

Qudos FOOD

Dining at QHotels an education

QUALITY FOOD AND QUALITY STAFF
GO HAND IN HAND AT QHOTELS
WHERE ITS OWN CHEF ACADEMY
ENSURES THE DINING EXPERIENCE
IS NEVER LEFT WANTING.



Most of us have had the experience of visiting a restaurant for the first time that we have raved about. Everything was fantastic, from the *al dente* pasta, to the crispness of the organically home-grown rocket, the waiter was attentive without being annoying and the head chef looked like we had genuinely made his day when we complimented him on a job well done.

QHotels endeavours to ensure this first-time experience is repeated on all subsequent visits so its guests never go away disappointed.

Holy Grail

Consistency of quality is the Holy Grail for the entire catering trade. It is tough to achieve but QHotels has discovered the secret which is investment in home-grown talent. It is a strategy that really delivers results.

It means that no one restaurant is totally reliant on any one member of the kitchen staff. So if the head chef falls ill one day, everyone else is able to deliver total client satisfaction.

At QHotels, the creation of a Chef Academy has ensured the

commitment to quality translates into consistency day in and day out regardless of who is on duty, so diners get the best food, the best service and the best environment in which to enjoy their meal. Everyone who passes through the academy understands the pivotal role each plays in delivering that consistency and their own integral place as part of a larger business that spans 21 hotels with 26 restaurants, many of them award winners.

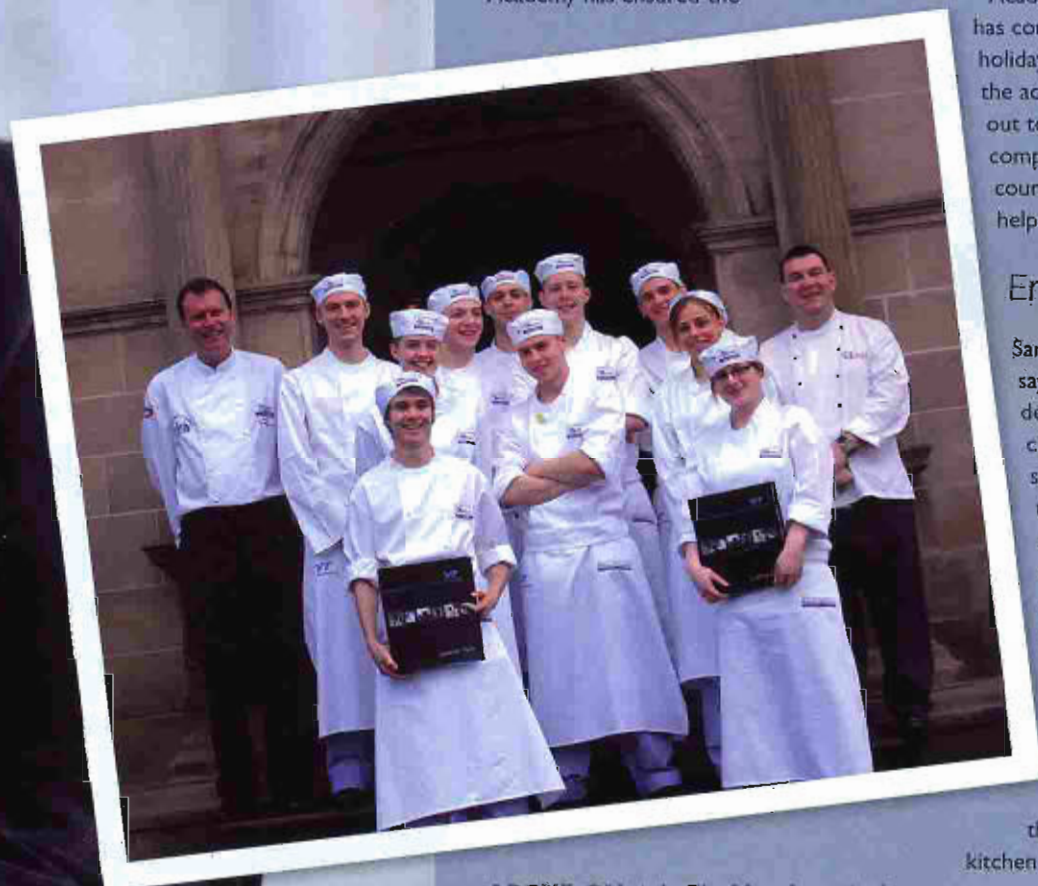
It is all about nurturing home-grown talent and the first eight commis chefs to go through the academy are expected to graduate in March. They will have participated in in-house competitions, undergone interactive workshops, gained experience and insight at other hotels in the group and visited key suppliers and markets such as Smithfield, New Covent Garden, Billingsgate and Grimsby. They will have undergone succession planning interviews, gone back to the classroom and undertaken skills-based practicals in a variety of kitchens which help encourage flexibility and adaptability. It means QHotels presents its guests with imaginative menus and fantastically prepared and presented cuisine served by a team of people who have a passion for the job and are dedicated to satisfying their clientele.

