

Eating out of town – Brasserie Ecosse

Brasserie Ecosse's passionate hospitality team look forward to reopening the sophisticated Shore Terrace eatery in Dundee.

The haute cuisine restaurant and bar, due to open its doors to the paying public soon has spoken of its plans to enable its young team of employees to shine in the coming months.

With the last year having seen two agonising lockdowns inflicted on the hospitality industry, and latest UK figures stating that 660,000 jobs in the industry have now been lost – with many more predicted – Brasserie Ecosse, just behind The Caird Hall at Shore Terrace, has fully retained all its staff. The restaurant, known for its famous egg chairs, its champagne tasting area, metal effect curtains, and eye catching wall of live moss and succulents, has been running an in-house training academy for young hospitality workers, since 2019.

Incorporating industry recognised training for both front of house, and young chefs, the academy has taken a number of young Dundonians, such as Natalie Maitland and Jordan Millar, and progressed them through the business. Having started as a part time junior waitress, who was often affected by a severe lack of self belief, Natalie is now Brasserie Ecosse's Head Waitress.

Along with mastering professional front of house skills, Natalie has also had extensive training in many aspects of running a hospitality business. These include performing a

desservice & gueridon service, learning about customer service & recovery skills, covering KPIs and sales targets, HACCP and COSHH training, and Fire Safety and bomb threat training.

With the restaurant currently seeking to fill some new roles in both the kitchen and front of house, General Manager Nikos Matsikas, who set up the Training Academy with the support of his Head Chef, Scott Cameron, and Brasserie Ecosse owner, Dr Rami Sarraf, believes the restaurant will be a trail blazer for training and mentoring moving forward. "Natalie will pass on her experience to the new staff, providing them with a buddy system as they bed into the role," he said.

Said Natalie: "I'm really looking forward to the restaurant re-opening. It will be great to get some more local young people working here in this amazing space."

"Doing well in this industry is all about someone taking the time with you, until you feel much more confident about everything you are doing, from recommending a wine, to describing the ingredients in a complex dish," she said.

"Knowledge is power. Nikos is a patient teacher whose understanding of the industry is unsurpassed. He has given me his passion for excellence, and I get a huge buzz from seeing diners enjoy their meal together with the whole experience, as it's a touch of theatre here at Brasserie Ecosse for sure. That's probably what I have missed most in lockdown. It's been a long layoff, but we have all kept in touch with one another to keep spirits up, and Nikos has still been passing on tips and training guidance the whole time."

Currently a Commis Chef, Jordan Millar will once again be running his own section within the Brasserie kitchen, working on Brasserie Ecosse' delicious selection of starters & desserts.

With the mantra "laid back luxury", the Brasserie Ecosse menu uses a mix of classic and modern cooking techniques,

predominately French, but with some influences from parts of Asia.

Jordan commented: "Like Natalie I've missed the buzz of the whole place. It's been hard to be away from the job you love, but now is my time to shine with Scott providing fantastic advice and mentoring. We're both been discussing the re-opening menu, as it will feature some favourites, together with some new dishes we had developed before lockdown. There's a whole host of seasonal ingredients to play with too."

With a long career in the States working at 3 Michelin star Manhattan and Chicago restaurants, before going to his native Greece to spearhead luxury 5 star Resort Multi-Food & Beverage outlet operations for leading Hotels of the World, Nikos Matsikas has always seen the value in good training. Coming to Dundee however, after occupying senior Food & Beverage Management roles at Gleneagles & Malmaison, he believed it should be available at a grassroots level, and not just at establishments in London. Ultimately, he wanted to nurture and retain talent in Dundee.

Even with the restrictions and lockdowns throughout last year, Nikos and Scott continued to provide training throughout 2020.

Said Nikos: "We're pleased to be growing our team. We took the decision last month that we would wait until June to re-open, when hopefully even more restrictions will have lifted. We want our customers to enjoy the full Brasserie Ecosse experience, which for us, includes them being able to choose wine matched to their courses, and enjoy cocktails & aperitifs. We don't have any outside tables, so it just wasn't possible to open earlier."

"This dilemma has been shared by many other fine dining restaurants we are sure," added Nikos. "It's been hard to know how best to plan the re-opening, as we are responsible for our

teams' jobs, plus feedback from the public seemed to indicate that they were desperate to get out dining again. We wanted the customer's experience to be at the forefront though, so for us, it made sense to wait a little longer. We thank our regular customers for being patient, and hope they will once again support us when we re-open. It will be worth it, with a fantastic menu in place, plus our cocktails, signature coffees, wines and champagnes on offer."

"We can but look forward to the time, hopefully coming within the next few months, when we can close at our usual time, so that we can take more bookings, together with having a full number of tables in our dining space. We want to start pushing for Brasserie Ecosse to host small weddings, tastings, and events again."

Nikos, who has now set up his own management consultancy for restaurants, stated that he believed the other major dilemma for hospitality businesses moving forward was the skills gap, with so many jobs having been lost.

"We'll put the word out to local colleges and other educational establishments that teach hospitality that Brasserie Ecosse will once again offer students work placements. Young people coming into this industry – and staying in it – are going to be key to the sector's recovery, which, unfortunately, is going to be a slow one. We are under no illusion."

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