

BaxterStorey Crowns First Ever Chef Battle 2026 Champions Following Showcase of Culinary Talent and Sustainable Innovation

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BaxterStorey has crowned Domenico Papa and Madeline Clare as the winners of its inaugural Chef Battle 2026 competition, following the national final held at the Obsessed Lab in Newbury this week.

The competition brought together 24 chefs from across the UK and Ireland, who competed in pairs after progressing through a four-month programme of mentoring and development.

Finalists were tasked with creating two dishes. The savoury course focused on sustainable nutrition, requiring chefs to showcase a regional ingredient while demonstrating creativity and simplicity. For the dessert course, competitors were asked to develop a seasonal dish centred around dark chocolate.

Domenico Papa and Madeline Clare, representing Stephenson Harwood and Man Group, secured first place with their menu of Hodmedods Split Fava Bean Gochujang Chilli with BaoTilla and Sticky Toffee NOT Miso Chocolate Mousse.

Second place went to Colm McBride and Oisin Dougan from Ireland, while Flynn Moore and Efe Ukhun finished third.

The finalists were judged by Simon Attridge, BaxterStorey chef partner and culinary director of Claridge's; chef and author Jenny Chandler; Rik Razza, head of craft development, at BaxterStorey; and Palmiro Ocampo, Chef Manifesto partner.

As winners, Papa and Clare will receive a range of development opportunities, including an international

one-week culinary stage linked to the Chefs' Manifesto, a stage at Ben Murphy's restaurant, a two-day study tour with Scotland's National Chef Gary Maclean, a sponsored place at Chef Academy 2027 and membership of the Craft Guild of Chefs.

Reflecting on their win, Clare said: "What made the day so special was that it never really felt like we were competing against each other - everyone genuinely wanted to see one another succeed.

The kitchen was a challenging environment with the heat putting everyone's timings under pressure, but we adapted as we went mainly wanted to enjoy the experience and have fun. It definitely helps when the brief is something Dom and I are so passionate about".

Dan Wilson, head of food UK at BaxterStorey, said: "Today brought 24 of our Chef Battle 2026 finalists together, but their journey began four months ago with their first entry, followed by mentoring and development along the way.

"By the time they arrived at the Obsessed Lab, there were some nerves, but meeting the judges and getting a feel for the day helped set them up.

"We've been able to give our chefs the platform they've been asking for, and they delivered throughout the day. Choosing first, second and third place wasn't easy, but our independent judges selected three very deserving finalist duos.

"For me, the difference came down to the journey - what they learned early on, how they embraced the mentoring and how they put that into practice. That's what set the winners apart."

Greg Bramwell, director of food and beverage at BaxterStorey, added: "We're on a journey to make sure our people are at the heart of our business and today is an example of that in action.

"Across the business, we have a depth of talent and passion for food and beverage, and giving people the opportunity to demonstrate that is important.

"Every dish reflected our focus on people, planet and purpose. Events like Chef Battle show the value of investing in development and creating opportunities for people to grow their skills and confidence."

Chef Battle forms part of BaxterStorey's ongoing investment in culinary development, providing chefs with opportunities to learn from industry experts, develop new skills and share ideas with colleagues from across the business.

Through mentoring, collaboration and hands-on experiences, the competition supports the development of culinary talent while encouraging innovation and sustainable food practices.