

Flower Menu Specialist Joins the Executive Traveller Chefs' Club

Michael Gresslin of the Wyndham London Chelsea Harbour joins the Executive Traveller Chef's Club with his special Flower Menu. Michael's Flower selections are a hit with the Chelsea Flower Show and diners at the hotel's Aquasia restaurant.

Michael Gresslin has been Executive Chef at Aquasia restaurant, bar and terrace at The Wyndham (*formally known as the Conrad*) since 2002. Hailing from a family of chefs and hoteliers, it could be said that Michael was born into his chosen profession. He started working at 14 yrs old in small hotels and cafes back home in the Black Forest Region of Southern Germany. After some time in the kitchen of a Michelin starred restaurant, Michael was offered an apprenticeship and from that moment he has never looked back.

Aged 23 he went to Sri Lanka and travelled around for 18 months, exploring the diverse culinary culture of the area and learning as much as possible about Asian ingredients and techniques. After deciding to return to Europe, Michael settled in London to experiment with his newfound knowledge and to improve his English. He has worked at, amongst others, the Berkeley Hotel, Mosimann's and the Inter-Continental at Hyde Park Corner under Peter Kromberg, before setting up 'Gresslins' in NW3 in 1996, today Michael speaks very good English and has won the hearts and minds of the nation with his excellent menus. Executive Traveller met with Michael at the Wyndham during the Chelsea Flower Show.

How did you come up with the idea of the flower menu?

The flower menu has been going for four years now. It works very well alongside the Chelsea Flower Show which is held not far from the hotel. So for visitors that have spent the day there, it compliments that. But even for people who haven't been to the flower show, the Flower Menu is a nice addition to the spring menu. I think it is always a nice idea to have a promotion running because it keeps the restaurant fresh.

How do guests warm to the idea of eating flowers?

Well, either they like it or they don't! But we have found that most guests have enjoyed it, which I why we have brought it back year after year. Some people arrive already aware that the promotion is running but some people just come in and stumble across it, in which case it is down to the restaurant staff to promote it, to let people know what we are offering, and we find that a lot of people do go for it.

How do you know which flowers are edible?

Well, the internet has proved invaluable for research purposes, but otherwise it is a similar story to that of mushrooms. For example- how do you know if a mushroom is edible? There are so many varieties. Of course the most common ones we know, but if you find them in the wild you wouldn't have a clue and it is the same with flowers. So we invest time in finding out so that we can improve the dishes year on year.



Michael Gresslin

We have to work ahead of schedule and it can sometimes be tricky to source the flowers. Roses, Lavender and Geraniums are easier to find but some of the more unusual flowers can prove challenging.

What sort of clientele does the restaurant attract?

We tend to have a lot of Americans and also Middle Eastern diners who are staying at the hotel on business, but we also have a large number of people from the local area who come in to enjoy the food, the atmosphere and the surroundings.

The Flower Menu aside, what else can people expect from the restaurant?

We are currently in the process of introducing a new menu which will feature modern European cuisine with Mediterranean influences and seasonal ingredients. I lived in Sri Lanka for a number of years and I have also worked with a Thai chef at The Continental Hotel so my cooking has always been influenced by both these experiences. I am interested in the history of food and the similarities and differences between foods from around the world. For instance, Goulash is an internationally recognisable dish where the only regional differences are the spices. My favourite part of my job is experiencing cuisines from all over the world.

Are you a chef that is insistent on having the right wines to compliment your food?

Yes, definitely. I always make sure I am part of the wine selecting process at the hotel and I make the decision along with the Food and Beverage manager.

What is your favourite dish?

I have always had leanings towards certain kinds of game. My favourite dishes on the current menu are the Pidgin appetiser and the Duck main course.

What can you offer in terms of banqueting for large groups?

Banqueting can be very difficult because you have to make food that a lot of people are going to like. This means making quite simple food, things that will be suitable for everyone, for example, the elderly and people from different countries. It's not easy to cater for a number of different people at the same time.

The Flower Menu is available until the 31st August this year and comes highly recommended.