



The Queens Arms *Corton Denham, Somerset*

MEDIA RELEASE

Celebrating two years at award winning Somerset pub, head chef Ben Abercrombie believes there should be more emphasis on cooking in schools

From a young age, Ben Abercrombie, Head Chef at The Queens Arms, Corton Denham, knew he wanted to be a chef. Somerset born Ben, who in August celebrates two years at the award winning pub located on the Somerset/Dorset border, admits he has always been obsessed with cooking. His perseverance paid off in 2009 when he won Young Pub Chef of the Year at the Great British Pub Awards, aged just 17.



Ben is keen to see cooking take a more important role in education. He says, "I was lucky because I had the opportunity to work as a commis apprentice from the age of 14 at my local Somerset pub in East Coker. Under the guidance of the wonderful head chef Matthew Eke, who had worked with Phil Vickery, I developed and worked as a chef de partie, realising this was what I wanted to do with my life." As well as on the job training, Ben had started NVQs in cooking at school, but he felt too many youngsters were choosing what they thought was an easy option and not something they really had any interest in.

Ben says, "I want to be able to reach out to young teens deciding on their career choices and educate them about the opportunities of a career as a chef."

A year in London, including time as an astage chef at Claridges and working with celebrity chef Mark Hix at Soho Hix, (where Ben as one of 19 chef de parties starting at seven in the morning and not finishing until after 1am) really opened Ben's eyes to the infinite possibilities of the culinary world. Ben says he loved his time in London as it was always busy – "if you weren't cooking, you were cleaning or helping someone out – creativity was encouraged."

Moving back to Somerset in 2010, Ben was offered the position of Head Chef at the Old Inn, Holton and developed a menu that used only the very best fish and meat available. His vision was to produce excellent food working off a Josper oven grill – a revolutionary indoor barbecue system. The pub went on to win Best Food Pub at the Great British Pub Awards in 2011.

In 2013 Ben arrived at The Queens Arms and promptly fell in love with the place, finding he shared the vision of owners Jeanette and Gordon Reid. The Queens has its own herd of cattle, pigs and hens as well as a bountiful kitchen garden, so ensuring that all ingredients are fresh and locally sourced. Heading up a young team in the kitchen, Ben says that the food reflects the individual strengths of the whole team. He says, "We are all commis chefs in the kitchen because we are all on a continual learning curve and everyone respects everyone else." Since Ben has been Head Chef, The Queens received a coveted second rosette for Culinary Excellence from the AA.

The watchword is versatility with the food presenting a mix of traditional "home cooked" comfort food versus a la carte. For example a simple dish like "Fish and Chips" will be served up as a deconstructed version presenting all the accompaniments as an amazing dish of "chip shop treats". The A La Carte menu is different again reflecting Ben's love of using more obscure cuts of meat and fish and may include pig's head ravioli, squirrel or Cornish Pollock.

Ben comments, "I have always loved cooking, and have been lucky that I have been able to train with some amazing chefs and now find myself in the perfect environment where I can bring my skills and experience to an award winning venue and continue to develop and grow with my brilliant team. With the growth of interest in food reflected on the TV and everywhere in the media, I hope to be able to inspire those interested in a career in cooking

and would love to reach out to local schools and colleges and show them what can be achieved with hard work and passion.”

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