FRED SIRIEIX

FOLLOW YOUR HEART.
Cynics say Valentine’s Day is just a money spinner. I think it’s fun to embrace it – what do you think?

I think you should embrace it. It’s a day in your calendar when you can be romantic, and do something special, and make somebody else feel that you think about them. As much as it’s commercial, what isn’t? Trade is the way we make the world go round, and there’s nothing wrong with that. I think it’s a great opportunity to show someone they mean something to you.

Some people have their suspicions that restaurants double their prices on Valentine’s Day – is this true, or can you dispel it as a myth?

Restaurants don’t double their prices – it’s just the law of supply and demand, because everybody wants to come that day, and they might have a special menu. The other factor is, there are only tables of two on Valentine’s Day. You don’t have big groups who notoriously spend more money, and if there’s a table that would normally seat six, you can only really turn this into two tables of two, so you’re losing two covers. It’s like Christmas – it’s a bit more expensive and that’s normal. You wouldn’t expect it to be the same price because it’s Christmas Day and people are working, looking after you.

Are flowers and chocolates clichéd or classic?

They are classics. Everybody likes chocolate and flowers so it’s a good start. If you don’t know what to do, go for flowers and chocolates – at least you can’t get it wrong!

You’ve eaten in some of the best restaurants in the world – what are the most romantic restaurants you’ve been to?

There’s a really romantic restaurant called Chez Black [chezblack.it] in Positano on the Amalfi Coast. The setting is beautiful, it’s hot, there are beautiful people everywhere, it’s nice food, and it’s just that dolce vita – the dolce vita is all over your skin, it makes you feel so good.

In London, you could come to Galvin at Windows, [galvinatwindows.com] but it’s not fair for me to say that [Fred is the General Manager]. So, I would say Jose Pizarro [josepizarro.com] in Bermondsey. It’s a lovely place, very easy going, serving beautiful Spanish food, and great tapas. You can sit at a half-circle table, watching the kitchen, drinking a glass of wine. Bermondsey is very cool and trendy, almost bohemian, and it makes you feel young when you go there.

If Valentine’s Day comes round when you’ve only been on one or two dates together, is it too soon to send flowers, or invite that person on a Valentine’s Day date?

Follow your heart. If it’s the right time to kiss, you kiss, whether it’s the first date or the tenth date. If Valentine’s Day is around the corner and you feel like it, just say, ‘It’s Valentine’s, let’s go out!’ Be free and cherish the beauty of that moment because life’s too short.

If it’s your first Valentine’s together, is it make or break?

No, I don’t think it’s make or break, it’s just the first one. There has to be a first one – take it in your stride, then it’s going to be what it’s going to be. C’est la vie.
If you’re a guy who’s not into Valentine’s Day, should you still make the effort to spoil your partner?

If you’re not into it, and you’re forcing yourself, it might be difficult for you to fake it all the way. But we all do things in life that we don’t want to do and this is why discipline is a very important trait. Sometimes you have to dig deep and do the right thing, and if it’s going to make somebody happy then come on, it’s one day a year!

Are oysters really an aphrodisiac?

It depends if you think they are. If you think they are, they probably are, so don’t have them on Valentine’s because you might get too randy! They’re very potent, especially the French ones – you have six and you’re away.

What would be on your ideal Valentine’s menu?

Caviar with blinis and cream, followed by raw fish: ceviche, carpaccio, sashimi, and oysters – bien sur. Then a lovely grilled fish, a whole one, like a turbot, with beurre blanc, some nice French fries, a bit of a green salad, and Brillat-Savarin, a triple fat, triple cream cheese that melts in your mouth and makes you feel like, ‘Ooh! This is naughty.’ I would have that with walnuts and some beautiful bread, then for dessert, chocolate mousse. I would start with champagne of course, then have a lovely Burgundy, like a Meursault.

What’s the one magic ingredient for a romantic Valentine’s Day?

A passion that’s consuming both of you. It’s all in the anticipation of the day, because you don’t start to make love the moment you make love – you begin two days before, in your head. If you both do that separately and then you meet on the same day, there’s going to be an explosion!

If your partner says they’re not into Valentine’s Day, should you still surprise them by doing something special, in case they’re just saying they’re not into Valentine’s Day?

People are funny in relationships, sometimes they say they’re not into Valentine’s Day, but actually it’s the opposite. If you want to do something to say, ‘I’m doing this for you because I’m thinking of you,’ then I’m sure someone would be touched by that. Go with what’s in your heart.

If you want to cook a romantic Valentine’s dinner at home, what would be a fail-safe option?

Do surf ‘n’ turf because it’s very simple. Get a nice rib eye steak on the bone, and rather than prawns, get lobster. Cut it in half and baste it with parsley and garlic butter, then roast it for five minutes. Serve it with your meat, some green salad, and oven chips – you can even get sweet potato fries. Get a dessert from Marks & Spencer and voila – that’s all you need.

Should we all be more romantic all year round?

Yes, it’s nice to feel love and to be loved. Sometimes we get carried away with work, children and responsibilities, but we understand the world according to our senses – we put food in our mouths, we hear beautiful music, we see beautiful things, we feel things on our skin, we touch people, and just as I eat every day, I want to feel love too. Love is a pleasure – I want to feel the electricity.

