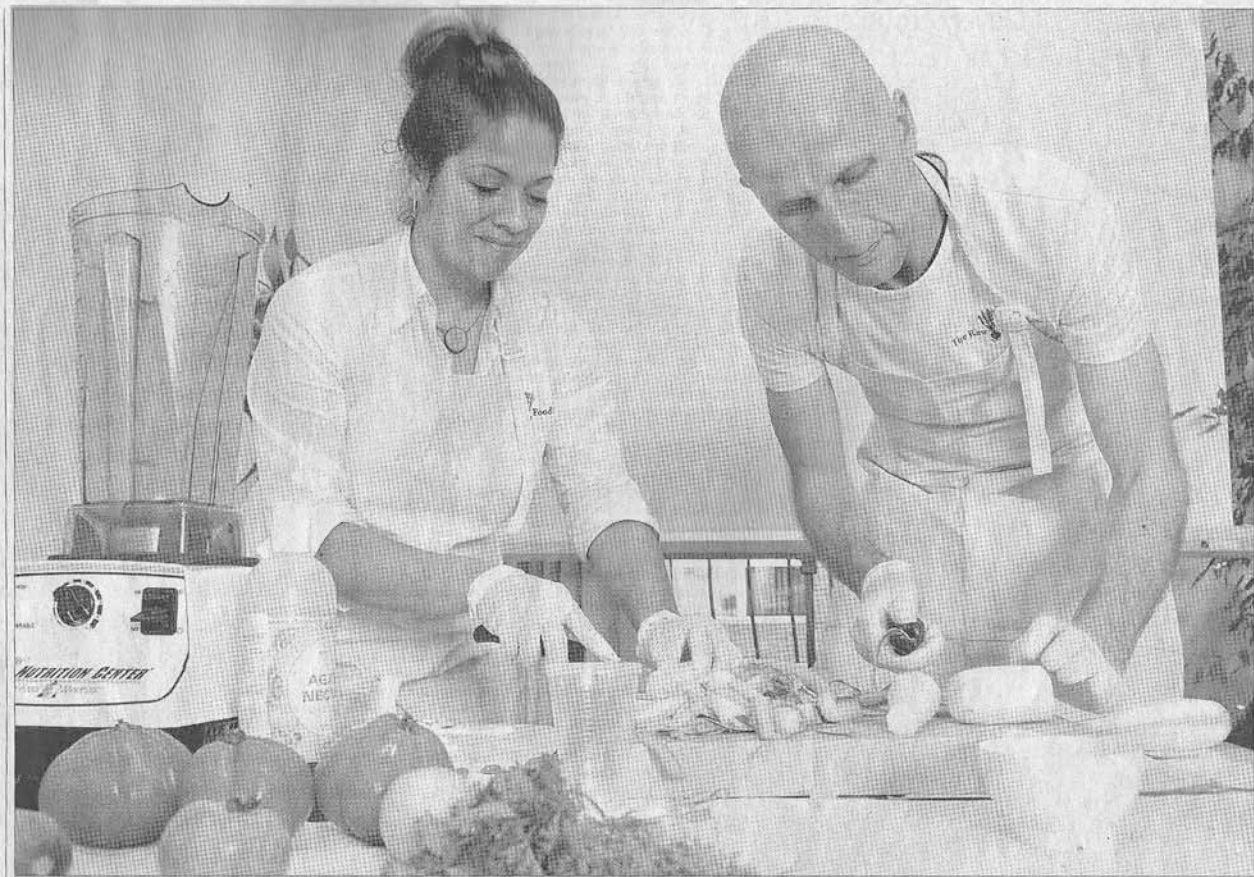
Plus, of course, several Tupperware containers' worth of fruit, vegetables, nuts, herbs and seeds, along with a jar or two of Himalayan rock salt. Not everything is easy to identify and some of the more obscure ingredients are still quite hard to get hold of in this country, notably mesquite powder and agave nectar (raw cactus honey).

There may be a dozen raw-food restaurants in New York, but London is still waiting for its first (rumoured to be a branch of Istanbul's super-hip Saf, due to open later this year). In the US, film stars such as Woody Harrelson and Alicia Silverstone are high-profile devotees of "living" food, but over here, Andrew and Angela have only just started to sow the seeds.

The class certainly begins in somewhat gospel-meeting fashion, as our tutor gets to his feet, announces "I'm Andrew and I went raw two years ago", and then proceeds to list the ailments that have miraculously disappeared since he started eating raw food. These begin with arthritis in the knees and go on to take in bad skin, bloated stomach and a permanent feeling of exhaustion. Meanwhile, his wife, Angela, goes one further with her claim that she was not so much overweight as "morbidly obese", with rampant hair loss to boot.

Today, both look the picture of health (she's 32, he's 37) and are anticipating extended decades of vitality, into old age and beyond. That said, they are going to need all the energy they can muster to convince tonight's audience that life without cooked food (let alone meat, fish, dairy products and alcohol) is in any way worth prolonging.

Not having to spend money on a cooker is, admittedly, a start. There again, if you're going to go seriously raw, you do need an electric food blender and not just any old blender, either. "This is our



workhorse," purrs Andrew, patting the side of his mighty Vita-Mix 5000, which cost £380 and has the power to turn nuts into dust. "It's the key to everything we do."

He's not joking, either. Almost every single one of the Raw Food School recipes requires ingredients to be whizzed into powdery, pasty or pulpy submission. As well as being noisy, the blending process can also be brutal, involving vigorous application of the machine's black truncheon-cum-pounding-tool, which Angela wields like a fairground Splat-The-Rat bat.

The results are surprisingly good. An unpromising-looking pile of tomatoes, garlic cloves and sundried tomatoes comes out as a

Crunch time: Angela Miller and Andrew Davis say their health has improved dramatically since they adopted a raw-food diet

deliciously tangy marinara sauce on top of, not tortellini, but spiral-cut courgette ribbons. And an equally unglamorous collection of almonds, sunflower seeds, spring onions and carrots becomes a rather piquant pâté, served with water-thin crackers that are themselves made of Vita-Mixed nuts, seeds and spices, spread out and left to crisp in the de-hydrator.

The what? Ah yes, another piece of essential raw-food equipment is a plug-in food-drying machine (Andrew recommends the nine-drawer Excalibur de-hydrator, at £199). Then there's the special £200 vegetable juicer (a normal fruit-only model won't do), not forgetting your saladacco (£24.95 from www.detoxyourworld.com),

which allows you to slice vegetables into pasta-like shapes.

So going raw isn't without its expense, but Andrew and Angela believe the health benefits far outweigh the cost. "When you cook vegetables above 112 degrees Fahrenheit, you destroy the built-in enzymes that help the food digest in your system," says Andrew. "As a result, your body has to draw on its own stock of enzymes, which will eventually run out. That's what ageing is, really: the body being depleted of enzymes."

At this point, raw-food enthusiasts such as Andrew and Angela start speculating about extending life beyond 100, extracting the "black snake" of

harmful toxins inside us and the virtues of going on a "juice feast", where you have to drink four litres of puréed celery or kale per day.

All of which is a bit too much for the average hot-food eater to swallow at one sitting. But there's no doubt that raw food when it's served like this (as opposed to a heap of lettuce and uncooked carrots) is tasty enough to merit a second helping. Pass the black truncheon, please.

✦ The Raw Food School (07986 458863; www.therawfoodschool.com) is running classes each month for the rest of the year at the Revival Wellbeing Centre, Chiswick High Road, west London. The four-hour introductory course costs £70. A two-day raw foods transformation class is £330.

