



The start of the Hampstead Heath hunt.

# Claire Zambuni

**T**HE FIRST Covert Girls dinner (with a silent 't', of course) was held at the Modern Pantry in London's Clerkenwell recently. The girls were a formidable group including the country's number one clay shot Charlotte Kerwood, and Helen Barbour, who has recently taken over the shooting clothing side of the family business. The other seasoned and passionate shots were all brought together through a love of shooting and game.

Anna Hansen created three innovative game dishes using pigeon, partridge and venison from the Quidenham & Hargham estates in Norfolk. Anna first trained as a chef under Fergus Henderson at The French House Dining Room in 1992. She then worked with Peter Gordon at Green Street in 1994, and again in

*"I heard a loud baying in the distance and then a red fox suddenly appeared in front of us, soon to be the quarry of the pursuing beagles."*

1998 at The Sugar Club. In 2001, Anna, Peter Gordon and partners opened their award-winning Marylebone restaurant The Providores, before opening The Modern Pantry to critical acclaim in August 2008.

The pigeon starter was a masterpiece, the breast wrapped in fenugreek, sweet potato, kalamata olives and sour cherries and then enveloped in pastry and served with ponzu dipping sauce. The partridge was roasted and served with carrots. The bird was covered in quinoa, orange, spiced almond and pumpkin seed crumbs and served with a chocolate jus.

The venison was some of the best I have ever tasted. It was almost raw, seared and served with bone marrow, hijiki seaweed in an Olorosso jus. Corney and Barrow expertly matched the wines and the girls all chatted about shared shooting experiences and adventures.

Pigeon was also on the menu at BASC's London Social bash at Holland & Holland in Mayfair, finely prepared game canapés being created by game chef Mark Gilchrist: I am proud to say I had helped shoot the pigeon myself in Kent the previous weekend. There were other delicious offerings such as venison sausage rolls and smoked wigeon. Mark gave a talk on cooking with game to a packed crowd, and The Balvenie helped loosen the evening's conversation with a whisky tasting.

It is coming near to the time when Lola, my black working cocker spaniel will make her first foray into the field. Her trainer Paul Rawlings and I have agreed we will spend her first day together. I have been reinforcing his training on Hampstead Heath each day with my pink working whistle and a dummy. I received several disapproving looks from the London luvvies but remained focused and unfazed.

Lola absolutely loves the training and is quick and responsive. My border terrier Purdey finds it all beneath her and spends time finding some dirt to roll in. We use the same area each day and on our way there one day met a lovely lady with two beagles she had 'rescued' from a hunting pack. She explained she was anti-hunting, but these dogs are now her beloved pets. After walking a fair way to where I do my daily routine with Lola, leaving the lady walking in the opposite direction, I suddenly heard a voracious baying in the distance. A few yards in front of us a red fox in stunning condition appeared out of the undergrowth to boldly stare at us before continuing on its way.

Lola and Purdey sat by my side. The baying became ever louder and eventually the two single-minded and determined beagles appeared in hot pursuit of the fox, following the scent of their potential quarry. They were a fair way from their owner, stopping for nothing and I feared she would have a call from Fulham by the time they were apprehended. I wonder whether this could be the start of the Hampstead Heath Hunt? 🐾

*Claire Zambuni is a dedicated game shooter and chairman of the BASC London social committee.*