

THE COUNTRY RANGE GROUP
MAGAZINE FOR CATERERS

Stir it up

SPRING

MARCH
2025

Italian Inspiration

An interview
with Theo Randall



CRAFTING THOUGHTFUL MENUS FOR THE CARE SECTOR
HOTTEST LOOKS IN HOSPITALITY | EMPOWERING YOUR TEAM FOR SUCCESS

Ingredient

Finally, signs of spring are everywhere as we head into March and prepare for all of the upcoming events that come with the new season.

This month, we're celebrating talent in care and hospitals in our Rising Stars and Health and Welfare articles, whilst experts from across the industry impart their favourite sweet and savoury pastry dishes in the Melting Pot feature. As always, there is plenty of menu inspiration that we're sure will put a spring in your step as you plan for the months ahead.

If you would like to get involved in a feature or if you have any feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at editor@stiritupmagazine.co.uk

The Stir it up team



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Contact us...

Writers
Lindsey Hoyle
Sam Houston
Jackie Mitchell



@stiritupmag

Subscriptions
stiritup@countryrange.co.uk

Design & Print
Eclipse Creative
www.eclipse-creative.co.uk

Front Cover
Photography by Lizzie Mayson, Verdura by Theo Randall

As part of our environmental policy this magazine is printed using vegetable oil based ink and is produced to high environmental standards, including ISO14001 and FSC® certification. It is also fully carbon balanced.



OUR EDITORIAL PARTNERS...



ALLERGEN REFERENCES

VG - Vegan V - Vegetarian



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Fresh FROM THE KITCHEN



With universal appeal, convenience, affordability and comfort, it's no wonder that the global sausage market has observed consistent growth, with more projected growth to come. From the classic pork or beef, to poultry, game, plant-based or even fish, they're a staple on menus across the land, so let's delve into the latest trends.

HEARTY & WHOLESOME – The classic bangers & mash gets a gourmet upgrade, with restaurants creating uber-calorific-but-who-cares mash and high quality handmade sausages. Sausages are also made for comforting casseroles and traybakes, or add to pasta or dumpling dishes.

HOT DOGS – There are several approaches you can take with this trend – keep it simple for a nostalgic less-is-more approach, take it from humble to haute with the addition of gourmet ingredients, or go all out with a filthy OTT fully loaded indulgence with no holds barred.

BREAKFAST BANGERS – The sausage sandwich is an absolute stalwart of breakfast and brunch menus and continues to be comfort food at its finest. Smashed sausage has been going viral in various forms, including on toast and in tacos.

SAUSAGES ON A STICK – Skewered sausages are a great option for on-the-go convenience and on-trend street food and range from a very simple grilled skewered sausage with mustard, to trendy corn dogs which are being reinvented in so many ways from plant-based to premium, creative or cuisine-led. Let your imagination run wild!

PASTRY PIONEERS – It's no surprise that the humble sausage roll is getting a gourmet makeover, with fusions such as croissant bratwurst rolls or hot dog Wellington where mustard basted sausage is rolled in a crêpe with duxelles and prosciutto and wrapped in puff pastry.



Cooks CALENDAR



MARCH

9TH MARCH – NATIONAL MEATBALL DAY

Why not switch up your traditional meatballs to a plant based option with a Tabbouleh Salad recipe using GARDEN GOURMET® Vegan Balls. Find this recipe on our website.

25TH MARCH – INTERNATIONAL WAFFLE DAY

Get creative at breakfast time this International Waffle Day with this delicious breakfast waffle recipe made with KITKAT®.

30TH MARCH – MOTHER'S DAY

Make the most of macarons this Mother's Day with Tipiak's Heart-Shaped Macarons. These darlings of the pâtisserie world can be used to decorate cakes, cocktails, hot drinks and freak shakes, or popped into gift bags and boxes.

APRIL

20TH APRIL – EASTER SUNDAY

Celebrate in style this easter with this delicious Chocolate Scotch Egg recipe from Country Range.

24TH APRIL – NATIONAL PIGS-IN-A-BLANKET-DAY

Try something new with your pigs in blankets with this pigs in blankets Mac 'n' Cheese recipe from Opies.

The full recipes can be found at www.stiritupmagazine.co.uk



MAY

2ND MAY – WORLD TUNA DAY

Make lunch time extra special this World Tuna Day with this Italian Tuna Melt recipe from Country Range.

17TH MAY – WORLD BAKING DAY

Celebrate World Baking Day in a scrumptious way with this Country Range Hazelnut Brownie recipe.

Thanks to GARDEN GOURMET®, KITKAT®, Opies, Tipiak and Country Range.

IN SEASON

Spring Onions

Cauliflower

Grapefruit



Sidewinder Nachos with Five Bean Chilli

This recipe from Country Range is a nutritious twist on traditional nachos, making it a great meat-free option for school menus.

45 MINUTES

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tin Country Range Five Bean Salad
- 200g Country Range Tomato and Basil Sauce
- 2 tsp Country Range Crushed Chillies
- 1 tsp Country Range Mixed Herbs
- 50ml vegetable oil
- 1 diced red onion
- 1 diced red pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

1. Gently fry the red onion and red pepper for 5 mins in vegetable oil.
2. Add the crushed garlic, crushed chillies and mixed herbs and continue to fry for 2 minutes.
3. Add the five-bean salad and tomato and basil sauce and simmer for 15 minutes.
4. Season to taste.

Readers' lives



NAME: Vicky Graham

BORN AND RAISED: Brownsea Island, Poole

JOB TITLE: Sous Chef

PLACE OF WORK: Castle Court School, Dorset

HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED IN THE CATERING INDUSTRY? 30 Years

PASSIONS OUTSIDE OF THE KITCHEN? Nutrition and Fitness

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE CUISINE TO EAT? Chinese

WHICH CHEF DO YOU RESPECT THE MOST AND WHY? Michel Roux – Classic Cooking.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU WERE EVER GIVEN AND BY WHOM? "Your hands are your best tools" – Yvonne Sheen.

WHAT IS YOUR MUST-HAVE KITCHEN GADGET? Thermo Mix

WHAT'S YOUR TIP TO CUT WASTAGE IN THE KITCHEN? Good ordering and portion control.

WHAT IS YOUR TOP TIP FOR SOMEONE STARTING OUT IN THE CATERING INDUSTRY? Listen, every day is a learning day.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE COUNTRY RANGE PRODUCT AND WHY?

Signature by Country Range Potato Sidewinders – great for a street food twist.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO SWITCH OFF/ RECHARGE? Go to the Gym.

WHAT'S YOUR DREAM JOB?

Fitness Guru

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE GOING TO BE A COOK/CHEF?

When I left school.

WHAT TRENDS DO YOU SEE TAKING OVER IN LATE 2025?

More diverse and interesting international street food trends.

WHAT INGREDIENTS DO YOU MOST LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH?

Fruits and root vegetables.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE DISH TO COOK?

Curries – the spicier the better.

DEAD OR ALIVE – WHICH THREE PEOPLE WOULD YOU LIKE TO COOK FOR THE MOST?

Freddie Mercury, Dawn French and Peter Kay.

Signature by
Country Range
Potato Sidewinders
Pack Size: 4 x 2.5kg



Salmon

Rhubarb

Wild Garlic

Leek

Mussels

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&
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PEAK PERFORMANCE

Peak Performance For Award-Winning Cycle Café

An outdoor enthusiast, Pete Sparks' hospitality adventure began working in youth hostels where he picked up an assortment of useful skills and experience from front-of-house, cleaning and laundry through to DIY, maintenance, gardening and, of course, cooking.

Widening his experience in the service sector, Pete went on to work as an F&B manager in hotels and managed various cafés before deciding that it was time to pursue his own Everest.

"It was always a dream at the back of my mind to one day open my own place and I knew I wanted it to be connected to the great outdoors," says Pete. The café he eventually found is in a quiet corner on the eastern edge of the Peak District and perfectly placed for outdoor enthusiasts enjoying the local area, but unfortunately, the business was a slow burner initially. With the Tour de France visiting Yorkshire in 2014 and the route passing the café, innovative Pete painted the café in its standout King of the Mountain design for the big occasion.

"The previous café was only open a few days a week, as was the pub nearby, so if people were heading our way, they generally brought sandwiches and came



prepared. It took a while to get the message out there but once word-of-mouth started spreading, we quickly became a key destination on the map for cyclists and walkers," enthuses Pete.

"We offer quality homemade breakfasts, pies, quiches, sandwiches, soups, toasties and plenty of cake and I can assure you, it's all worth getting on your bike for. Our giant stuffed Yorkshire puddings are our latest hot seller, but we also have a fantastic offering for vegans, vegetarians, coeliacs and those with allergies."

