

Saraca – a Grenadian small plates concept – wins Lexington’s Casual Dining Competition 2024

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At the finals of [Lexington's](#) Casual Dining Competition, the team that created Saraca, a food concept that celebrates the spirit of the Spice Island Grenada, was crowned as 2024's winner. The winning team will witness the introduction of its concept across the business and will also be presented with £1,000 to celebrate.

Saraca combines the authentic flavours of Chef Jacqui's Grenadian roots with dishes that feature aromatic notes of nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon, which are the heart of Grenadian cuisine. The small plates concept celebrates Grenada's communal food culture, inviting diners to come together and savour traditional Grenadian dishes.

In its third year, Lexington's Casual Dining competition is a team event which is open to participants from all sites across Lexington's Business & Industry business. Each team is briefed to create a new casual dining concept – complete with a menu, uniform, marketing and mobilisation plans – and the six new brands that reach the final are then rolled out across the wider business.

In total 35 teams initially submitted written entries; 12 teams were then selected to showcase their concepts to the judges and six finalists were chosen to attend the final at OKN1, a collaborative kitchen and award-winning dining space at New City College, Hackney, and the home of Lexington's Chef School.

This year included a new element, the inclusion of a concept created by chef students based at New City College, providing them with the opportunity to showcase their culinary skills. Jesal and Razmin combined

modern cooking techniques with traditional Indian and Bangladeshi flavours and ingredients to enable customers to experience their culinary heritage.

The six Casual Dining Competition finalists were judged by a prestigious panel of industry experts including: Sia (Simisola Idowu-Ajibodu), chef and entrepreneur; Druv Baker, Former MasterChef winner and co-founder of Tempus; Neil Rankin, creative director at Symplicity Foods, chef and restaurateur; James Golding, former chef director of the Pig Hotel group and current head of food education at the Table Talk Foundation and Michal Seal, Elixir's marketing and commercial director. Over 150 clients and guests attended the finals and sampled food concepts developed by the finalists and voted for their favourite brand which accounted for 30% of the final score.

Matt Wood, Managing Director of Lexington, said; "This competition is a highlight in our calendar as it showcases the extraordinary expertise and creativity that exists at Lexington.

"We have already rolled out 20 casual dining concepts, created by Lexington colleagues, over the last three years. I am so proud of the amazing talent we have within the business, and it is brilliant to be able to provide a platform for this expertise to flourish."

Jacqui Fraser, development chef for Saraca, said: "We created the Grenadian concept to show who we are as a country and share our cultural identity. Grenada might be a little island, but we have some big flavours! We wanted to translate our presence into food and bring something different to this competition."

"Every year we see great food and great flavours at the Casual Dining Competition, but this year the marketing efforts are better than ever. So much thought and dedication has gone into creating these brilliant brands." Michal Seal, marketing director, Elixir

The other five finalists created original, diverse concepts ranging from Japanese and British fusion food, contemporary Baltic cuisine, savoury, international flavoured doughnuts, Bangkok street food to modern Spanish, Basque inspired dishes.