

THE FOOD DIARIES

Masterchef Contestants and Brunch Pioneers, Taste of Ireland ambassadors and Food Entrepreneurs, these are the success stories...From Galway to Global.



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PHIL CONWAY

MASTERCHEF AUSTRALIA CONTESTANT 2023

From: Loughrea, Galway | Based in: Melbourne Australia
@philconway_

When and why did you move to Australia?

Even though I loved my time growing up in Loughrea and have fond memories of that time, I always knew from a young age that it wouldn't be my forever home and that there was something else out there for me. So in 2010 I took off to Australia and within the first couple of years of being here, I knew I was home.

Tell us about your food journey and how you came to be a contestant on Australian MasterChef?

I was always intrigued by food and cooking in general, especially when I travelled. I always wanted to learn about different restaurants and cuisines. I started cooking for myself from a very young age - but just your average everyday cooking. The food scene in Melbourne, and Australia for that matter is on another level. I became obsessed with wanting to try new restaurants and different types of cooking all the time. When covid hit, it put a stop to that. So I basically turned my apartment into a mini restaurant and never looked back. I knew this was what I needed to be doing with my life.

What was the MasterChef experience like?

MasterChef was incredible, it was everything I wanted and more. I learnt so much over the time and grew not only as a cook, but as a person. Having made the commitment to move into food and wine the previous year, it really gave me the belief in myself that I can succeed in this space. I met the most amazing people, from the other contestants, the judges and guest chefs and the crew that make it all happen. Plus getting to spend a week cooking for Jamie Oliver was pretty epic!

What do you love most about the Australian food scene?

The food scene here is so diverse and multicultural. Being a country of mass immigration,

it really is a melting pot of all types of cuisine. From one side of the street to the next you can get anything from Dumplings to Pizza, Fine Dining to Fish and Chips and everything in between, and it's all world class. The chefs and cooks of this country push the boundaries every day.

What do you miss most about Galway?

The people! I love that even 13 years later, I can come back home and slot in with my friends and family like I never left. Everyone really cares and looks out for one another and the support from back home over this past year has been amazing. I can't wait to get home again soon.

What's next for you?

This has probably been the toughest question I've been asked since my time on MasterChef. To be fully honest, I still don't 100% know. I feel like everyone thinks having done something like this, that you're on a path and everything is just going to fall into place. But in reality, 6 months ago I was just a gym manager who loved to cook. I've taken on a role as a wine buyer, been cooking at some restaurants in the city and

doing some private chef work too, while still exploring opportunities in TV and social media. So doing lots, but really just trying to enjoy the ride and follow my passion which is, food and wine!

Phil's move to Melbourne 12 years ago sparked his interest in food and he loves eating out regularly with his wife whose Italian heritage provides the pair a deep affinity with the country and cuisine. In 2022 Phil took leave to spend a month in the Veneto wine region in Italy for wine harvest, and learnt traditional recipes from locals, making pasta and sauces from scratch. Dedicated to wine and wine education, Phil has also spent time with winemakers in Burgundy and Bordeaux in France, and Napa and Sonoma in the USA.



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LORRAINE HESKIN

CEO GOURMET FOOD PARLOUR

From: Barna, Co Galway | Based in: Dunshaughlin, Co Meath
gourmetfoodparlour.com @gourmetfoodparlour

Where did your love of food begin? My love of food was always there from a young age. Growing up in the West of Ireland, I was brought up to enjoy the incredible local produce available to us.

How did Gourmet Food Parlour come about?

Gourmet Food Parlour is a product of many years living and working in the food business in New York. I was so impressed with the food variety, style and quality – it was hard not to fall in love with it all! I found my entrepreneurial spark whilst living there and knew from then that I wanted to set up my own business. I moved home, set up GFP and opened our first cafe in July 2006 and thus started my own food journey from there.

How did the company get involved in sports catering?

After a couple of years, we started to evolve the catering side of our business and were looking to expand, we were asked to tender for a sports contract and we won it. From that moment on we built our own sports division working with elite sports teams and it grew from there.

What is your favourite things about the food industry in the West of Ireland?

Most definitely the quality of our food produce, it is second to none. It's only when you travel away from home that you truly appreciate the quality of food we have available to us.

What are you most proud of in your career to date?

I am so proud of the business Gourmet Food Parlour has become, and of the team within our amazing Irish business – it is my privilege to work with them all every day to achieve greatness. Personally, my recent shortlist as a finalist for the EY Entrepreneur of the Year representing GFP in the established category has been a real career high – It's truly been an incredible experience.

What advice do you have for people starting out in the food industry?

I always say “walk in the shoes of the people you aspire to be” spend time working with and experiencing all that the food business has to offer, believe in yourself and your ideas. Find a mentor and never take no for an answer, have fun and enjoy the journey.

Future plans?

To perfect our offering and continue to grow our catering business, we have plans to open new units and further expand our business.

Through hard work and dedication, Gourmet Food Parlour has grown into a very successful business employing a team of almost 250 people across the group. With 8 locations across Ireland and with their ever-growing Catering and Event Business, it has been a busy 17 years. Lorraine is a current EY Entrepreneur of the Year Finalist, representing GFP in the Established Category as CEO and Founder.