When it comes to local suppliers, the business is blessed with an array on its doorstep. "Our menu has a very traditional feel, and our incredible local butchers, bakers, growers, dairy farmers and egg suppliers provide our food with a clear identity. It means visitors don't just get to see, smell, hear and enjoy the beauty of the Peak District but they're able to taste it as well through our menu," he continues.

"However, it's no good having stunning local produce without the quality seasonings, spices, sauces, tinned products, staples and sides. This is where Country Range come in as the portfolio provides outstanding choice, flavour, consistency and value. The Gourmet Fish Fingers and Baked Beans in particular are fantastic.

Nearly 20 years after I started properly in the kitchen, I still get a buzz, especially short order cooking during a busy breakfast rush, so I'm not ready to get on my bike just yet. The café is very much like a home and the guests have become family, but maybe a few weekends off would be nice in the next few years. The aim as always is to keep improving and moving with the trends without losing our personality and character."

For more information, visit www.bankviewcafe.co.uk



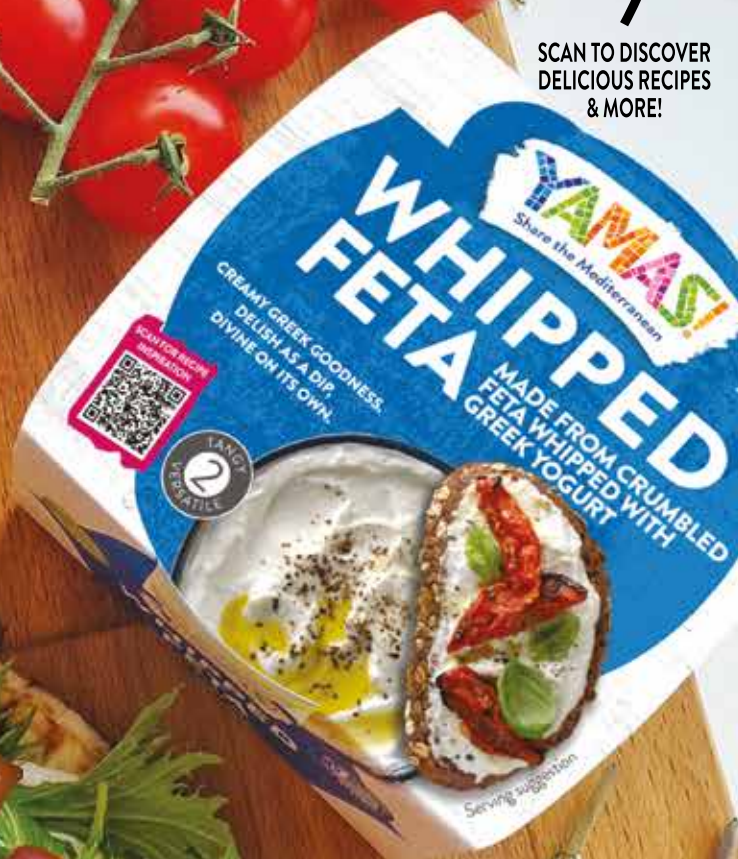
Above: Bank View Café exterior

Left: Bank View Café

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**DAIRY:
CHEESE**

Photo credit @AmySheppardFood
Chilli Chicken & Whipped Feta Flatbreads

EAT THE SEASON

Hake

A member of the cod family, Hake can be found at depths of over 1,000 metres. A total of 12 hake species are known in the family of Merlucciidae and even though taste and texture can vary by species, they all tend to have a milder taste, softer texture and smaller flake than cod.

The flesh when raw is naturally very soft, but when cooked it becomes firm and meaty. It is a versatile fish and can be used in a myriad of recipes including curries and stews. Hake carrying the blue Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) label is certified sustainable, as it comes from a fishery that has been independently assessed to the MSC Fisheries Standard. This month's recipe inspiration is courtesy of Ben Crittenden, co-founder and chef at Stark, and the recipe development teams at Seafish and the Irish Food Board who are both public bodies supporting the seafood industry.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Leftover cooked hake can be used in a salad or a pasta dish, with olive oil, garlic and spinach. You can also use it in a rice dish – stir fried with soy sauce, peas and chopped nuts.



Credit: Ben Crittenden

1/ SPICE IT UP

Marinate your hake with mild cheddar, single cream and a green chilli. Serve with a korma sauce, pickled onions, sliced grapes and toasted cashews.



Credit: Seafish

2/ PEP IT UP WITH GARLIC

Season the hake and pan fry for a few minutes before adding finely sliced garlic. Turn the fish and cook for a few minutes before removing from the pan. Add lemon juice and parsley to the pan juices and spoon over the hake with rice.

3/ HAKE IN A HURRY

Top your hake fillets with olive oil and breadcrumbs combined with chopped parsley. Bake in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes.



Credit: Seafish

4/ KEEP IT SIMPLE

Fry the hake fillets, skin side down until the skin is beginning to crisp, then add knobs of butter and cook for another few minutes. For the sauce, add butter to a pan and allow it to gently melt before adding herbs and a dash of lemon juice.

5/ ADD CHORIZO AND CHICKPEAS

Chorizo, onion and garlic are gently fried for a few minutes before adding chickpeas, butter beans, tomato purée, stock, tomatoes and fresh herbs. Serve the stew with pan fried hake on top.



Credit: Seafish

Savour the Season

With an explosion of new seasonal ingredients, **National Pie Week (4th – 10th)**, **St Patrick's Day (17th)**, **Mother's Day (23rd)** and **Food Waste Action Week (17th -23rd)**, March is a mega-month for caterers, cooks and chefs. Here are our latest products, recipes and top tips to ensure your menu springs to life and delights this month.

Spring Desserts

As winter officially ends this month and with Mother's Day and Easter on the horizon, there is no better time to grab the following new decadent desserts that are guaranteed to put a spring in your guest's step.

COUNTRY RANGE PEACHES AND CREAM TORTE – 14 PORTIONS

A layer of beautiful Victoria sponge is topped with peach compote and a creamy vanilla flavoured cheesecake topped with freeze-dried raspberries and peach pieces.

COUNTRY RANGE SPECULOOS CAKE – 16 PORTIONS

Three luscious layers of sponge filled with caramelised biscuit cream and sauce. Visually striking, the spectacular Speculoos Cake is covered with buttercream and another generous drizzle of the delicious biscuit sauce.

Speculoos Cake



17TH - 23RD MARCH

FOOD WASTE ACTION WEEK

Huge strides have been made in this area over the last few years as more chefs understand the necessity to cut down on wastage. We're proud to have been driving awareness of this important campaign and this year, we're delighted to launch our first Food Waste Recipe Guide. Providing over 12 fantastic recipes to help chefs cut waste and make the most of every ingredient, the guide also offers plenty of tips and insight. To download your free guide and discover ingenious concepts such as katsu rice balls and pasta frittata, visit countryrange.co.uk or ask your Country Range wholesaler. There is no time to waste!

Award Winners

We were thrilled to win five fantastic Cash and Carry Management Own Brand Awards! If you've not tried these products yet, ask your Country Range wholesaler for more information.



Winner of the Potato Products Category

**SIGNATURE BY COUNTRY RANGE CHEFS
CHUNKY FRIES**

Winner of the Ice Cream Category

**SIGNATURE BY COUNTRY RANGE CHOCOLATE
DAIRY ICE CREAM**

Winner of the Afternoon Tea Category

**COUNTRY RANGE OAT, LEMON & RAISIN
COOKIE PUCKS**

Winner of the Street Food Category

COUNTRY RANGE POTATO HALOS

AND LAST BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST....

Best Innovation of the Year Savoury

**SIGNATURE BY COUNTRY RANGE
POTATO SIDEWINDERS**



BEHIND THE BRAND

This month, we caught up with Viki Wilkinson, who is our Senior Category Buyer. Passionate about foodservice and the incredible innovation within the sector, Viki has been responsible for some of our latest and top-selling launches, products and solutions such as our incredible award-winning cookie pucks and ice cream ranges.



Name: Viki Wilkinson

Role: Senior Category Buyer

Joined: Dec 2021

Day-to-day responsibilities: I work in our Trading Team, looking after categories including Desserts, Bakery and Seafood.

I work on our own brand offering as

well as working with our branded partners to bring the Group good quality and up to date products. I also lead our promotional process from a trading perspective and one I am most proud of, I am a member of our Signature Innovation Team, helping to shape our Signature by Country Range brand offering.

Best part of your job: Presenting our products to our member wholesalers and their customers.

How do you ensure the Country Range portfolio remains the best? I work collaboratively with our suppliers, building strong relationships which helps us to move quickly on emerging trends and securing the best quality products for our member wholesalers and their customers. I also attend trade shows to meet new suppliers and keep up to date on key trends in the industry.

Favourite Country Range product: Country Range Lemon Drizzle Cake.

