The future of IRISH cooking

As 22-year-old Ruth Lappin from County Laois wins Ireland's most prestigious chef culinary award, we take a look at the young chef's time in the competition.

After three months of interviews, culinary skill tests and a lot of heated debates in kitchens across Ireland - the winner of Euro-Toques Young Chef of the Year competition was announced at a gala evening event in The Shelbourne Hotel on Sunday 29th November. Ruth Lappin was awarded the coveted 2015 Euro-Toques title from special guest judge - three-time Michelin-starred chef Clare Smyth. Ruth, Chef de Partie at Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, was mentored throughout the competition by her head chef Kieran Glennon. After completing a BA in Culinary Arts at DIT Cathal Brugha Street, Ruth did some impressive stages at Dublin's Fallon & Byrne and the world famous WD50 in New York. Ruth originally went to college to become a nurse, but she felt too much of a draw to the culinary arts.

Speaking after being crowned Euro-Toques Young Chef of the Year Ruth Lappin said, “When I entered this amazing competition back in September, I never thought I would be the last one standing. The past three months have been an immense learning curve for me and I have been honoured to work with such inspirational chefs along the way. Getting to meet Clare Smyth today was a real career highlight and I cannot believe that I now get to work under her next year. I am thrilled to represent Ireland as a young chef and really thank Euro-Toques for the chance to take part in this competition and La Rousse Foods for their support this year.”

Ruth was one of five finalists who battled it out to win this esteemed title and will now embark on an all-expenses paid stage at Gordon Ramsay’s flagship restaurant - Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in London. Ruth will work under Clare Smyth, an MBE and Northern Irish Chef who is Chef Patron at this prestigious restaurant. Clare is the first and only female chef to hold and retain three Michelin stars in the UK – one of only five women in the world to attain the accolade.

The judging panel also included Mark Moriarty, San Pellegrino World Young Chef 2015 champion and previous winner of the Euro-Toques Young Chef of the Year competition in 2013, Graham Neville, Restaurant Forty One at Residence, Wade Murphy, Commissioner General of Euro-Toques Ireland and Chef/Proprietor 1826 Adare and Paul Kelly, Executive Pastry Chef at Merrion Hotel and Great Irish Bake Off judge. The chairing judge was Lorcan Cribbin, former Commissioner General of Euro-Toques Ireland.

The five finalists put their culinary skills to the test one last time at the gala banquet final event where they prepared feast for Ireland’s most celebrated chefs and guests. The five young chefs were assisted on the night by a professional team consisting of Declan Maxwell (La Rousse restaurant) acting as front of house and special guest MCs for the evening Marie Flynn and Domini Kemp.

The competition this year focused on the theme - “Origins of Contemporary Irish Cooking”. Euro-Toques Young Chef of the Year, in association with La Rousse Foods, looks to find a young food ambassador for Ireland who can contribute to developing an identity for Irish cooking and promote Ireland’s...
The 2015 Euro-Toques Young Chef of the Year competition finalists:

John Fitzmaurice, aged 26, Head Chef at Moloughney’s, Clontarf, Dublin 3. John’s mentor is Liam Moloughney.

Conor Halpenny, aged 20, Chef de Partie, Tankardstown House, Brabazon Restaurant, County Meath. Conor’s mentor is Head Chef Robbie Krawczyk.

Robert Browne, aged 21, currently a medical student in National University of Ireland, Galway and being mentored by Enda McEvoy, Chef-Patron Loam Restaurant in Galway.

Roseanne Meehan, aged 24, Junior Sous Chef, Knockranny House Hotel. Roseanne’s mentor is Head Chef Seamus Commons.

The 2015 Euro-Toques Young Chef of the Year competition was extremely close and really came down to the wire but Ruth showcased exceptional culinary skill and organisation making her a worthy winner.”

For more information, visit: www.youngchef.ie.
Passion & style

Author, chef and food stylist, Ania Shuhmacher, tells of her passion for food and explains the ins and outs of food styling.

While most folks interested in the culinary arts choose to work in the kitchen as chefs, I have chosen to build my career on my passions... One of those is being a food stylist.

Food stylists combine culinary art and science to prepare food for cookbook and advertising photographs, television commercials and scenes in movies. Stylists are responsible for finding unusual ingredients and preparing food so it looks freshly made and appetising. A culinary school degree is a must for a food stylist as the job requires extensive knowledge of how food acts, both aesthetically and scientifically.

