

Life&Style

I'm in the restaurant speaking to Mr and Mrs Kitchin. It could be a game of Happy Families. It certainly has been for the team at The Kitchin in Leith who, for the last couple of weeks, have been basking in the glory of their newly acquired Michelin star, awarded five months after they opened their doors.

The Michelin guide states, without flourish, that one star indicates 'a very good restaurant in its category' (two: 'excellent cooking, worth a detour'). Inevitably, the man in chef's whites, in this case Tom Kitchin, is the focus of media and diners' attention.

The Kitchin has set great store by its motto 'From Nature to Plate', so it seems logical to assume that if so much care is going into every link in the chain leading to the kitchen, then the final link, the arrival of the plate at a diner's table from the kitchen, should be equally important.

In charge of that final journey to the table are Michaela Kitchin, who manages the front of house operation, and maitre d' Philippe Nublat.

Michaela Kitchin says, 'When Tom and I set up the restaurant we wanted a place where the service matched the food. We didn't want it to be stuffy. We wanted that contact between the kitchen side and the front of house. So when the food comes out Philippe explains what's on the plate, what the guests are eating, and it helps to emphasise that link to the guests.'

Nublat, a native of Marseilles, has quickly become a distinctive part of the Kitchin experience with his easygoing, languid approach to each table and careful, passionate and thick-accented description of the dishes being served.

'You cannot be too intrusive in the table,' he explains, 'but you have to have a warm contact with the guest. You can't just take the plate from the kitchen, put it on the table, say "enjoy your meal" and go away. I think you can get just as much reward from communicating with your guests as creating something in the kitchen.'

Michaela Kitchin, who is from Sweden, is clear that other parts of the world have much to teach us here. Previously she worked in Dubai at the supposedly seven star Burj al Arab. 'For me, it was wonderful to see the service side of things. I've never seen anything like it. I think service comes with training, but mostly it comes with confidence. If you know your product, it shines through.'

For two dedicated foreigners working at the heart of a restaurant

Team Kitchin: Tom Kitchin (left), Michaela Kitchin and maitre d' Philippe Nublat



Star turn

Edinburgh has another Michelin star restaurant, but should all the focus be on the chef? Donald Reid meets the young team at The Kitchin who bring a refreshing attitude to Scotland's perennial *bête noir*, service.

'IF YOU KNOW YOUR PRODUCT IT SHINES THROUGH, IT MAKES YOU RELAX AND ALLOWS YOU TO BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU DO'

on the make, enthusiasm comes easily. On the other hand Tony Singh of Oloroso restaurant announced a few weeks ago that he had suspended the James Sankey Award for Excellence in Service due to a lack of response.

Singh's disappointment is clear. 'Does it reflect the state of the industry? I think it does. You can always get a job in a kitchen. But where are our young kids wanting to do it? It's not on television. They should have an Idol or a Superwaiter.'

The team at The Kitchin observe that inspiration is within reach in Scotland. 'I'm French,' says Nublat, 'I'm trying every day to promote beautiful Scottish produce. I don't see a reason why young Scots wouldn't realise that and say, that's a thing I want to be in. Food is becoming so much more important in Scottish culture. I believe this will motivate people to see that there's a future in hospitality.'

Michaela Kitchin concurs: 'I want our guests to be able to ask any one of our staff, what's the meaning of that, or how did that come about, or where does the scallop come from. I want them to know the answer. It's an ownership thing. It makes them feel comfortable and part of the whole thing. If you don't understand what implications a happy customer has for your business, then why bother?'

Side Dishes

News to nibble on . . .



■ Edinburgh's Oloroso restaurant is rolling out its twice monthly gourmet wine dinners. On Monday 5 March, fine wine merchant Friarwood hosts a night of burgundy, while on Monday 26 March Edinburgh's own Villeneuve Wines brings along Australian winemakers Shaw + Smith and Mitolc. All dinners start at 7pm with aperitifs. For more information and booking, call 0131 226 7614 or visit the website: www.oloroso.co.uk

■ Wines are also on the minds of the staff at the Wee Restaurant in North Queensferry. Owner/chef Craig Wood has slated the next wine tasting evening for Tuesday 3 April. Details are yet to be given, but contact the restaurant for more information (01383 616263).

■ Launched in Glasgow last year, the online restaurant booking/meal bidding operation Price Your Meal has now come to Edinburgh. Go to www.priceyourmeal.com to take part in an eBay style auction of lunches and dinners at participating restaurants, such as North Bridge Brasserie, Agua, Indigo Yard and Suruchi.

■ Following delays, the £1.1 million renovation of the once derelict Maid of the Mist has been completed and Cruz Bar and Restaurant [pictured] has opened. Moored at the Shore, Leith, Cruz has a piano/cocktail bar and lounge as well as a lower level dance space. Atop it all is a dining room and terrace.

Running the operation is Steve Legget, who has long experience in the New Town, while Eric Lionnet is head chef. Lionnet's creations tend to use Scottish ingredients in Mediterranean-influenced recipes.

Opening hours are noon-1am Monday to Sunday. To book a table, call 0131 553 6699.