

# BREAKFAST AT LOUBI'S



BELLA FREUD & CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

WORDS LIAM HESS PHOTOGRAPHY JIMMY FOX

BREAKFAST AT CHRISTIAN'S HOLIDAY HOUSE IN MELIDES, PORTUGAL

It's a summer morning at the legendary shoe designer Christian Louboutin's estate in the coastal town of Melides, and breakfast is served. Here, at Christian's private oasis, he spends long Portuguese summers sketching the red-soled wonders that will be sold next season to the world's glitterati. It's a closely guarded sanctuary to which only a friend like Bella Freud — a British fashion icon in her own right — is granted an insight. With a friendship spanning three decades, they remember the slap-up meals they've enjoyed together across London and Paris, the fashion trends best applied to food, and some of their deepest, darkest culinary desires.

**BREAKFAST FOR TWO**

Toasted rye bread and marmalade  
Muesli with yoghurt  
Fresh watermelon and seasonal fruits  
Black coffee

**C**HRISTIAN: Breakfast is my favourite meal, you know. I love eating fresh fruit in the morning. When you wake up you never feel stuffy.

**BELLA:** Do you always wake up happy?

**CHRISTIAN:** I do, I wake up happy. That's why I associate morning food with happiness. I've always enjoyed the mornings, but I also like the last few hours before bed, because I know that if things are getting too much or I'm stressed, I can sleep on it. I think my relationship with food changes so much throughout the course of a day. In the morning, I feel enthusiastic but I eat light in the morning. I don't

need to be excited by my food in the morning, really. For me, dinner is associated with fun, so that's when the food needs to be exciting. What about you?

**BELLA:** What I get endless pleasure from is having a really strong black coffee, and a piece of toasted rye bread with olive oil and marmalade. The joy of that sensation gives me a much more sensuous pleasure than dinner probably. I can find things hard work because I'm often so tired. Lunch for me is usually functional, but the biggest treat in the world is to go out for lunch, which I hardly ever do. I always do it when you come over, though. I feel like, if I say I'm having lunch with Christian, it counts as work so I can rush away.

**CHRISTIAN:** I would say that there's something in that association between food and certain people. If I eat alone, which is pretty rare, I don't really eat properly.

**BELLA:** Me too. If I'm cooking for my son,

and he actually wants to eat at the time I'm making it — because he often likes to eat at weird times — the real pleasure is sharing the meal with him. If he enjoys it, I enjoy it much more too. But if I'm on my own then I make very easy things, boiled potatoes and something green with a bit of olive oil and salt, which I find totally delicious. You know how people go on and on about food, I'm not that adventurous unfortunately.

**CHRISTIAN:** Maybe that's an English thing. In France, we talk about food all day! You will be having dinner, and you'll be talking about what you had for lunch today, and what you're going to have for lunch the next day too.

**BELLA:** The way that French people talk about food is like they're planning to build a house, it's so detailed and strategic. We'll get this, we'll get that, we'll do it in this way. I can't do that. If I open a recipe and it has too many ingredients, I can't handle it.

**CHRISTIAN:** I find the relationship with food in America quite terrifying. Being French, I arrive there and think I will take a starter and then a main, but I realise that the starter is more than enough — it would probably be enough for five people in Europe. One of the most annoying things to me also is when you go to a restaurant and the waiters come over and ask, "are you still working on your food?"

**BELLA:** Oh my god, it's so annoying.

**CHRISTIAN:** For some reason, the idea of "working" on food just makes me want to stop eating for like a week.

**BELLA:** I agree. As if it's a building site or something. It's so unappetising.

**CHRISTIAN:** The type of relationship that America has with food is not always associated with pleasure.

**BELLA:** What do you think they associate it with? Some terrible kind of duty to consume as much as you possibly can, and then take it home if you can't physically squeeze any more into your body. Also the most gluttonous combination of foods you can have, sometimes almost obscene — you go to America and it's all there, it's normal. Having peanut butter in your milkshake or 20 types of cheese on your burger, these things that you should do in secret when nobody's looking. [laughs] There it's all available, and it's a good idea.