Favourite Dish: A Sunday roast with all the trimmings.

Favourite chef: I'm a big fan of the Hairy Bikers. I have all of their cookbooks.

Favourite restaurant: I love a dog friendly country pub serving the classics, although a recent trip to Heft was a great experience.

Signature dish: King Prawn Keralan Curry – made with Country Range King Prawns!

Hobbies outside of work: I'm currently training for a charity 25km trek, so lots of walking with the dog. My husband and I love eating out and trying new restaurants and food concepts. I'm also partial to an Escape Room, with a 100% escape rate.

Top tip to chefs in 2025: Speak to your local wholesaler and let them help you with your menus. They can advise what swaps can be made for seasonality but also from a cost perspective when everyone is trying to keep quality high but costs to a minimum.

Trends that excite you most in 2025: Everyday luxury, retro classics and fusion flavours (sweet-spicy = swicy and sweet-salty = swalty).

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THE BRUNCH BUFFET MAKES A COMEBACK

Brunch is a welcome treat for many diners, offering a mix of breakfast and lunch dishes to be savoured with family and friends. As our appetite for this hybrid meal continues to grow, many operators are branching out and developing new experiences for their guests and the brunch buffet is now making a welcomed return to the scene.

According to Jane Pendlebury, CEO of the Hospitality Professionals Association (HOSPA), the secret to a successful brunch lies in the menu. “You need to balance classic comfort foods with creative, modern twists. Think hearty eggs benedict alongside lighter options such as avocado smash or shakshuka. Add seasonal locally sourced ingredients to elevate the menu.”

My Nawaab, a Pakistani-Indian buffet restaurant in Levenshulme, Manchester, has introduced its first Sunday brunch buffet, combining the full English breakfast with the rich, aromatic flavours of the traditional Desi Nashta or Indian breakfast.

For £18.95 customers can choose from over 50 items on the buffet. Shama Rahman, head chef, says, “Sunday brunch buffets provide

“To make brunches and buffets profitable you need signature dishes with a twist”

customers with such a variety of choice all under one roof. There’s also been a shift towards daytime eating and socialising, so Sunday brunch is perfect for hitting this market. We’ve had such a positive response. We’ve cherry picked dishes from our regular buffet offering and included a real mix of menu items you wouldn’t see on any other day including our signature Nawaabi Omelette. Other dishes include Nihari stew and Desi Murgh chicken curry.”

In Leeds, Chef Bobby Geetha offers brunch at both his restaurants, Fleur Restaurant and Bar and Nesso Coffee. He says, “To make brunches and buffets profitable you need signature dishes with a twist that stand out such as Fleur’s Chicken Keema Naan or Nesso’s Italian inspired options which entice customers to return. Both our restaurants cater to dietary requirements ensuring inclusivity. Strategic use of social



media and partnerships with platforms such as DesignMyNight and OpenTable helps bookings.”

Brunch is also a chance to show off your cocktail menu, but don’t make them too complicated so they can be served quickly and offer a selection of low or non-alcoholic drinks to cater for this growing trend too.

The bottomless brunch buffet has now come into its own, although it isn’t necessarily confined to the weekends. The Slug & Lettuce pub chain offers this throughout the week with a range of dishes such as Plant-Based Breakfast, Smoked Salmon & Avocado Croll (a croissant bun), Pancake Stack and Crispy Shredded Chicken and Belgian Waffle Fingers.

JANE PENDLEBURY, CEO OF HOSPA OFFERS SOME TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL BRUNCH BUFFET

PROMOTE BUFFET BRUNCHES

through eye-catching photography and short, engaging videos on Instagram or TikTok.

OFFER TIERED PRICING

such as a standard brunch menu for the budget-conscious with premium add-ons such as bottomless mimosas or a decadent truffle topped dish.

PRE-BOOKING SYSTEMS

can help you manage demand and avoid food waste.

OFFER INCENTIVES

for early bookings or group reservations.

LOYALTY SCHEMES

can encourage repeat business.

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of an adult's Reference intake. Typical values per 100g (as sold): 1575kJ / 374kcal



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Nourishing Care

Crafting thoughtful menus for the care sector

Providing nutritious, appetising and cost-effective meals in a care setting—whether in a care home or hospital—is both a responsibility and an art. Mealtimes often represent more than just an opportunity for nourishment: they are points of comfort, familiarity, and even pleasure in residents' and patients' daily lives. As the price of ingredients continues to rise and dietary needs become ever more complex, caterers are having to find increasingly creative ways to ensure every bite supports health, wellbeing, and fulfilment.

Comforting dishes can create aromas that evoke memories and stimulate appetite.

EVERY MEAL METICULOUSLY PLANNED

Planning across all day parts in care environments ensures residents and patients receive a steady intake of nutrients, hydration, and energy throughout the day. Many older adults and those in healthcare settings have smaller appetites and may therefore not intake the nutrients they need in three meals per day.

However, planning for every meal can be challenging due to the wide range of tastes, and needs of diners. Some residents may require texture-modified foods, while others may have specific cultural preferences or allergies that need to be accommodated. Additionally, logistical constraints such as limited kitchen staff, budget pressures, and storage considerations must be factored into every meal to maintain quality, reduce waste, and control costs. Striking this balance can

be complex - it requires organisation and flexible menu planning to achieve both consistency and variety seven days a week, 365 days a year. To help, we have broken down each day-part to provide a little inspiration.

BREAKFAST

Morning meals set the tone for the day, so consider options that are both comforting and nutrient-dense such as porridge topped with stewed fruits, scrambled eggs with spinach, or a thick yoghurt bowl with mashed banana and soft berries. "From fruit and nuts right through to spreads and preserves, residents will love being able to tailor their morning bowl of porridge or yoghurt with a menu of toppings. For an extra malted twist, why not try adding a scoop of Horlicks to the mix?" says Rebekha White, Brand Manager, Aimia Foods.

As our world becomes more culturally diverse, menus that celebrate global cuisines can

5 TIPS TO GET YOU INSPIRED

PLANT-BASED VARIATIONS: Introduce simple yet nutritious options like lentil and vegetable casseroles, bean-based soups, creamy oat milk porridge infused with cinnamon and softened apple chunks, or savoury scrambled tofu and a side of smooth avocado purée. These are gentle on the palate, nutrient-dense, and can be adapted for texture modifications where needed.

GLOBAL COMFORT FLAVOURS: A softly braised Moroccan-style tagine or a gentle, coconut-based Thai curry can bring comforting warmth and variety, appealing to a wide range of cultural backgrounds and taste preferences.

BRAIN-FRIENDLY FOODS: Consider including soft salmon fillets, smooth spinach purées, and gently stewed berry compotes which contain nutrients believed to support brain health and wellbeing.

TEXTURE-INNOVATIVE PRESENTATIONS: By using techniques like moulding, piping, and layering, meals become recognisable, appetising, and reassuring for those with swallowing or cognitive challenges.

REDUCED SUGAR AND SALT, INCREASED NATURAL FLAVOUR: Using naturally sweet and savoury ingredients such as roasted root vegetables, stewed fruits, and gentle herbs to enhance flavour reduces the reliance on added sugar or salt.



make everyone feel more at home. Light dosa pancakes, soft chapatis with dhal, or a more continental style breakfast with cheese and ham caters for residents with different backgrounds and also satisfies those who are open to new experiences.

MID-MORNING SNACKS AND BEVERAGES

Small snacks, such as a slice of buttered malt loaf, energy balls, a soft banana muffin, or cheese with grapes, can help boost nutrition between meals. Tea or coffee – whether hot or served over ice provides hydration and comfort, but this can also be interchanged with fruit juice, cordials or water flavoured with cucumber, lemon and mint.

LUNCH AND DINNER

Balance heartier traditional options—like roast chicken with mashed potatoes and seasonal vegetables—with lighter, globally inspired dishes like a mild chickpea curry or a salmon teriyaki bowl. Ensure that those with texture modifications can enjoy the same flavours, just in adjusted consistencies.

For those living with dementia, familiarity and presentation are crucial. Research suggests that familiar, easy-to-recognise foods encourage better dietary intake (Alzheimer's Society, 2020). Offer comforting dishes like shepherd's pie and apple crumble to create aromas that evoke memories and stimulate appetite. Use strong contrasts in crockery and table settings, and serve small portions frequently to avoid overwhelming the diner.

AFTERNOON TEA AND SUPPER

A late-afternoon tea or supper can bridge nutritional gaps. Sandwiches with softened bread (e.g. egg mayonnaise, tuna mash, or hummus for vegetarians), puréed fruit pots, or mashed avocado on soft toast strips are good options. Alternatively mini Cornish pasties, samosas or sausage rolls are filling, can be handheld and served warm. For the summer months, add cold pasta and rice to salads, or offer an open puff pastry slice topped with courgette, tomatoes and olives for a taste of the Med.

