

# **Mason Belles Kitchen – apprentices are chefs in the making**

## **PANDEMIC WON'T STAND IN THE WAY OF OUR YOUNG CHEFS TRAINING SAYS LINLITHGOW RESTAURANT**

Having always believed in the recruitment and training of young inspiring chefs “in the making”, chef/proprietor of Mason Belles Kitchen in Linlithgow and Dunblane, Linsey Scott, has spoken of the way she used lockdown to provide her three young apprentice chefs with a learning opportunity. This led to 200 covers for the restaurant for Afternoon Tea over one weekend.



For a week at a time throughout March and April, the three young chefs, Jamie Thomson (21) from Falkirk, Lara Aitken (20) from Addiewell, and Marianne McKie (27) from Denny, were each put in charge of the takeaway menu for the restaurant. Running

since November 2020, the takeaway menu offers everything from afternoon teas, to a wide choice of starters, mains and desserts.

The restaurant has the ethos of serving fresh produce in a relaxed dining environment and was established in Linlithgow in 2018. Linsey Scott set up the restaurant after being a chef for twenty five years. During that time she worked at numerous leading Scottish Hotels and restaurants. The restaurant is named after her son Mason, and gives her more flexibility over her long working hours, so that it was easier to combine her career with being a mum.

As the pandemic continued Linsey decided to offer a quality takeaway service so that her customers could enjoy a taste of MKB in their own homes.

“Our takeaway menu showcases delicious local meat, fish and game, with inventive hot and cold desserts,” said Linsey. “Since we started it, we have enjoyed strong local support for which I am very grateful. I felt it was a real shame that my young chefs literally had to stop learning through lockdown, during all the closures, so I came up with the idea of giving them free rein to design and create their own takeaway menus.”

“This was indeed a challenge as it wasn’t just a case of designing the menus, they had to keep a close eye on costings, on staffing, and bear in mind that several dishes had to be able to be reheated at home, without any compromise of flavour, texture, or taste,” she said. “A project like this was certainly something that, as a young chef, I would have dearly welcomed, had it been available to me.”

Handing the menus over to the junior chefs enabled them to really stretch themselves, with Jamie coming up with dishes such as Pesto Butternut Squash Noodles and Prawn and Salmon Fritters in a Yuzu Lin Gin Batter. Marianne choose to hero Roast Lamb Rump and Pork Fillet, also creating a Biscoff



Sticky Toffee Pudding. Lara's menu offered a delicious Blackened Cauliflower Steak, alongside Bang Bang Chicken and a stunning Pavlova dessert.

"Everyone pitched in at Mother's Day weekend to create an amazing Afternoon Tea and Brunch Menu, with two hundred covers going out the door, which was a fantastic achievement. I'm delighted I gave my chefs the opportunity to do this," said Linsey.

The valuable on the job training enabled Jamie, Lara and Marianne to finish important milestones withing their level 2 professional SVQ cookery course, with Linsey arranging for assessors to come on site to the restaurant to evaluate them in a covid safe environment.

Linsey also explained that she took great pride in the eye catching branded packaging used to transport the takeaway meals.

"When you order a meal to eat at home it is effectively your brand arriving at someone's door," she said. "We felt that plain paper bags and plastic containers were just not going to cut it for us, given the type of elevated dishes we offer, hence the different shaped, ribboned boxes we have been using, each stamped with our MKB At Home logo. These were expensive to source, but we felt gave us the edge, reflected our brand, and summed up what we are trying to achieve with Mason Belles Kitchen."



Jamie

Linsey remarked that even with a takeaway service running, it was a very difficult time for restaurants who were unlikely to be making any profit at the moment.

"We have to keep going until better times arrive, hopefully

later this year,” she said. “Putting time and effort into the training of our young chefs is investing in the future of our business as we come out of this pandemic.”

Mason Belles Kitchen took over the food and drink operation at Old Churches House, Dunblane in November 2019, giving the brand an important second outlet.

“We’re looking forward to re-opening here from 19 May and really getting stuck into the fabulous foodie location that is Dunblane,” said Linsey. “It was the right time to look at growing the brand to another part of Scotland.”

Mason Belles Kitchen Linlithgow has now reopened following refurbishment of the restaurant space.

Linsey said: “I am looking forward to trying everything we can to keep our business alive in the recovery post covid. I’m growing my dream and thank everyone for their support. Myself, together with our MBK family, cannot wait to see everyone very soon!”

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