**CHRISTIAN:** 'Too much' works better in fashion than in food, I think. There are plenty of words actually that are functional in fashion but dysfunctional in food, and vice versa. I'm trying to think of an example where both can work. If you like minimalist fashion, are you going to like minimalist food too? Or are they detached.

**BELLA:** I feel if you like minimalist fashion then you're probably going to be quite adventurous in food. You've already eliminated quite a lot of things from your horizon by dressing in a minimalist way, and you probably have minimalist décor to match. So you might be more adventurous when it comes to food, searching out different things. I think minimalism is actually quite an effort, isn't it? It's not just about having less, it's curating and refining.

**CHRISTIAN:** I think being matchy-matchy has not been tried enough in food. There should be a restaurant that does dishes where they are all one colour. Although that

“French haute cuisine is always about transformation, which I sort of like. It never looks like the original products, it’s playful.”

— Christian Louboutin



might involve a lot of food dyes.

**BELLA:** I don’t think I would like that — I still want to have the option, even though I know I’m probably going to order the same thing over and over again. I love risotto, so whichever restaurant I go to, I always look for it, because I know it’s going to make me feel good if I eat it.

**CHRISTIAN:** Okay, so let’s forget about matchy-matchy restaurants. Doesn’t work for food.

**BELLA:** In a weird way, maybe Japanese food has the real artistry or elegance to pull that off. Even if it’s not matchy-matchy per se, it seems to coordinate really well.

**CHRISTIAN:** I’m more visual than mental in many aspects and I think perhaps that’s why Japanese food could never be my favourite. It’s too much of a cerebral food for me, it’s not always sensual or fragrant. It’s like in Japanese culture how you don’t walk all through the garden to experience it, you sit and look and contemplate. It’s a very contemplative culture, which is very interesting, but when it comes to food I’m not so into contemplation, I’m more into stuffing myself! [laughs] Which doesn’t really work with Japanese food. Have you heard of ‘hell tofu’?

**BELLA:** I don’t think so?

**CHRISTIAN:** So you put the tofu in water, then you put in these tiny live fish or baby eels too. You slowly turn up the heat, but eventually the water becomes uncomfortable for the animal and they want to escape the heat, so they start burrowing into the tofu because it’s cooler and also it’s starting to cook so it

“I don’t really like French cuisine for those exact reasons, there are too many things hiding in it that I don’t like.” — Bella Freud

tastes nice for them. Then they end up in the tofu, hiding, and are slowly cooked. What fascinated me was are you really eating it for the taste? Boiled tofu doesn’t sound super exciting to me. Or are you eating the idea of it, of those animals hiding in that block of tofu. You’re enjoying that little death that is now nourishing you.

**BELLA:** It’s quite perverse, isn’t it. I could probably eat that though, as I like little fish and I like tofu. As in, I think for me it would taste good — I don’t enjoy the idea of cruelty to animals. I find it interesting that your appetite can overcome your moral reservation about how something appears on your table, then sometimes, if the appetite isn’t strong enough, your objection will overrule your appetite. That is a strange one.

**CHRISTIAN:** I found it fascinating — it’s like an expression of triumph over nature. French cuisine is about triumphing over nature too I think, but in a very different way. It’s not like Italian, where you are trying to retain the character of the ingredients you’re using, their essence. French haute cuisine is always about transformation, which I sort of like. It never looks like the original products, it’s playful.

**BELLA:** I don’t really like French cuisine for those exact reasons, there are too many things hiding in it that I don’t like. As I’ve got older, I’ve also become more and more intolerant of rich food and I want to be as mentally alert as possible, so I have to be quite strict about what I eat or it will throw me off course. I used to get really bad headaches — I would cut an onion up and get a headache that last-





ed for three days — so I ended up having to get very censorious about food.

