

Belfast restaurant manager clinches top AFWS award



Chairman of the judges Peter Avis with 2012 Restaurant Manager of the Year Peter McAlister

Peter McAlister, restaurant manager at the Culloden Estate & Spa in Belfast, has won the prestigious 2012 UK Restaurant Manager of the Year competition following the final yesterday at the Westbury Mayfair hotel, London.

The runner-up, announced at an Awards Dinner sponsored by Champagne Lanson and Boutinot Wines, was Paul Taylor, general manager of TGI Friday's Wembley.

The competition, organised by the Academy of Food & Wine Service (AFWS), saw four restaurant managers compete in the final, which involved a customer service scenario, a staff management task and an all-important Dragon's Den-style presentation in which the competitors pitched a business plan for a new restaurant concept to a panel of potential investors.

Throughout the tough competition each of the four finalists were quizzed on their food and wine knowledge, business acumen, management ability and customer service skills.

Chairman of the judges, former winner Peter Avis, restaurant manager at Babylon, Roof Gardens and chairman of the AFWS Guild of Restaurant Service, said McAlister was a clear winner. 'He didn't put a foot wrong. In the Dragon's Den he presented well and with a real passion, conveying the information in an interesting and informed way. He sold us with the concept verbally and impressed us with his research and attention to detail.'

John Croft, AFWS executive director said: 'Peter McAlister was extremely professional as well as having a warm personality and good management skills. The judges were unanimous in awarding him the title. He will be a great ambassador for the industry.'

McAlister, 31, from Belfast, has worked in the hotel business for 15 years including 18 months at the Culloden Estate & Spa, previously working for Malmaison Hotels. This was the third year he had got through to the final of the competition. On receiving the award, he said he was 'delighted and absolutely shocked'.

'I have loved every minute of the competition, it has been so exciting. It has been a big team effort. I've had a lot of support from my colleagues and my general manager. Without them I wouldn't have been here and I couldn't have won.'

As part of his prize McAlister receives a stage in some of Daniel Boulud's Dinex Group of restaurants in New York, staying at the trendy, boutique Mave Hotel in the FlatIron district, gaining a unique insight into the running of various departments. The Culloden Estate & Spa receives a year's subscription to the Livebookings reservation system.

Judge Stephen Motion, head of business development at leading sponsor Livebookings said: "It's a pleasure to be involved in such a prestigious award with candidates coming from a range of establishments. The standard was very high but we had a very strong winner in Peter, who had clearly done his research in all aspects of the competition."

Runner-up Paul Taylor of TGI Friday's, Wembley, receives a place at the renowned business summer school run by the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, sponsored by the Savoy Educational Trust.

Following the final, Babylon's Peter Avis offered to act as a mentor for finalist Tobias Barfoot, restaurant manager of The Ambrette Restaurant in Margate, while Stephen Mannock of the Edge Hotel School, Wivenhoe House, offered fellow finalist Paul Shanahan, operations manager of Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, mentoring at the hotel school.

"The standard of competitors was particularly high and we are delighted the competition attracted entries from such a broad spectrum of establishments," added John Croft of AFWS.

At the Restaurant Manager of the Year dinner five industry personalities were invited to join the Academy's Restaurant Manager Hall of Fame, sponsored by Lanson International: Rémy Lysé, chief operation officer, The Arts Club; Edward Griffiths LVO, The Royal Household; Elaine Watson, F&B support services manager, Gleneagles; Simon Girling, executive F&B operations manager, The Ritz, London; and Connor O'Leary, F&B director, Hyatt Regency London.

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Photographs are available to download at <http://www.afws.co.uk/newsroom/gallery/>

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Editor's notes

UK Restaurant Manager of the Year 2012 finalists

Tobias Barfoot, restaurant manager, The Ambrette, Margate

Peter McAlister, restaurant manager, Culloden Estate & Spa, Belfast

Paul Taylor, general manager, TGI Friday's, Wembley

Paul Shanahan, operations manager, Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, Oxfordshire

Judges at the final

Peter Avis, Babylon, Roof Gardens

Paul Breach OBE, AFWS

John Croft, AFWS

David Durack, The Arts Club

Zoe Jenkins, Coworth Park

Rory Kelly-Naughton, Kingsway Hall Hotel

Stephen Mannock MIH, Wivenhoe House

Ben McEwen, Baxter Storey

Daniel Moriss-Jeffrey, AFWS

Stephen Motion, Livebookings

Nick Scade MBE, FIH, AFWS

Ashley Shaw, The Westbury

Nigel Wilkinson MS, Boutinot

About the Academy

The Academy of Food and Wine Service (AFWS) established in 1988, is the professional body for front-of-house service. It is dedicated to improving the status and awareness of food and beverage service as a viable career choice, raising standards across the industry, and by encouraging teamwork to foster good relations with other industry sectors. The Academy can offer advice and training to anyone following, or considering, a career as a sommelier, wine waiter, waiter, bar manager or restaurant manager.

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