Before bedtime, a warm, milky drink such as Horlicks, spiced milk with cardamom or a chamomile tea can aid a good night's sleep.

MAXIMISING VALUE AND MANAGING RISING COSTS

Food cost pressures are affecting the entire sector, but with a bit of careful planning, creativity, and waste reduction, you can maintain quality without blowing the budget.

To keep your ingredient costs under control, opt for vegetables and fruits when they are in season. Root vegetables like carrots, parsnips, and swedes are affordable in colder months and can be batch cooked in soups, stews, and casseroles. Any leftover roasted vegetables cooked as a side dish for main meals can be turned into mini handheld quiches, individually portioned frittatas or a puréed soup the next day. Food costs can also be reduced by using a core set of cupboard staples which can be used across multiple dishes.

While your team are busy reducing purchasing costs, it's also important to minimise food waste. Working with care staff to monitor portion sizes is important to ensure your efforts in the kitchen don't end up in the compost. Some meals may be best served as a buffet or with an option for a smaller/larger portion to meet the appetite of each diner.

For more inspiration, visit <https://www.thenacc.co.uk/shop/publications/menu-planning--dining-in-care-care-homes> and download their latest training resource which supports both catering managers and care staff with all aspects of menu planning for care environments.



HOMEPRIDE PASTA WITH TOMATO RED PEPPER AND SPINACH SAUCE



Made with high quality ingredients, our delicious **HOMEPRIDE TOMATO EVERYTHING SAUCE** adds a burst of flavour to this veggie red pepper and spinach bolognese style sauce. Sprinkle on vegan feta cheese for a tangy kick.



PREP 10 MINS



COOK 20 MINS



SERVINGS

INGREDIENTS

- 1.5KG HOMEPRIDE TOMATO EVERYTHING SAUCE
- 2 RED PEPPERS, FINELY CHOPPED
- 800G VEGAN MINCE
- 750G PASTA SHELLS
- 200G SPINACH, WASHED
- 150G VEGAN CHEESE
- 50ML OLIVE OIL



METHOD

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Gently cook the chopped peppers for 5 minutes.
2. Add the vegan mince, cook for 10 minutes until it is all brown.
3. Add the **HOMEPRIDE TOMATO EVERYTHING SAUCE** and simmer for 10 minutes, then stir through the spinach to wilt and remove from heat.
4. Cook the pasta shells following on pack instructions.
5. Serve the sauce on a bed of pasta shells and sprinkle with crumbled vegan cheese.



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CAREERS AT PIZZAEXPRESS

PizzaExpress provides career pathway for school and college leavers

Staff recruitment continues to be challenging in the hospitality industry, however we are increasingly spotting fantastic innovations by operators to attract and retain talent early in their careers. PizzaExpress is one such organisation, which has recently introduced a training programme for school and college leavers across England and Ireland.

Kate Hetherington, Chief People Officer at PizzaExpress, says, "This programme is about providing school and college leavers with a pathway in the hospitality industry with opportunities to build a rewarding career whilst gaining qualifications." The initiative provides a fast-track training programme to become a general manager, as well as a Level 6 Degree Apprenticeship.

The first cohort of students was recruited last year for the inaugural programme. "We want to ensure that the format is working before we increase numbers - which we plan to do this year," says Kate. "Those on the programme are offered a permanent role from the outset and we're dedicated to their progression. This programme gives them the skills to be a general manager."

The three-year PizzaExpress programme combines both practical training and university tuition through Arden University. Candidates have training in every role in a restaurant before learning management duties and how the business works. Kate says, "During the programme, we're holding regular check-ins with team members to ensure they are armed with the best opportunities to succeed, while working collaboratively, with the opportunity to provide feedback. This will help to improve the programme and provide the best possible learning environment going forward," she says. "We have incredible stories of progression at PizzaExpress. Some team members have gone on to have successful, long careers from leading our restaurant recruitment to managing our Manchester restaurants. One of our directors started in the pot wash."

Vizzy, an innovative platform, was used to recruit candidates for the scheme. Kate says, "We are the first hospitality company to partner with Vizzy and we're seeing some great applicants through the platform."



Through Vizzy, candidates can bring their projects and personality to life with multimedia applications compared to traditional black and white Q&As and long application forms. Jess Woodward-Jones, co-founder of Vizzy, who used to work in hospitality and events, says, "We think the CV is outdated, limiting and boring. The Vizzy profile allows candidates to bring their answers to life by uploading videos, gifs, PDFs, audio files and images to accompany their answers."

Grades and experience are important, but we believe personality, passion, skills and interests are equally, if not more so. A psychometrics test within the Vizzy profile shows what the candidate's strengths are. Vizzy reduces CV volume anywhere from 35% to 80%."

Visit <https://www.pizzaexpress.com/> and <https://vizzy.com/> for more information.

- PizzaExpress has 360 pizzerias in the UK.
- It is aiming to reach 1,000 pizzerias globally by 2030.
- It opened its first site under the new 'grab and go' concept PizzaExpress Pod, at Tesco Extra in Southampton last year.
- Their new training programme for school and college leavers launched in 2023 and the team are keen to continue its roll-out across their portfolio.

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Shine Space

NOODLE SALAD

Based in a gorgeous Grade II listed building in Leeds, Shine is an extraordinary social enterprise providing bright meeting room space, offices, co-working space and some of the best food you will find in Yorkshire.

Opening its doors in 2008, Shine's mission is to raise aspirations and create opportunities for disadvantaged communities. Recent Shine successes include the re-integration of 12 non-violent women ex-offenders by finding them homes, re-connecting them with their families and finding them work. As a result of their dedication, 29 children have been reunited with their mothers and given a chance to thrive.

The café is managed by Matthew Wilkinson, who joined the business five years ago. All food and drink sold helps to fund the social enterprise and the café caters for visitors as well as the corporate world, and offers private dining, takeaway and deliveries to anyone and anywhere in Leeds.

"We have a broad offering and customer base so no day is ever the same and I wouldn't have it any other way," says Matthew. "The frenetic pace and pressure keep us on our toes and enables us to express ourselves through our food. We cater for the café, inhouse meetings and corporate lunches, NHS training days and then a wide range of businesses, events and private clients across Leeds."

"We're big fans of the Country Range portfolio.

The quality is exceptional, especially considering the value it offers. Spices, mixed herbs, chopped tomatoes, noodles, sauces, rice, pasta – most of our store cupboard staples are Country Range. This noodle salad recipe can be adapted depending on the season but is a fantastically fresh and flavoursome dish."

**MATTHEW
WILKINSON**

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pack Country Range Egg Noodles
- 2 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 1 tbsp light soy sauce
- 3 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1 clove of garlic (finely chopped)
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 red chilli
- 2 spring onions (for garnish)
- Two handfuls julienne vegetables like carrots, red peppers, cabbage, bok choy, mushrooms.

METHOD

1. Heat the sesame oil in a large wok or skillet. Add the spring onion bulbs (keep the stalks for garnish later) and vegetables to the hot pan. Stir fry until tender, about 3 to 5 minutes.
2. Place the noodles in boiling water and remove from the heat for 6-8 minutes.
3. Add the cooked noodles and about half of the sauce - toss around in the hot pan to combine.
4. Add more sauce if needed. Garnish and serve with remaining spring onions

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CATERING STARS

Celebrating our Care Catering Heroes

When Anna Sudak, head chef at Montfort Manor, Ashford, Kent, received the NACC Our Care Catering Hero Award, she says she was in shock, “because I don’t feel like a hero – I just love what I do with the support of my amazing team.”



After landing her role, Anna was determined to change the negative perception surrounding care home food. “I was given the freedom to create menus based on residents’ wishes, and research the world of IDDSI (the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative) for those residents who have dysphagia,” she says. “My passion for IDDSI grew stronger after attending a conference, but I also realised we weren’t doing enough in this area.”

For three days Anna followed an IDDSI Level 4 (puréed) food and Level 2 (mildly thick drinks) diet. “I ate the same meals as the residents, including my evening meals, to the amusement of my children who thought I’d lost my marbles!” After sharing her findings with colleagues, she experimented with foods that hadn’t previously been modified, seeking the opinion of residents throughout the process. “I want them to feel this is their home and they can eat what they enjoy even if it requires modifications.”

A few miles away at Princess Christian Care Centre, Woking, Surrey, part of Nellsar Care, Cosmin Cristea, head chef and his team have also been working hard to improve the preparation and presentation of modified textured foods. Cosmin has been spearheading a project to explore new techniques for producing modified textured dishes and recently won the NACC Catering Team of the Year Award. Cosmin says, “To win this Award is a crowning recognition of our work. I’m proud to be head of such a remarkable and talented team.



