

Fast talking:
Shane, left,
and Mimi chat
5:2 at Moro
on London's
Exmouth Market



‘I don’t want to sound like Saint Mimi’

I have to declare a personal interest in the fortunes of Mimi Spencer. I worked alongside her years ago when she was fashion editor of the *London Evening Standard*. We were often wedged together in a queue at a show, or squeezed up against the bar at a party. Back then, there were 20-ft-high posters featuring her strong yet doe-like face plastered on the walls of Tube stations. She had a window of Selfridges dedicated to her personal style. It was the mid Nineties, and Mimi Spencer was an unusual fashion guru, fun and friendly with an infectious scattergun laugh. I remember her as the sexy, vibrant one in a sea of black-clad, mostly joyless, invariably skinny fashion worshippers – blooming and rather gorgeous. So it’s with a certain amount of trepidation that I’m meeting her (hot off the train from her home in Brighton) for lunch at Moro on Exmouth Market.

Because, since we last met, Mimi Spencer has become the celebrated co-author of

With half the country – and the office – on the 5:2 diet, we sent *Shane Watson* to meet fashion editor-turned-5:2 guru Mimi Spencer for lunch. Good thing it wasn’t a fast day...

PHOTOGRAPHS
Leanne Bracey

The Fast Diet (Short Books, £7.99). Also known as the 5:2, it’s a regime based on intermittent fasting that has surpassed all other diets (it feels that way, anyway) on account of its unique promise to make you lose weight, get healthy and live longer at the same time. Mimi has become not just thin (size 8 down from a 12) but a fit, yoga- and Pilates-honed, teetotal businesswoman running what can now legitimately – 18 months on from publication of the book and one million book sales later – be described as a diet empire.

So, I’m happy to report that even before I see her I’m hit by that irrepressible trilling laugh and, even more pleased to find that she looks normal – ‘slim’ as she says with a grin ‘not thin’ – radiating energy in her sleeveless top and skinny J Brand jeans. It’s true her once bouncy bosom has faded away (so much so that she now wears camisoles instead of bras ‘and I don’t miss those’), but otherwise, at 46, she looks a lot like she did all those ▶

years ago, and seems much the same, apart from the fact that she is genuinely evangelical about this diet. 'It's really got under the skin,' she says, describing how she was recently almost mobbed at a bar mitzvah by women with tears in their eyes who told her she had changed their lives.

That is the big difference with this diet, according to Mimi and co-author Dr Michael Mosley (they met when she interviewed him following his BBC documentary on the benefits of intermittent fasting; she texted him at 2am the next day saying, 'Look, I think there is a book in this') – it's a long-term lifestyle choice. 'It doesn't pathologise food. It's not onerous to live off 500 calories twice a week. The reason this is so big is because you don't feel like you are on a diet. And there are serious health benefits.'

Her dad, she says, is the perfect example of the knock-on effect of 5:2. 'He's 77 and he's lost four stone. He's off statins, his cholesterol is right down. I don't want to sound like Saint Mimi but actually I really mind that people get healthy.' One woman messaged her to say that thanks to the 5:2 she has been swimming with her five-year-old daughter for the first time 'and



to the 5:2. Her husband, a QC human rights barrister, swears by it. You wonder if he might miss the curvy woman he married? 'Funnily enough he wouldn't comment. But I think I feel better about myself and he probably gets the benefit of that.'

A new body

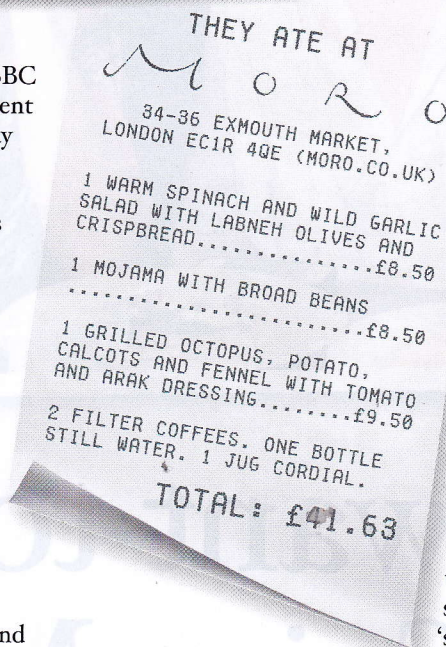
confidence has obviously been a big incentive: feeling good enough to pose for bikini shots to promote her new book *The Fast Beach Diet*, having, at 46, the figure to wear any clothes she wants. 'Most people reading this will think a size 12 is perfectly

reasonable and it is, but I didn't feel good in a bikini. I had a tummy bulge I couldn't get rid of and I hated it.' The first thing she nipped out to buy when it was clear she'd be requiring a whole new wardrobe were the J Brand jeans she's wearing today 'size 27' she says,

'I'm a hippy really. I would never consider plastic surgery. I like my crows' feet'

twisting around to find the label. And when she realised the book was a runaway bestseller, she bought herself a Mini. Recently she's put in a bid for a beach hut in Hove, near to where she lives and works, sharing an office at home with her husband. She's the poster girl for finding your mojo in your forties. So do her friends hate her now? 'One friend did say to me, "Oh God, you are rich and thin!" But no. They've all been boringly supportive.'

Even so, she's acutely aware of not setting herself up as a woman in total control, especially since she doesn't drink any more (for health reasons not connected with the diet). 'I'm a hippy really. I would never consider plastic surgery. I like my crows' feet. I want to kiss them, because they are who I am. I have a girlfriend who had Botox recently and it was like a wedge had been driven between us.' Some people, I say, would think of the diet as a different kind of wedge. 'Right, because you want to be able to go out with your girlfriends, get shedded and eat all the cake, but that's fine. Just don't do it on a fast day.' And once again she's laughing, making the waiter smile. *The Fast Beach Diet by Mimi Spencer* (Short Books, £6.99) is out now. ♦



'I feel better about myself and my husband gets the benefit of that'

that is incredibly powerful stuff; this is not just about looking good in a short skirt.'

These days, at her fighting weight, she fasts just one day a week, and barely notices it (her tips include lashings of fizzy water and black coffee) but the truth – and possibly the secret of this diet

(though it doesn't seem to apply to my husband) – is that it's permanently altered her appetite. On non-fast days she says she tucks into pizza and chips with her children (Lily May, 11, and Ned, 10), 'There is nothing I don't eat,' but today is a regular day and I've noticed she's eating like a model, picking gingerly at the plates in front of us. Proper lunch has slipped off the list of priorities – as it often does for the intentionally slim. But it's clearly doing her no harm. Her foodie family (including a sister trained at Ballymaloe cookery school) are all converts



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**'How I got
into my
size 8 jeans'**

By the woman who
invented the 5:2 diet

**10 super suppers
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*Quick pasta, stir-fries
and salads with a twist*

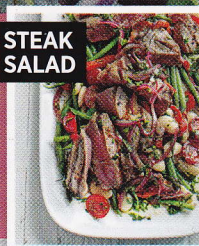
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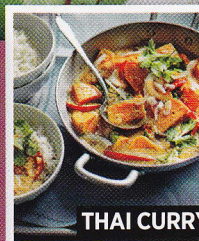
TUNA PASTA



**STEAK
SALAD**



THAI CURRY



**PEA AND
SALMON
RISOTTO**



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DOING IT!**

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