What are little things we can do to make every day more magic?

Smiling, telling people you like them and why you like them, being kind, saying what we do, and doing what we say – it’s the little things, like delivering on your promises. With a partner, a touch, a joke, a kiss – these things keep you connected, they keep the electricity between you. If you stop, the connection goes. It’s hard because we get distracted by so many different things. But you need to remind yourself, because what you give is what you get.

Is it harder to keep the romance alive when you’ve got kids?

Definitely, it’s very hard to do. It takes time and effort, and invariably, the children take over because they are the children, and you always want the best for them. For couples, it’s about learning to take themselves out of the parenting mindset and putting themselves back in a place where only the two of you exist. It’s very difficult because it makes you feel selfish, and you don’t think about doing that naturally.

Lots of long-term couples with children have adopted the idea of ‘date night’ – is this a good way to keep the romance alive?
When you meet somebody, all you want to do is look into each other’s eyes and stay in bed all day, but after a while, work takes over and you want to go and play football. This is normal, it’s just what happens. There’s attraction, and then it dissolves. It hasn’t gone, but it doesn’t have the intensity it did at the beginning. Love takes over, but you have to keep the flames of passion burning.

When you have children, this involves planning, like: ‘OK, on Tuesday, we are going out, it’s our date night.’ You must plan ahead, because when you have children, you can’t just say, ‘OK I’m going.’ You need to book a babysitter – and of course, you can’t come back drunk at 4 o’clock in the morning.

Should we be getting more creative, for example writing poems or making cards by hand?

Yeah, it’s nice to get creative. A card, a poem, a song – you can do whatever you want, as long as you have the imagination. You don’t need money to do crazy things, you just have to dare to do it.

Scrolling through social media, it often seems that instead of being fully present in special moments, people are busy taking pictures for Facebook and Instagram. Do you think that we should just enjoy Valentine’s Day, without taking pictures of our champagne glasses?

Maybe by doing that you might connect through taking the picture together, but I think it’s just too much. Social media is a big addiction – most people are addicted to it, and people are so used to it. In the old days, people used to smoke, and now, instead of having a cigarette after making love, they post, ‘Oh I just made love, it was fantastic.’ Social media has become an addictive drug, and it’s got to the level where it has taken over people’s lives, unfortunately.

Do you think we should try and be in the moment more?

Yeah, totally. Being in that moment is the hardest thing to do – and yet, that’s all there is.

If you want to make sure your date has an amazing Valentine’s Day to remember, what’s the best way to make sure you get really good service in the restaurant?

You can tell the restaurant it’s a very special night for you – but you have to remember, it’s very special for everybody else. If you have a compelling reason for why it’s very special for you, call the restaurant, or go there in person to explain. This will have more power, but only do it if it’s genuine. Choose your restaurant wisely because if you choose a good restaurant, they will look after you regardless. If you choose a bad one, they may look after you a bit more, but it’s still going to be bad because they’re bad anyway. Choose the right restaurant!

Fred’s podcast Oh La La is available on Apple Podcasts.

“Cherish the moment more.”

When you meet somebody, all you want to do is look into each other’s eyes and stay in bed all day, but after a while, work takes over and you want to go and play football. This is normal, it’s just what happens. There’s attraction, and then it dissolves. It hasn’t gone, but it doesn’t have the intensity it did at the beginning. Love takes over, but you have to keep the flames of passion burning.

When you have children, this involves planning, like: ‘OK, on Tuesday, we are going out, it’s our date night.' You must plan ahead, because when you have children, you can’t just say, ‘OK I’m going.' You need to book a babysitter – and of course, you can’t come back drunk at 4 o’clock in the morning.

Should we be getting more creative, for example writing poems or making cards by hand?

Yeah, it’s nice to get creative. A card, a poem, a song – you can do whatever you want, as long as you have the imagination. You don’t need money to do crazy things, you just have to dare to do it.

Scrolling through social media, it often seems that instead of being fully present in special moments, people are busy taking pictures for Facebook and Instagram. Do you think that we should just enjoy Valentine’s Day, without taking pictures of our champagne glasses?

Maybe by doing that you might connect through taking the picture together, but I think it’s just too much. Social media is a big addiction – most people are addicted to it, and people are so used to it. In the old days, people used to smoke, and now, instead of having a cigarette after making love, they post, ‘Oh I just made love, it was fantastic.’ Social media has become an addictive drug, and it’s got to the level where it has taken over people’s lives, unfortunately.

Do you think we should try and be in the moment more?

Yeah, totally. Being in that moment is the hardest thing to do – and yet, that’s all there is.

If you want to make sure your date has an amazing Valentine’s Day to remember, what’s the best way to make sure you get really good service in the restaurant?

You can tell the restaurant it’s a very special night for you – but you have to remember, it’s very special for everybody else. If you have a compelling reason for why it’s very special for you, call the restaurant, or go there in person to explain. This will have more power, but only do it if it’s genuine. Choose your restaurant wisely because if you choose a good restaurant, they will look after you regardless. If you choose a bad one, they may look after you a bit more, but it’s still going to be bad because they’re bad anyway. Choose the right restaurant!

Fred’s podcast Oh La La is available on Apple Podcasts.