We work at a high level as a cohesive team, striving to offer the best of foodservice and providing tailored, tasty menus for residents.”

Cosmin joined the care home in 2015 as a kitchen assistant and worked across all the roles in the kitchen on his way to becoming head chef. “I have learnt the pros and cons of each job which helps me create a working agenda for each member of the team,” he says. “When each person is aware of their responsibilities, teamwork really does work. Although we’re all from different cultures and have different personalities, we all pull together.” Cosmin also runs a Cooking Club – a mobile hob that enables him to hold live cooking sessions for residents and travel round the three Nellsar care homes in the vicinity.

Cosmin’s catering team consistently achieves a five-star food hygiene rating. Professional development is important, and catering staff are keen to develop their skills and gain more knowledge. When preparing modified food for residents Cosmin says, “Each dish must look as good as it tastes.”

“Natural food colouring can be used to enhance the appearance of puréed food. You need to spend time testing and developing each dish to ensure all flavours and tastes are well balanced.”

**Cosmin Cristea, head chef,
Princess Christian Care Centre**

“Love what you do, cook with your heart and passion and remember – it’s never too late to follow your dreams.”

Anna Sudak, Montfort Manor



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From pies and pasties, to tarts, spanakopita and eclairs, pastry is a chef's flexible friend. Whether you proudly make your own or save time for pouring love into sumptuous fillings by using the ready-to-roll variety, pastry has been used in kitchens since the ancient Egyptian times. Since then, it has undergone several makeovers and today it is relied upon for warming comfort food in winter and cool, crisp sweet summer tarts and everything in between.

A galette pastry can be *sweet for savoury* and it's super simple to make.

Clockwise: 'Plum Vacherin'
by Daniel Pearse, Rhubarb
Hospitality Collection

French strawberry tart with
shortcrust pastry

Puff pastry chicken and
mushroom pie



PAVEL BARANVOS,
*Executive Chef, UBA,
Shoreditch*

Blueberry pie is unequivocally my favourite; it's truly iconic! Another favourite is apple and quince pie with gingerbread ice cream. There's also nothing quite like a filling of spinach, speck, leek, and potatoes infused with Manchego cheese.

Filo pastry reigns supreme for me, followed closely by a short crust. Both pastries are perfect for a weekend family treat.

When it comes to meat, I confidently choose a variety of cuts and parts that can be cooked in a pressure cooker. I transform these into a stunning filling for my mini or large pies. My alternative to the vegan option would be mushrooms and sweet potato filled with vegan béchamel and pieces of cheese and served with a glass of Chateaufort du Pape.



DANIEL PEARSE,
*Group Executive Pastry Chef,
Rhubarb Hospitality Collection*

I love the flavours of winter. Plums, honey & spices come to mind specifically. I have created a dish called 'Plum Vacherin' which is an ice cream-based dessert with a roasted spiced plum centre and sits on a honey and plum purée. It's finished with compressed plums in a Japanese plum wine and a crisp London honey tuille. It has a beautiful balanced sweetness coming from the roasted fruits which is offset by the acidity of the Japanese wine. The whole dish is a real celebration of the season and is a real crowd pleaser served at events.



MIMI NGUYEN,
Founder, Cafely

I'm automatically reminded of my childhood days in Vietnam whenever asked about my favourite pastry dish. My mum would often make Vietnamese Meat Pies (Pâté Chaud) as an afternoon snack once I got home from school. It's one of the things I look forward to, and sipping a hot cup of Vietnamese coffee elevates the experience more. I often crave one as an adult and fortunately, because of how easy it is to make – I'm able to immediately satiate those cravings by baking them myself!



THEO RANDALL,
*Chef Patron at Theo Randall
at the InterContinental*

My favourite pie filling is an Amalfi lemon curd, which is one of most popular desserts in the restaurant. It's simple but so delicious. It is what Italian food is all about, amazing produce cooked perfectly.

I love all pastry but for me a perfect puff pastry is hard to beat, but a vegan pastry is a mixture of tipo 00 flour, olive oil, salt and cold water.



ERAN TIBI,
*Founder and Executive Chef
at Bala Baya and Kapara*

My favourite pies are definitely sweet as there is much more excitement around them, and my favourite is my beautiful homemade pistachio frangipane with black cherries and a nice dollop of crème and lemon zest.

My favourite type of pastry to use is rough puff pastry. The texture is incredibly soft and flaky and works with so many sweet and indulgent fillings.



Versatile and served hot or cold



DEVIN JONES,
Head Pastry Chef, The Grand, York

My favourite pastry dish is a sweet or savoury “Galette”. It’s something I make when friends ask me to bring a dessert for a dinner, or if I need to quickly do something last minute, as it’s super simple to make.

In principle, it’s a sweet pastry or shortcrust that you roll out into a rough circle and fill. For a sweet filling you can use sliced plums, apples or pears tossed in some sugar with mascarpone or jam/composite spread underneath, or for savoury, you can use ricotta or soft goat’s cheese, baby plum or heritage tomatoes and some basil. It’s super versatile and can be served hot or cold, which I think is why I always come back to it.



DOMINIQUE WOOLF,
Founder, The Woolf’s Kitchen

My favourite pastry filling has to be the one in my Thai chicken curry pie – a twist on the classic chicken and mushroom pie. Thai red curry paste, coconut milk, and curry powder create a creamy yet bold filling. Mushrooms and leeks add earthy sweetness which work so well with the chicken, although aubergines or cauliflower would make a delicious vegan alternative. It’s all topped with flaky puff pastry.

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HEADS^{UP}

Empowering Your Team for Success

Within the hospitality sector, every day brings a new set of challenges. Whether it's a last-minute booking scramble, a sudden staff shortage, or a supply chain hiccup, the industry is no stranger to tests of resilience. While it's easy to view these hurdles as negatives, they can also be catalysts for innovation and growth.

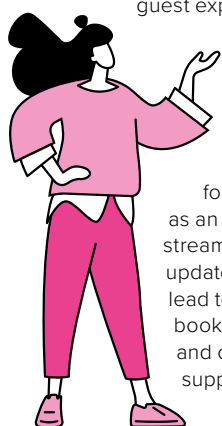
When you trust your team and give them the tools and freedom to think on their feet, everybody benefits. Empowered employees feel valued and confident, knowing their insights matter. This sense of ownership not only boosts morale but also encourages creative problem-solving. By actively involving your workforce in decision-making and problem-solving, you help reduce the stress and anxiety that can arise from feeling powerless in difficult situations.

As time progresses, employees learn to see obstacles as learning moments rather than insurmountable burdens, and a more positive mindset can contribute to lower staff turnover, a more supportive workplace culture, and reduced burnout—key elements in building a loyal, long-term team.

The benefits don't stop there. Empowered employees become brand ambassadors for your business and genuinely care about the guest experience. They are more likely to

go above and beyond for a customer, strengthening your operation's reputation. In addition, a team member who feels trusted and supported is far more likely to come

forward with fresh ideas such as an inventive menu tweak, a new streamlined process, or a thoughtful update to support operations. This can lead to positive online reviews, repeat bookings, word-of-mouth referrals and operational improvements that support profitability.



PRACTICAL STEPS TO EMPOWER YOUR TEAM

OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION:

Schedule regular catch-ups to discuss daily issues. Encourage everyone to voice their opinions, acknowledging each suggestion, no matter how small.

PROVIDE TRAINING AND SUPPORT:

Offer relevant workshops, online courses, or one-on-one coaching sessions to help employees develop problem-solving skills. The more skilled they are, the more prepared they'll be to tackle challenges head-on.

SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES AND GUIDELINES:

Empowerment doesn't mean giving staff free rein without structure. Clearly outline what decisions team members can make independently and where they should seek guidance.

CELEBRATE SUCCESSES AND LEARN FROM MISTAKES:

Recognise and reward team members who take initiative and see setbacks as learning opportunities. Regularly highlight success stories in staff meetings to inspire others.

- You can keep track of how things are progressing by conducting short surveys or informal check-ins. If someone seems stressed or unmotivated, find out why and offer support by adjusting workloads, providing mental health resources, or simply lending an understanding ear.

- Empowerment is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Continually revisit your approach, asking: Are team members still engaged? Are we finding creative solutions to challenges rather than getting stuck? Listen closely to feedback and be ready to adjust. Over time, you'll develop a resilient, well-balanced team that thrives on turning challenges into opportunities, day in and day out.





A true leading light and trailblazer who helped establish the iconic River Café as a culinary hotspot in the nineties, Theo Randall has since been winning countless honours and even a Star of Italy award for his Italian restaurant - Theo Randall at the InterContinental. We chewed the fat with Theo discussing his rise, his love of Italian and his latest book called Verdura.

Theo RA

How did you become interested in food?

