

Yes Chef! CH&CO crowns its Chef of the Year 2022

3 years ago



CH&CO has crowned Ricky Matonti its Chef of the Year 2022.

The talented Head Chef who works within the Venues by CH&CO business, showcased his exceptional culinary skills, creativity and sustainability know-how at the final of the CH&CO Chef of the Year competition.

Ricky impressed the judges with his menu of *'Fermented barley & whey risotto, wild garlic ricotta, slow cooked duck egg, wild garlic oil, pickled shimeji'* to start, followed by a main of *'Rabbit rack & loin, rabbit ragu tartlet, broccoli, onion & potato crumb, charred broccoli stem, broccoli, anchovy & chilli puree'* and to finish, a dessert of *'Rhubarb & black pepper cake, meadowsweet cheesecake mousse, rhubarb vinegar gel, earl grey tuile'*.

His deserved win has scooped Ricky the amazing prize of a trip to Seville with José Pizarro to visit Cinco Jotas Iberico Jamon production, tour Seville's vibrant food scene, and taste vintage Sherries in the cellars of Jerez.

Nathan Kearney, Head Chef with Gather & Gather - CH&CO's specialist workplace business - was runner up.

Open to all chefs working across the diverse catering and hospitality business the CH&CO Chef of the Year competition spotlights culinary excellence and gives chefs the opportunity to develop professionally and personally as they experiment, push boundaries and share learning and ideas with their peers.

Entrants were challenged to develop an innovative three-course menu (starter, main and dessert) that

supports the Sustainable Restaurant Association's (SRA) One Planet Plate agenda – a global campaign to address inherent problems in our food system. As well as the flavours, textures, colours and aesthetics of their dishes, competitors had to consider the SRA themes of Celebrate Local, Waste No Food, More Veg, Source Seafood Sustainably and Low Carbon Footprint.

Following the initial paper judging round, eight chefs stood out to secure a place in the finals at University College Birmingham, where they cooked their dishes in a bid to impress the expert judges. The finalists represented the diverse CH&CO estate, including Company of Cooks, CH&CO Education, Gather & Gather, Gather & Gather Ireland and Venues by CH&CO.

The esteemed judging panel featured John Williams MBE, Executive Chef of The Ritz Hotel; Ollie Dabbous, Chef/Owner of Michelin-starred HIDE Restaurant and member of the CH&CO Gathered Table; Adam Bateman, Executive Chef at The Grand Hotel Birmingham; Ravneet Gill, Pastry Chef, Author and member of the CH&CO Gathered Table; Bradley Carter, Chef/Proprietor of Michelin-starred Carters of Mosely; and Ana Paula Oliver, Executive Pastry Chef for Company of Cooks.

Jeremy Ford, Food Director, CH&CO, said: "How fantastic to bring back our Chef of the Year competition after the pandemic put a stop to it for the past two years. Huge congratulations go to the winner, Ricky Matonti. He was an exceptional competitor and his rabbit main course a highlight of the competition.

"I'm incredibly proud of all the finalists who produced amazing food. Everyone stepped up to the challenge and they are all testament to the culinary excellence and talent within our business. I was also impressed by their approach to sustainability. As a holder of the SRA's three-star Food Made Good rating, it's a fundamental part of our culture, as the chefs demonstrated perfectly.

"It was a privilege to welcome such an esteemed judging panel to oversee the final and I thank them all for their time and expertise. Having the opportunity to cook in front of and take critique and advice from some of the industry's finest, most respected chefs is an incredible opportunity for our chefs and important to their continued development."