It's obvious to know that looks are more important than taste during a photo shoot and culinary tricks make my food the star of the show. For instance, I might substitute heavy cream for milk when photographing cereal (heavy cream looks much more appetising). By adding aspirin powder to champagne I can create extra fizz for the camera! Talcum powder sprinkled over charcoal simulates ash... It's knowing all of these tricks that are key to the job.

There are other tricks too – applying lipstick on strawberries to deepen their redness or using shortening mixed with sugar to simulate ice cream. With digital photography, my job has gotten much easier. No longer do I need to worry about such details as the food sitting under the hot lights for hours and hours while film develops – photos are now taken and assessed much more quickly.

Being a food stylist is a fascinating and challenging job. Each Food Stylist has their favourite style. I believe my style of plating is the "symmetrical" one. I'm a fan of clean plates, sharp cuts, deep colours, visible texture, freshest and unusual ingredients. Finding new products is a challenge I love to go through. I'm passionate about a healthy lifestyle, which I'm always promoting on the plate.

Being a food stylist requires always being at the top of the game. Food is like a fashion, trends come and go and it is highlighted in the same way. Food doesn't always behave the way it requires an individual that is detail-oriented, organized and focused.

My profession is a new trend in the hospitality industry, which I believe plays a crucial part in the hotel and restaurant business as many highly qualified chefs with passion and extreme talent, find the plating challenging, while they have no problem with delivering their food with an accurate texture and sensational flavours.

Every day there is a new challenge and I love every minute of it!

Job Training & Education

A good food stylist starts out with a solid culinary education and spends several years working as a traditional chef before working in the field. The best way to break into the market is to work as an assistant to a well-established stylist and then branch out into having your own clients. Food stylists can earn anywhere from €450 to €850 a day once they are established.

Being a food stylist is an excellent way to combine artistic vision with culinary skills. If this sounds like you, enroll in a culinary school and get your career underway today!
Every day there is a new challenge and I love every minute of it!
exotic tuna tartare with quail egg yolk, pickled ginger, wasabi and soy sauce on beetroot and horseradish mousse

Serves 4
1 medium side steak of raw tuna, sliced and then minced
2 red chillies, chopped
zest and juice of 1 lime

For the beetroot and horseradish mousse:
2 beetroot, cooked
20g horseradish cream
a pinch of lime zest
a pinch of salt
a pinch of sugar

To serve:
wasabi
pickled ginger
soy sauce
quail egg yolk
asparagus tips, blanched
dragon fruit

This dish does not require any cooking. Plating is the key to the fabulous results.

Blitz together all the ingredients for the beetroot mousse. Using a teaspoon, place the mousse in the centre of the plate and press it down to get a nicely textured effect.

To make the tuna tartare, mix together the minced tuna, chopped chillies, lime zest and juice. Place on top of the beetroot mousse, then start plating using your imagination. I like the shapes of the ingredients to work together in harmony. Wasabi, ginger and soy are meant to be together, but on different levels and angles, while the dragon fruit adds an exotic element to this dish and finishes it off with a fabulous sweetness.
Christmas beet and dry mushroom consommé with grilled Irish black pudding, fat scallop, Dublin Bay prawn and salmon caviar

Serves 4

- A handful of dry mushrooms
- 1kg uncooked beets, peeled and cut into small pieces
- 2 small carrots, peeled and cut into small pieces
- 2.4 litres beef stock
- 2 tsp red wine vinegar
- A pinch of sugar
- A squeeze of lemon
- Salt and pepper
- 4 slices of black pudding, grilled
- 4 scallops, pan-fried
- 4 prawns, cooked
- Salmon caviar, to garnish

First soak the mushrooms in hot water for 10 minutes.

Place the beets, carrots and stock in a saucepan and simmer until the vegetables are soft and the soup has turned red. Add the soaked mushrooms, then strain through a fine-mesh sieve. Do not press the vegetables. Return the soup to the pan to reheat and add the vinegar, a pinch of sugar and a squeeze of lemon juice along with some salt and pepper.

To serve, place a slice of grilled black pudding in the centre of a white soup bowl. Place the pan-fried scallop on top, then place a cooked prawn on top of that. Pour in the red stock and garnish with a little caviar for added brightness and texture.