I was fortunate to grow up in a family obsessed with food. My mum was an artist, loved Italy and France, and was a brilliant cook. She was slightly frugal in her cooking due to her Scottish heritage, but we would holiday in Europe, so I grew up eating a wide array of great food. She would bake her own bread twice a week, make cakes and she was always in the kitchen rustling something up. It just rubbed off on me so I was always the little helper, shadowing her. My first experience of food was mum's cooking.

How did your journey as a professional chef begin?

Like many others really - washing pots. I was washing dishes in a place called Stars Bistro, which was a little French place. I would go there and wash up on a Thursday. This was my first experience of the restaurant world. It was this tiny kitchen, and the chef was always fighting with the waiter. I just thought it was fantastic.



For your chance to win a copy of Verdura, turn to page 42



The chef took a liking to me and would ask me to taste his food. He then asked me to help out in the kitchen at their second site on a Sunday. Within a year I was pretty much running Sunday lunch service. I was loving it, and it was here I realised that I wanted to do this as a career, but I wanted to improve and learn from the best.

Tell me about your memories of River Café

At River Café, we learnt all about produce, seasonality and Italian food, which was quite different to what I had been cooking. It's a fantastic restaurant that brought out the best in people. It made you cook on the hoof. You were always doing something new and there was always a new ingredient coming in. Langoustine or red mullet would come in during the morning and off you would go – on the grill or poached. It challenged your spontaneity, creativity and gave you freedom, which you don't always get.

sourdough bread, loads of butter, some nice anchovies, a squeeze of lemon and black pepper. It's the most delicious thing in the world.

Are there any other cuisines you love?

I had a restaurant in Bangkok and Hong Kong, so I really got into my Thai and Chinese food. I trained in French food so I still have a passion for that. Mediterranean as well and Greek is a cuisine I love. Anything where you can grill a whole fish, eat great salads – sunshine food, I guess. There isn't a cuisine I wouldn't try or don't like.

Where did the idea for the book *Verdura* come from?

My daughter is 23 years old next year but when she was fourteen, she asked if we could eat more vegetables. She still loves a steak and Italian sausages, but she wanted extra veggie-centric dishes. I started to cook more dishes where vegetables were the hero at home, and we all loved it. If you think about

RANDALL

CHEF PATRON AT THEO RANDALL, THE INTERCONTINENTAL

Do you see yourself as an Italian chef?

Very much so. We do a regional menu every month and I'm about to receive the Star of Italy, which is one of their biggest accolades. It's a lovely feeling that an Englishman without an Italian bone in his body can engross themselves in Italy's food and be recognised for it.

Do you think you will ever get bored of Italian?

Being a specialist in Italian food means I'm always learning and always researching. I'm doing a new book on regional Italian food, and I've still only scratched the surface.

What would be your last meal?

A plate of Scottish Langoustine – steamed and served with olive oil and an Amalfi lemon. A plate of Taglierini tossed with butter and shaved white truffle and then a Scottish roasted grouse on some of my mum's homemade sourdough bread with some fresh fried porcini mushrooms and some gorgonzola cheese. For dessert, a cox orange pippin. I have been asked that question for years and the meal stays the same.

What do you love to cook at home?

My favourite dish at home is what I had last night, actually. Two slices of

southern Italy in particular, a lot of the food is vegetarian or vegan without even thinking about it. The variety of pulses, squashes and other vegetables they grow is unbelievable. There is nothing more inspiring than an Italian fresh produce market.



Grated potato and onion fritters with salsa verde



This recipe is a variation on one of my mother-in-law Josselyne's classic dishes. She calls them potato latkes, and from the first time I ate one I wanted another. I have used salsa verde to drizzle on top of each fritter, making them fresh and tangy.

MAKES 12

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| • 600g Désirée or Cyprus potatoes, grated | For the salsa verde |
| • 1 egg, beaten | • 100g flat-leaf parsley |
| • 2 red onions, finely sliced | • 100g wild rocket (arugula) |
| • 75g cornflour | • 50g basil leaves |
| • 150ml sunflower oil | • 25g mint leaves |
| • sea salt and black pepper | • 1 tbsp miniature capers in vinegar, drained |
| • lemon wedges, to serve | • 1 tsp Dijon mustard |
| | • 4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil |

METHOD

1. To make the salsa verde, finely chop all the herbs, and then the capers together. Place in a bowl and mix together with the mustard and olive oil. Check the seasoning and keep to one side.
2. Preheat the oven to 150°C/130°C fan.
3. Place the grated potatoes in a tea towel and squeeze, so all the water is removed.
4. Add the beaten egg to a large bowl with the red onions, grated potatoes and cornflour, mix well and season.
5. Heat the sunflower oil in a large frying pan until it reads 160°C on a cooking thermometer, or a small piece of bread dropped in the oil sizzles immediately.
6. Using a slotted spoon, and in batches so you don't overcrowd the pan, place spoonfuls of the potato and egg mixture into the hot oil. Leave to set and cook for 3 minutes, then gently turn and cook for a further 2 minutes, until all sides are golden brown.
7. Once drained, plate the hot fritters with lemon wedges and the salsa verde on the side to dip and drizzle.

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HOTTEST LOOKS IN HOSPITALITY

Co-Owner of DesignLSM, Holly Hallam is no stranger to creating brands and environments that push the boundaries of design, developing compelling concepts that consider operational efficiency and emotional engagement to drive loyalty. We caught up with Holly to learn more about the design trends that will be influencing decisions in 2025.



TOP INTERIOR DESIGN TIPS

Family-oriented café:
Prioritise child-friendly zones with playful, durable furniture and bright colours. Incorporate clear sight lines for parents to always see where their kids are and avoid sharp edges for safety.

Mid-market restaurant:
Focus on warm, inviting tones and comfortable seating that encourages guests to linger.

School dining room:
Use low-maintenance, hard-wearing materials. Incorporate acoustic solutions to manage noise levels in bustling spaces, ensuring a more pleasant environment for students.

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS FOR 2025?

Emerging hospitality trends highlight warm earthy tones like terracotta and rust paired with soft neutrals, alongside bold accents in geometric patterns and bright hues. Textures emphasise tactility with plush fabrics, chunky knits, and layered finishes, fostering comfort and connection. Concepts focus on adaptability, sustainability, and storytelling, using natural materials, multifunctional designs, and local craftsmanship to create inviting, functional, and regenerative spaces.

HOW DO INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS DIFFER TO THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR?

General interior design prioritises longevity and practicality for daily living, while hospitality design focuses on delivering exceptional guest experiences. It often embraces bold, immersive elements to create memorable moments, integrating considerations like maintenance, service flow, and seamless technology. Hospitality spaces cater to diverse guests but aim to leave a lasting impression during a short stay, not for daily life.

WHAT IMPACT DOES INTERIOR DESIGN HAVE ON GUESTS?

Interior design is all about connecting with your target market by reflecting their preferences, values, and lifestyle. Our strategic approach ensures that every design exceeds guest expectations, fostering emotional engagement and loyalty. Designing with a clear persona in mind helps create spaces that resonate, as trying to appeal to everyone can often end up connecting with no one.

WHAT SHOULD OPERATORS FOCUS ON TO MAKE THE MOST IMPACT?

Focus on design features that really bring your brand to life and make the biggest impact on the guest experience. Think about the key touchpoints—like a show-stopping bar, showcasing culinary theatre, or adding a standout feature with art or lighting. Even small changes, like injecting personality through fabrics or colours, can make a big difference. With tighter budgets, it's also worth looking at ways to drive revenue, such as adding bookable booths or private dining spaces to create more versatile, desirable spaces.

WHICH COLOUR/TEXTURE COMBINATIONS SHOULD BE AVOIDED?

This depends on the context; you need to consider how you want guests to feel, what emotions you wish to spark when someone walks in. There's a lot of research around colour psychology which we often consider when designing and also how this translates into the brand's online persona/aesthetic. In hospitality spaces it's also important to consider the durability of materials.



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Making ends meet



DRY AND MIGHTY

This month, Paul Dickson explores the benefits of using dried herbs in the kitchen, from cost saving to intensifying flavour, as well as sharing some of his favourite recipes.

Whilst we're emerging from the winter months, it's still a while before an abundance of fresh herbs will be in season, so it's a good time to appreciate the huge variety of dried herbs and why they should be in your store cupboard all year round. The process of drying herbs removes the water content, intensifying the flavour, making them invaluable when adding depth to a whole variety of dishes. The cost and waste saving benefits, alongside the versatility and long shelf life make them a kitchen essential, whether using to complement fresh herbs or to substitute them. Here is a selection of dishes that hero the small but mighty dried herb.

TIMELESS TARRAGON

Tarragon and chicken are a match made in heaven and this indulgent dish uses a tablespoon of dried tarragon, to give a good punch of the aniseed flavour, whilst being tempered by white wine and double cream. Bliss!