Academy sponsor Platinum Recruitment has contributed prizes, including a week's holiday in Turkey and Global Knives for the academy participants who come out tops in a *Ready, Steady Cook*-style competition that forms part of the course. It is this competitive edge that helps keep everyone on their toes.

Enthusiasm

Sarah Hoskin, Group Training Manager, says the result to date has been the development of a group of commis chefs whose enthusiasm for the job is second to none, and it has increased the way in which each individual cares about the work they do. "The quality of the people you have is always going to enhance the quality that is served to the guest," Sarah says.

Once the commis chefs graduate, the plan is to put chefs de parties through the academy's rigours with a view to developing them into sous chefs. The facilities of the Chef Academy help ensure all kitchen staff from the most junior to the most senior sing from the same hymn sheet, pulling together for the benefit of diners. "From a service perspective, it is



ABOVE: QHotels Chef Academy trainees.
MAIN: Sarah Hoskin, Group Training Manager.

not just about cooking, it is about kitchen management and how you deal with people which has a knock-on effect on guests. You don't have the stressed kitchen environment you used to have," explains Sarah.

will vary from hotel to hotel depending on the clients. Sarah explains: "If you have a high proportion of regular guests and long-stayers you may need to change the menu more often." Every hotel designs its own

have moved away from the stereotypical white table cloths and napkins to become more in keeping with the hotel's decor.

Atmosphere

They all have their own atmosphere with different lighting and music according to the time of day to evoke the desired environment. "It's all about the experience and not just about coming in for a meal," Sarah says.

Take Squires restaurant, for example, at **Bridgewood Manor**, in Kent, a glamorous restaurant with unstated elegance and simple chic, or the 2 AA rosette award-winning Ranulph, at **Crewe Hall**, Cheshire, in the extravagant and opulent main hall, decorated with privately commissioned hand-painted wallpaper bearing the **Crewe Hall** Crest.

The choice of food throughout the chain is vast from *sustainable haddock in Whitstable organic ale batter, hand-cut chips, minted garden peas and tartar sauce in the Horizon Restaurant & Wine Bar to pan seared breast of duck, spice apple compote, fennel and potato gratin, and mulled wine reduction in The River Room at **Chesford Grange** where the grounds run down to the River Avon.

If it is simplicity you prefer, you might want to select your fancy from the all-day Terrace menu at **Aldwark Manor Golf & Spa Hotel**, in York, with popular, but nonetheless perfectly prepared, staples from traditional sandwiches to burgers.

Whatever your requirements, QHotels' dedication to quality will ensure the same high standards from your very first visit and, hopefully, never your last.

Andrew Don

**Menu items correct at the time of going to press*



Grow your own

QHotels hopes the academy will help the group to retain the kitchen personnel in which it has invested time and money through a grow-your-own policy that it hopes will see them develop with the group from lower down the hierarchy to budding head chefs of the future. This is crucial for a chain that sports a healthy crop of restaurant AA rosettes.

The quality is apparent at QHotel's eateries no matter how many times the menu changes. The frequency of reinvention

menu. The notion of the homogenised brand is taboo. Each menu is designed around the diners who visit. It might be geared towards leisure in some, golf or corporate in others. Frequency of change depends how regularly they patronise the restaurants.

Sarah says: "With all our restaurants there has been an enormous amount of money invested and time and effort spent by our own in-house design team who make the restaurants appealing, warm and comfortable." Much of the focus is making each restaurant individual. Many of them

