Meet the chef

NATALIE PRIOR TALKS TO HARBORNE KITCHEN HEAD CHEF AND PROPRIETOR JAMIE DESOGUS

Jamie Desogus may cite music as his first love, and reveal that he studied music rather than catering at college, but the 34-year-old chef has more than proved his talent for food in the intervening years.

Kidderminster-raised Jamie trained at the critically-acclaimed Gordon Ramsay-owned Petrus restaurant in Knightsbridge under Mark Askew and is now the head chef and proprietor at Harborne Kitchen which serves modern British food using lesser-used cuts and seasonal produce where possible.

The Selly Oak resident took his first tentative steps into the world of cooking as a 15-year-old dishwasher at James' in Bewdley.

"I was washing dishes when, after a couple of weeks, James asked if I wanted to help with starters," he said. "At first, I actually said no, I was fine with doing the dishes! So I first cooked to earn money but it sucked me in and has never let go. "We're all pretty decent cooks in my family – I think it comes with the territory in Italian families." Jamie gained solid, basic training from Kevin Wilde at La Brasserie in Kidderminster but then left to join a band in London. When that came to an end, he decided to focus his efforts on gaining experience in a top restaurant and subsequently gained the position at Petrus. "It was quite a shock to the system but it taught me a lot very quickly," he said. Harborne Kitchen was an idea in the making five years ago when Jamie moved back to the Midlands from London with the intention of opening a restaurant in the affluent Birmingham suburb. He teamed up with a silent partner who even joined Jamie painting walls to get the refurbishment finished in time for the launch in November 2016.

Jamie said: "The opening was done on a shoestring. I had to wire the electrics, do the plumbing for the bar and kitchens and paint the place myself – it killed me!

"We have been overwhelmed with support. We have literally been full every night since opening in November, I'm very lucky."

Jamie describes his food as modern British. "I try to be as seasonal as possible," he said. "Essentially if it grows in this country, I only use it when it does.

"My dishes are simple but with bold flavours. My latest main course is lamb neck, tongue, and shoulder with lovage, olive and pickled radish, for instance.

"I like cooking simple dishes. I do not like faff for faff's sake. If it doesn't add value then don't put it on."

The restaurant has a 15-strong team – with five, including Jamie, in the kitchen at any one time. Diners can expect informal yet attentive service in a relaxed atmosphere and can choose from the Chosen 6 tasting menu with paired wines or the Choice a la carte menu. Lunchtime diners have the option of the Choice or Express 5 menus. Bar snacks and Sunday lunches are also available.

Her said: "It's hard-going as we make everything from scratch – the sourdough, the butter, every stock and braising liquor but it's worth it when you see the end result."

Jamie says he has a few food heroes but believes "the Roca i Fontane brothers are up there with the best".

Despite his top-notch culinary skills, the father-of-one says he leaves the cooking at home to his wife Sophie whom he met at La Brasserie

16 years ago. The couple have a two-year-old son called Louis who the team at Harborne Kitchen love, even clubbing together to buy him a drum kit for his birthday which Jamie admits shedding a few tears over.

He said: "Sophie and I have been through a lot together and she is just as much a part of the restaurant as me – albeit as a backbone."

Jamie says his aim for the coming year is to maintain what he's already started at Harborne Kitchen.

He said: "I plan to build a herb and vegetable garden which the rear double doors open onto, and I also have plans for a beehive on the rough. After that I also have a double room upstairs to convert – watch this space."

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