Paul is a Home Economist and food stylist working in London and the North West, creating exceptional visual stories in film & tv, on social media and in print. All of the recipes and videos featured in the article can be accessed online at www.countryrange.co.uk/recipes or by scanning the QR Code.



Oregano Odyssey

The bold, earthy flavour of oregano has the ability to transport us straight to a Greek taverna and I like to use it to flavour chicken in a Greek salad bowl. The flavour complements the feta and olives perfectly and will give your diners an instant taste of summer.



Basil Bliss

Lamb is often paired with rosemary, but for a fresh and fragrant marinade for lamb chops, I like to use basil, which I mix with garlic, pomace oil and balsamic vinegar. The dried herb adds intensity that you can't get from the fresh leaves, but you can freshen it up with a scattering of fresh basil to finish, if you have it.



PARSLEY PERFECTION

If you can't get fresh parsley, you can still make a deliciously comforting sauce using only a teaspoon of dried parsley. This sauce is classically served with a white fish such as cod or haddock and can be a very cost-effective and time-saving menu solution if you also use a béchamel sauce mix.



Rising Star

MANUELA MICCOLI and ALEJANDRO BEDOYA HERNANDEZ



ROYAL SURREY NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

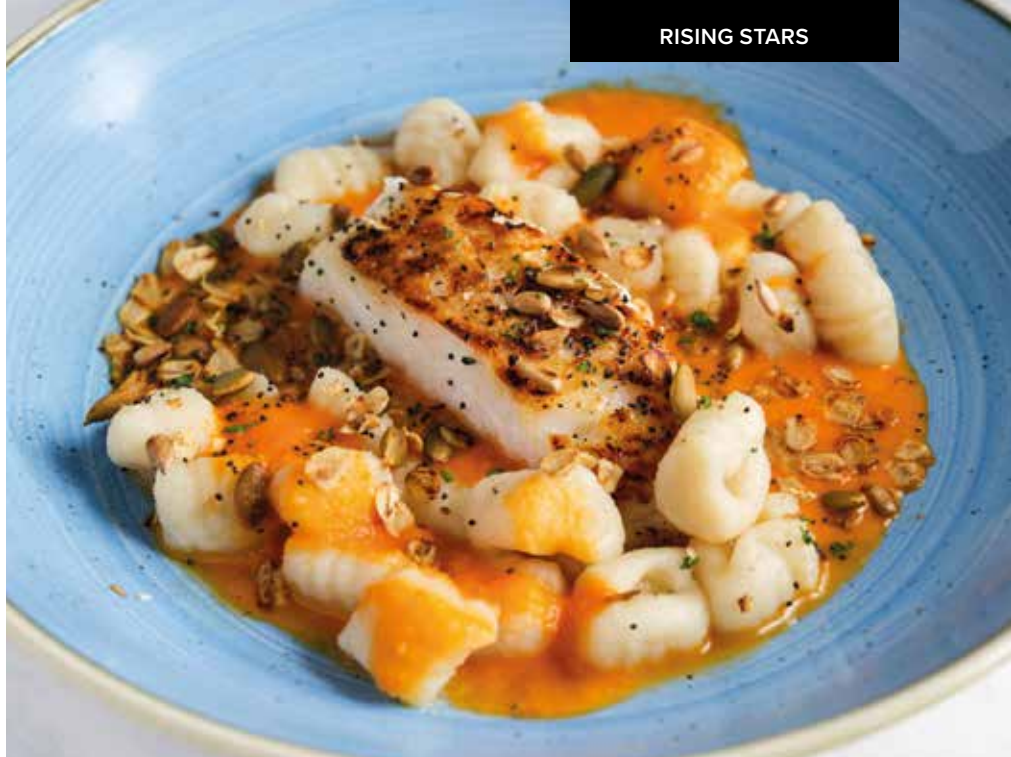
Two Medirest chefs Alejandro Bedoya Hernandez, Lead Chef and Manuela Miccoli, deputy restaurant manager, both from the Wellspring restaurant at the Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust in Guildford have recently been crowned winners of the NHS Chef of the Year 2024.

The winning menu consisted of Venison Bao Buns as a starter with Blackberry BBQ sauce, Celeriac and Apple Slaw, followed by a main of Gnocchi with Hake, Granola and Tomato Sauce. Their vegetarian option was a Lentil Patty, Roast Potato, Celeriac Fondant and Mushroom Gravy and the entire menu was finished with a Tiramisu dessert and homemade biscuits. Since winning the competition, Manuela has been promoted to chef manager at the Wellspring restaurant, while Alejandro is about to start a new role in another hospital, still with Medirest.

Tell us about how and why you became chefs?

Manuela: I was an architect in Italy, but when I had children, it made sense to leave that industry and focus on them. My husband and I moved to the UK and I decided to get a job working in a food outlet. A friend recommended a role with the Royal Surrey. I worked my way up from barista to supervisor to deputy restaurant manager and now chef manager. I learnt on the job, from both internal and external mentors. Working in catering offers a level of flexibility that allows me to balance my work with my family life, which is important to me.

Alejandro: When I moved to England at 16, I was studying for GCSEs and needed a part-time job, so I started working as a kitchen



Right
 Gnocchi with
 Hake, Granola
 and Tomato Sauce

porter. I fell in love with working in a kitchen and realised that's what I wanted to do, so I studied Hospitality Management and worked in various restaurants and cafés before joining the hospital a year ago.

How do you feel about winning the NHS Chef of the Year Award?

Alejandro: It's a dream come true. We worked so hard to achieve it. It was really tough, but we were so glad to be in a team together. We are pleased we were able to demonstrate our passion for food in our cooking.

Manuela: It was great to network with people from other trusts, mentors and people, who are experts in their fields. This enabled us to share ideas and best practices.

How has your cultural heritage influenced your cooking?

Alejandro: I am from Columbia and Manuela is from Italy so there is a huge influence from our cultures and heritage in our cooking. A good example is the Tiramisu dessert we made in the competition, an Italian dish that Manuela makes frequently. We wanted to include coffee in the dish because of where we are from, and this was well received.

I fell in love with working in a kitchen and realised that's what I wanted to do, so I studied Hospitality Management and worked in various restaurants and cafés before joining the hospital a year ago.

When and how did your passion for food begin?

Manuela: We are both so passionate about food and cooking. It has always been a part of our lives, and this competition allowed us to be creative, as well as learn and grow as chefs.

What made you choose a career in hospital catering?

Manuela: I love working in a hospital, it's important to me as I think you can make a real difference.

What do you like best about hospital catering?

Alejandro: It is a challenge, but we enjoy it. We try to make our food healthy, inexpensive and tasty. Our food is a critical part of people visiting and working in the hospital and through our cooking, we can offer comfort and normality.

Tell us about the Wellspring restaurant at the Royal Surrey County Hospital?

Manuela: We serve around 500 customers a day in the restaurant. Our philosophy is around offering healthy and delicious meals that incorporate choice. Meals vary from curries to British classics, as well as an extensive range of vegetarian and vegan food. Examples of dishes include herb roast chicken, plant powered aubergine dhansak, grilled haddock with a crispy mozzarella top and mushroom burger.

Did you have any mentors?

Alejandro: The mentoring we received as part of the competition was invaluable. Keith Turrell, chief academy lead tutor at HIT training was our mentor and it was brilliant discussing ideas with him.

How do you create new dishes?

Manuela: We spend a lot of time working up new ideas and concepts and this is where we can get creative! We take into consideration sustainability, cost and most importantly, nutrition and taste.

Alejandro: I love making Asian-inspired food, so for our starter in the competition, we made Bao Buns with venison. When sourced properly, venison can be a really sustainable option in the UK. Gnocchi with Hake, Granola and Tomato Sauce was our main course entry. In the build up to the competition, we made it over and over and received feedback from many people, which meant we were able to evolve the dish. We wanted to create a dish that could be served to a patient, visitor or staff member – it is healthy and inexpensive.

What advice would you give to other chefs looking to participate in future competitions?

Alejandro: Take time to plan, prepare and make dishes from scratch wherever you can. Throughout the competition we tried to make everything as inexpensive as possible, but at the same time create amazing and delicious food.

What new initiatives are you working on?

Manuela: At Royal Surrey, we are offering free meals 24 hours a day, seven days a week to the parents and carers of unwell children so they don't have to leave their children to get something to eat. Medirest is introducing this initiative across 20 NHS Trusts. This will meet a wish set by a young girl Sophie Fairall that forms part of charity Sophie's Legacy. Sophie's mother Charlotte Fairall was at the competition talking to us about her campaign and we were so inspired by her.

Sophie's Legacy was formed in memory of Sophie and the legacy of change she wanted to create. Her time being treated for cancer led her to want several things in healthcare to change and a priority was feeding the parents of children in hospitals.