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REBECCA MCNALLY COLEMAN

CO-FOUNDER OF MILK, GIGI VON TAPAS AND FIRE BUG

From: Loughrea, Galway | Based in: Barcelona, Spain
@gigivontapas @milk_bar_bistro @firebugbarcelona

Tell us about your food journey to date? Cooking with my mother as a young child, I believe provided the foundation and deep appreciation for home cooked, well prepared food. While my domestic science teacher Mrs O'Grady was inspirational and played a significant role in further nurturing my interest, I in fact opted for a career in Graphic Design. I believe the two interplay in terms of creativity. A move from London to San Francisco reignited my love of food. With its diverse food scene, I dove into learning everything I could about the restaurant & bar industry. I also uncovered another love, my Irish husband, Paul Coleman. We had a shared passion for food and indeed travel, and went on to move to Barcelona and open our first restaurant Milk Bar & Bistro in March 2005, Firebug and GiGi von Tapas quickly followed.

Describe the process of introducing brunch to Barcelona?

A concept we loved, the ultimate comfort food offering warmth & togetherness was a well-oiled concept in countries like UK & US but utterly new to Barcelona. Introducing a new dining experience to a city's culinary scene is innovative & impactful. We were the only one offering Brunch for many years - there was no such thing as bagels, or pancake syrup and we wanted sustainable eggs! Paul & I are humbled to have contributed to the City's culinary landscape in such a positive way. All three of our restaurants serve brunch by day with a totally different menu of creative tapas by night, two distinct dining experiences.

Where do you get inspiration from for your menus?

Exploring the cuisines of different cultures and countries is a rich source of inspiration for both Paul & I. Collaboration is also not just inspirational but key in any business. Keeping an eye on current culinary trends is also important to us. Meeting the needs of our

customers can also bring about inspiration. Cost also needs to be taken into consideration without cutting quality, ensuring we create interesting, tasty, exciting food which is affordable and accessible.

Has your Galway upbringing influenced your business in anyway?

I feel so privileged to have grown up in Loughrea, Co Galway in the 80's. We had a wholesome upbringing mostly relying on local farms to provide the food we ate. As a family we grew a lot of our own vegetables. Dad owned a couple of acres just outside of town where we planted and harvested our own potatoes each year, a job I did not look forward to on a Saturday! Mum grew anything from strawberries to squash, we picked wild berries and apples for jams and tarts. Early morning adventures with dad after a night of rain to discover a freshly emerged field of mushrooms, plucked and straight back home onto the pan with some salt and butter, nothing like it! Growing your own food fosters a deep connection to nature and appreciation for the environment, it teaches the value of nurturing the land and reaping the rewards of your efforts.

Favourite thing about working in the food industry?

Creating a warm & comfortable space for our customers to share a meal while sipping delicious drinks, the immediate & deep satisfaction of cooking & serving high quality food which our team have skillfully created and prepared, is so rewarding and fulfilling. Perhaps in some way re-creating the emotion of home cooking; soul nourishment.

Together with husband Paul, Rebecca founded and operates three award winning restaurants in Barcelona. A Galway native with a passion for food & design, Rebecca left San Fran brimming with ideas, her husband, and a shared plan to embark on an adventure.



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JADEN MASCARENHAS

CHEF DE PARTIE AT KAI, GALWAY

From: Mumbai, India | Based In: Galway
@chef.jaden

Talk us through your culinary career journey?

I've always had this pull towards the kitchen. Growing up in Dubai, I was fortunate to immerse myself in local culinary schools tailored for youngsters between 9 and 13. While there, I took a leap of faith and expressed my interest in volunteering at renowned food festivals, such as Taste of Dubai. Surprisingly, they said yes. By 13, I was quietly learning from some of the best in the business, including the likes of Jean Christophe Novelli, Nathan Outlaw, and Atul Kochar. A chance conversation with Chef James Knight Pacheco, who was spearheading VIDA Downtown back then, paved my way into the real-world kitchen during my school breaks. Those moments, so raw and real, solidified my passion for cooking. Later, I ventured into Ossiano with the talented chef Gregoire Berger for multiple stints. By 2021, my culinary journey took me to Galway for college, and I've since had the privilege of being part of teams at Ashford Castle, The Huntsman, and currently, at Kai under the guidance of Jess Murphy. Eammon Hout and Mary Reid have been monumental pillars in my culinary journey. More than just guiding me in the kitchen, they've been like family away from home. Their encouragement led me to proudly represent at WorldSkills Ireland in both 2022 and 2023.



Jaden Mascarenhas

How did you get involved in the Taste the Atlantic Programme?

I'd often heard about the programme's former ambassadors, like Roann Byrne, who had participated in previous years. Seafood and aquaculture have always piqued my interest. However, it was only when Becca Sweeney, another past ambassador, shared

her experiences with us at college that I started seriously contemplating applying. Truth be told, I never believed I'd have a shot at being selected.

Favourite thing about the Galway foodie scene?

The camaraderie and open heartedness here are truly remarkable. People readily engage in conversation, and there's an innate desire to help one another.

What advice do you have for young people looking to embark on a culinary career?

Keep cooking every day! Don't be afraid to try crazy ideas; the only way to learn is by trying. Step out of your food comfort zone; trying new things often helps you develop your taste.

Do you have a signature dish that you love to make?

I'm still pretty young and don't have a signature dish yet. But if I had to pick something I enjoy making and eating, it would be a hearty fried rice. Packed with veggies, some protein, and bursting with flavours, there's just something incredibly comforting about it.

Aged 21, Jaden is in his third year at ATU Galway, where he is studying for a degree in Culinary Arts and Gastronomic Sciences. Jaden was born and spent his early childhood in Mumbai, India, and moved to Dubai aged 10. He relocated to Ireland in September 2021 and currently lives, works and studies in Galway. He embarked on the Taste the Atlantic Young Chef ambassador programme with the aim of learning more about seafood along the Wild Atlantic Way and to showcase and champion it to an audience outside of Ireland.

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