**CHRISTIAN:** Do you think it has anything to do with your Freudian heritage? Perhaps it has left you with many neuroses. Or maybe the opposite would be true, that you should have no neuroses.

**BELLA:** I need neuroses to keep the family business going. [laughs] At first, I was completely disinterested, partly because my father very rarely spoke about my grandfather, Sigmund Freud. Then as I got older, I became quite interested in it all. I started doing therapy and psychoanalysis myself, and I became a bit preoccupied with it actually, that idea of looking for those underlying reasons. But now I feel like I've got more of a balance.

**CHRISTIAN:** Is your therapist Freudian?

**BELLA:** He is, actually. One of ours.

He's actually only semi-Freudian.

**CHRISTIAN:** Semi-Freudian and semi-Jungian?

**BELLA:** No, he's not into Jung. He likes Melanie Klein, actually, who I don't know much about. I don't know that much about Freud

either, to be honest. My son Jimmy once brought home a comic book from school and it was about his theories, which strangely enough was how I learnt a lot about them myself. I read Jean-Paul Sartre's screenplay that he wrote for John Huston, when Huston wanted to make a film about Freud and he asked Sartre to write it. It was too long so he asked him to edit it, so Sartre went away and then came back and it was double the length, so that was the end of that. It was very interesting though. I kind of like the way my knowledge of him has come to me.

**CHRISTIAN:** Would you say you're more Freudian in the sense of your father [Lucian] Freud than your great-grandfather Freud?

**BELLA:** I suppose, to be true to my Freudian roots, I was obsessed with my father. Maybe that meant in turn that I wasn't at all obsessed with my great-grandfather. Later in my life I think I understood more why my father tried to escape from that legacy, the association. He cut off from it and became very intensely his own person. I was completely captivated by him, and how he did things, and he was a

“At first, I was completely disinterested in Sigmund Freud, partly because my father very rarely spoke about him. Then as I got older, I became quite interested in it all. I started doing therapy and psychoanalysis myself, and I became a bit preoccupied with it actually, looking for those underlying reasons for my behaviours.” — Bella Freud

really good cook as well, actually. He made quite English meals, he'd buy grouse or liver, or get things from the local delicatessen and prepare them in a very simple way.

**CHRISTIAN:** If you have a date and you want to flirt a bit, what kind of restaurant do you like to go to? I ask people this question quite often actually.

**BELLA:** Probably a Japanese restaurant, as I feel very safe there. Also, contrary to what you were saying earlier, I find Japanese food very sensuous. If I eat too much I feel like a blob and I'm quite shy on a date. Japanese food is easy to eat without making a mess. What about you?

**CHRISTIAN:** I want to go somewhere quiet, but not intimidatingly small or empty. Somewhere where you can share food, like Ethiopian, because then you can complain or connect about the food you're eating.

**BELLA:** I would never think of that, it's a good idea.

**CHRISTIAN:** When I'm on a date, being slightly shy as well, if I feel intimidated I can get really clumsy. In a restaurant it's terrifying, because I could end up with gravy all over me. Ethiopian is pretty safe, so is Japanese. As much as I love pasta, it's not a dating food.

**BELLA:** It's too filling, for a start.

**CHRISTIAN:** You're so full at the end of your dinner that it's a nightmare. You don't want to look gluttonous on a first date.

**BELLA:** Like a sort of pig.

**CHRISTIAN:** It's a balance. You don't want to be too fussy about your food, but not too piggy either. So pasta is forbidden. One of the most beautiful movie scenes ever is a love scene around food in this Japanese film *Tampopo*.

**BELLA:** I saw that, it's amazing. I remember the part where he pours prawns over the woman's stomach.

**CHRISTIAN:** I love the scene of the couple having lunch by the sea, it's so sensual and evocative and erotic. They end up passing an egg yolk back and forth between their mouths, then she closes her eyes and it drips on her. It's so sexual.