THE MARKETPLACE

Keeping you up-to-date on products and services within the foodservice industry

KERRYMAID LAUNCHES GLUTEN-FREE, HALAL, AND VEGETARIAN CHEESE SAUCE

Kerrymaid proudly introduces its new Cheddar Cheese Sauce, a versatile addition to any kitchen. Perfect for enhancing dishes like loaded fries, nachos, mac and cheese, or as a creamy dipping sauce, this ready-to-eat product is designed for convenience. Its free-flowing texture works straight from the pack, requires no refrigeration, and can be heated in a pan, microwave, slow cooker, or Bain Marie while retaining its glossy, luxurious appearance. Gluten-free, Halal-certified, palm oil-free, and vegetarian, it caters to diverse dietary needs without compromising on flavour. Whether you dip, drizzle, or top, this sauce guarantees to elevate any dish into a crowd-pleaser.



Eco Initiative

RECYCLE DISPENSERS FOR A FREE WRAPMASTER

Cofresco Foodservice has launched the Return to Recycle by Wrapmaster® scheme, a partnership with SUEZ recycling and recovery UK aimed at sustainability in professional kitchens. The initiative allows chefs and foodservice operators to recycle any brand of food wrap dispenser in exchange for a free Wrapmaster® dispenser.

Once returned, old dispensers are shredded, washed, and separated into polymers and metals, which are repurposed into new products like white goods. Cofresco Foodservice plans to eventually use recycled materials to manufacture



new Wrapmaster® dispensers, supporting their mission of 100% circularity.

Libby Coe, Cofresco's Sales and Sustainability Manager, highlights the scheme as a significant step in reducing waste, complemented by SUEZ's resource management expertise. The Craft Guild of Chefs has endorsed Wrapmaster® for its efficiency and eco-friendliness.



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serving suggestions

Make it an *oh so chic* Mother's Day with our defrost and serve authentic, premium French macarons.

How will you serve yours?



Sweet Success

Leveraging Branded Desserts to Boost Sales

Nestlé Professional's latest report, *Breaking Dessert Barriers*, explores key trends shaping out-of-home dessert preferences in the UK. The findings highlight consumer demand for a balance between nostalgic classics, such as cheesecake and brownies, and modern options like churros and crêpes.

Barriers to dessert purchases include fullness, limited menu options, and group dynamics, offering operators opportunities to innovate. Suggestions

include sharing desserts, mini pairings, and sustainable offerings, especially appealing to younger diners. Branded desserts featuring names like KITKAT® and AERO® drive familiarity and higher engagement. Nestlé emphasizes sustainability, health-conscious options, and creativity to enhance dessert menus, aiming to make dining out more indulgent yet permissible.

The report aims to empower operators to boost engagement, sales, and customer satisfaction.

COOKS&CO LAUNCHES VERSATILE OLIVE AND CAPER RANGE FOR CATERERS

RH Amar's Cooks&Co brand has launched a versatile new range of olives and capers tailored for foodservice operators. The range includes green, black, and mixed olives, as well as capers in various catering formats, ensuring convenience and quality. Research indicates strong consumer demand for olives, with 43% expecting them as bar snacks or appetizers, a figure rising to 55% among Millennials. Health-conscious diners, particularly Millennials, view olives as a healthier alternative to snacks like crisps. With versatile uses in salads, pizzas, pastas, and appetizers, this range offers year-round appeal for restaurants and cafés. Sampling opportunities and staff recommendations further drive consumer interest, highlighting the potential for these products to enhance dining experiences.

BIG SALES *for* BIG BREAKS



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The No.1 OOH Confectionery brand for the break occasion*

*Source: Circana Sales Out, Confec + CBBs, 52 w/e 17th November 2024, KitKat® (including KitKat® Chunky). *Reg. Trademark of Société des Produits Nestlé S.A. For illustrative purposes only.

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5 ways to use

WHOLEGRAIN MUSTARD

SUMPTUOUS SAUCES

Great for adding depth of flavour and seasoning to sauces and gravy, I like to use wholegrain mustard in a beurre blanc sauce, with roasted hake loin, tomatoes and wilted spinach.

BEAUTIFUL BUTTER

Whether served with a breadbasket, or used for flavouring, making your own compound butters is a brilliant way to add subtle seasonality to the menu. A wholegrain mustard butter is a thing of beauty when served on top of a sizzling steak.

LUST FOR CRUST

A quality crust on a piece of fish or meat, not only looks stunning but helps infuse flavour and adds that all-important texture to a dish. For me, a simple piece of salmon with a wholegrain mustard crust is a stand-out dish on any menu.

DELIGHTFUL DRESSINGS

Mustard gives vital body and kick to a dressing and wholegrain mustard is one of my favourites to use. Olive oil, wholegrain mustard, a little honey and seasoning is a super versatile dressing. I love it on a simple bruschetta salad or using our freshly prepared pizza dough. I enjoy making pizzettas and loading them with wholegrain mustard-dressed rocket.

MAGIC MASH

I think we often have tunnel vision sometimes when it comes to mash and serve it fairly plain but it's a great carrier of flavour. There is a mash for all occasions, so mix it up. A simple tablespoon of wholegrain mustard can add colour, texture and depth of flavour to compliment the pork, poultry, lamb, beef or fish it's sharing the plate with.



Beurre Blanc



INGREDIENTS

- 2 tsp Country Range Wholegrain Mustard
- 2 tbsp Country Range White Wine Vinegar
- 4 Shallots, fine diced
- 250ml dry white wine
- 250ml double cream
- 200g diced cold butter

METHOD

1. In a saucepan add shallots, white wine and vinegar, bring to boil then simmer until almost all liquid has evaporated.

2. Add cream and simmer for around three minutes, then whisk in the diced butter, a few pieces at a time, allowing pieces to melt before adding any more.

3. Once all butter is incorporated, strain the sauce into another pan and mix in the mustard and season to taste.



Country Range
Wholegrain Mustard
Pack Size: 2.27 ltr >>

The Country Club

Exclusively for customers of the Country Range Group

COOK AND EAT THE ITALIAN WAY WITH VERDURA

"Verdura: 10 Vegetables, 100 Italian Recipes" by Theo Randall is a vibrant celebration of vegetable-focused Italian cooking. The cookbook spotlights ten versatile vegetables—such as tomatoes, courgettes, and artichokes—and offers 100 creative recipes that showcase their natural flavours and seasonal appeal. As a celebrated chef, Theo Randall presents dishes that range from simple yet flavourful classics to innovative, gourmet creations, capturing the rich, wholesome traditions of Italian cuisine.

With an emphasis on simplicity, high-quality ingredients, and authentic techniques, Verdura is an inspiring guide for anyone keen to explore plant-based dishes infused with the essence of Italian cooking.

For your chance to win, enter online or send an email titled 'Verdura' along with your name, contact details and name of your Country Range Group wholesaler to competitions@stirupmagazine.co.uk.



WIN
Theo Randall's
Verdura



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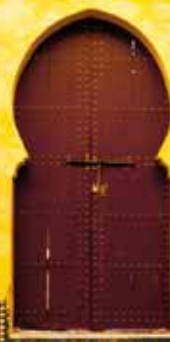


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Ninja Detect Power Blender Pro



This month's Category Focus is all about creating nourishing meals for people being cared for, so we're giving away a Ninja Detect Power Blender Pro to create a range of nutrient-rich meals and drinks.

The Ninja Detect Power Blender Pro 1200W is a high-performance kitchen essential designed for versatility and convenience. Equipped with a powerful 1200W motor, it effortlessly

blends smoothies, chops vegetables, and crushes ice for frozen drinks with precision. Its 2-litre jug provides ample capacity for family-sized portions, while its BlendSense Technology ensures perfect results every time, adapting to the ingredients for consistent textures.

Designed for both beginners and experienced cooks, the blender includes multiple preset programmes and manual options, offering flexibility for custom creations. The durable design and dishwasher-safe components make cleaning effortless, adding to its

practicality. Whether you're preparing creamy soups, silky smoothies, or experimenting with culinary creations, this blender simplifies the process while delivering professional-quality results.

WIN
Ninja Detect
Power Blender
Pro



For your chance to win, enter online or send an email titled 'Ninja Detect Power Blender' along with your name, contact details and name of your Country Range Group wholesaler to competitions@stiritupmagazine.co.uk.

You can now enter all of our competitions online. Simply scan this QR code or visit www.stiritupmagazine.co.uk



Closing date for the competition is 31st March 2025. All winners will be notified by 30th April 2025. Postal entries can be sent to: Country Range Group, 4 & 5 Jupiter House, Mercury Rise, Altham Business Park, Altham, Lancashire, BB5 5BY. Full terms and conditions can be found at: www.stiritupmagazine.co.uk/about

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