

Casual dining winner announced

3 years ago



The final stage of the Lexington Casual Dining Competition was held last week, resulting in Akwaaba being awarded the winner's crown. The team will see their concept introduced across the business and will also enjoy a British artisan cheese makers tour, hosted by Patrick Spinazza from The Cheese Geek.

It will also have the opportunity to create its own charcuterie range using flavours inspired by their winning menu, which will be hosted by Dhruv Baker, former MasterChef winner, and British charcuterie experts Tempus Foods. The collection will be rolled out across the Lexington business.

Akwaaba, which means 'you are warmly welcome' in Ghanaian was created by chef Andrew Thwaites, originally from Ghana, to showcase the core spirit of Ghanaian hospitality. From low and slow open-fire cooking methods, using tropical produce, to West African-patterned shirts hand stitched by one of the team member's aunts, the concept is authentic. Food included a fragrant Waakye from North Ghana to a rich vegetarian staple of Akan cuisine known as Kontomire.

This year's winner had competition in the form of entries including concepts based on the Silk Road, Colombian street food, luxury plant-based desserts and cocktails, Turkish pide flat breads, Tulum inspired Mexican food, vegetarian thali dishes and a next level brunch creation.

The competition is a team event and open to all sites across the company's divisions. Each participating team is briefed to create a new casual dining/street food pop up concept which could be implemented at their own site or across the wider business.

In total 31 teams made up of 186 people across the business entered the competition. Of those, 19 teams were shortlisted to showcase their concepts. Eight teams were then chosen to attend the final at OKN1, a collaborative kitchen and dining space at New City College, Hackney, and the home of Lexington's Chef School. 240 clients and guests attended and sampled the food concepts developed by the finalists and

voted for their favourite brand which accounted for 30% of the final score.

Managing director Matt Wood said: "This competition provides a true showcase of the passion and creativity that our business excels in. We have seen a more diverse range of concepts this year and it is truly exciting to see our people pull together and create such innovative concepts and it was wonderful to see how impressed the judges were by the finalists."

Mr Thwaites said: "I am absolutely over-joyed that our team won and that we will be introducing more people to experience Ghanian home-style cuisine in all its glory."

Each entry had to include the following:

- Food cost of £3 per head
- Marketing plan including promotional material, banners, menus and uniforms
- Mobilisation plan
- Description of equipment from food stands to display materials
- Recipes for all menu items
- Supporting photos, materials and ideas.

A prestigious panel of industry experts chose the winning concept at the final.