**BELLA:** It's funny, I haven't met anyone else that's seen that film.

**CHRISTIAN:** It's a masterpiece, but maybe it's because quite often when you mix food with other ideas it becomes a little bit weird



“The birth of the word glamour comes from a Scottish word that I don’t remember, meaning an illusion created by witches, which is not far from the fashion industry. Glamour is an illusion. “You don’t necessarily have to be a witch to create that image, but it’s an illusion.”

— Christian Louboutin



and people get freaked out. Have you seen *Babette’s Feast*, for example?

BELLA: Yes.

CHRISTIAN: I remember people saying that it was one of the most beautiful movies ever and going to see it, but before I went I was thinking, I don’t really have any desire to watch a film of people eating. It’s weird, I love the movie, but when you think about the act of eating, it’s not a very photogenic thing for some reason.

BELLA: The story is interesting, but it doesn’t make you hungry. It’s often the same with fashion film — even if it doesn’t make you want to buy the clothes, it can still be so beautiful and fascinating.

CHRISTIAN: It’s interesting that people will

always be Instagramming their food, but never uploading pictures of them eating. It’s just not very photogenic, is it?

BELLA: I hate it so much. When it’s static like that, it’s completely boring. It’s not appetising in any way. Anything that comes between you and eating the food is always a bad idea. It just detracts from the experience and it’s very boring to look at. Unless it’s the fishes diving into the tofu. That would be quite interesting to see on Instagram.

CHRISTIAN: Honestly, it sounds like something from an unfinished David Lynch movie or something. I feel like glamour as it exists in fashion doesn’t really have an equivalence in food. You wouldn’t say, I ate such a glamorous fish.

BELLA: Glamour in fashion is so evocative, you can visualise it immediately. The idea of eating a glamorous fish is quite repellent.

CHRISTIAN: The birth of the word glamour comes from a Scottish word that I don’t remember, meaning an illusion created by witches, which is not far from the fashion industry. Glamour is an illusion. You don’t necessarily have to be a witch to create that image but it’s an illusion.

BELLA: It is fascinating though, because some people do seem to embody that. Even some children have a real kind of independence about themselves, where you can kind of see the beginnings of them being a glamorous person.

CHRISTIAN: One of our most bizarre char-

acteristics as a species is our ability to collectively tell and believe in stories, to maintain that sense of illusion. It’s like that idea that you could never convince a monkey to give you a banana in exchange for unlimited bananas in monkey heaven. When we were cavemen, it would have been more productive to go out and hunt and forage rather than worship these mystical guardian spirits. And that extends further than religion, to economy — we all kind of mutually agree that this piece of green paper has a certain value. We share these stories across huge communities and societies. I think glamour is one of those things too, that many people can believe in, but it’s illusory.

BELLA: I agree. I think in the end it’s what keeps us interested, otherwise we just become like animals. We eat because we’re hungry, not because we’re attracted to or find a piece of food appetising — the pleasure is removed. In the same way, it’s not having sex with somebody because we like their mind, we’re attracted to them in that way, it’s just the basic desire for reproduction.

CHRISTIAN: Getting dressed or eating can’t just be about fulfilling those basic desires. It has to be about pleasure and joy.

BELLA: The joy of my marmalade on toast in the morning.

To sample Bella’s favourite breakfast of **Marmalade on Toast** eaten here, consult her recipe on p30  
For Christian’s recipe for **Aspic de Volaille**, visit p36

**AND NOW FOR A LATE NIGHT SNACK...**



**“NO JUNG FOOD”**

**CUBAN CHICKEN AND RICE**

*1 shredded chicken  
4 cups of rice and vegetables cooked in chicken stock,  
white wine and tomato sauce*

Serve with fresh coriander, lime juice and hot sauce



**“THE INTERPRETATION OF CREAMS”**

**MANGO CREAM MEDLEY**

*2 ripe mangoes, peeled and cubed  
2 cups vanilla ice cream  
4 tbsp sweet condensed milk  
Cassis liqueur*

Mix all the ingredients in a blender and serve immediately