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**THE CATERER**



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With sustainability top of the news agenda, the attention is firmly on waste and what the food industry is doing about it. *Katherine Price* learns how Lexington Catering has made dealing with waste a priority through its Trashed brand

**S**ome 1.9 million tons of food is wasted by the food industry every year in the UK and approximately one-third of food produced worldwide is wasted and sent to landfill. It is estimated that if one-quarter of food wastage globally could be saved, it would be enough to feed 870 million people.

At the same time, concerns are being raised regarding overfishing and the environmental impact of meat production, as well as whether supplies will be able to meet the demands of a growing population.

There are chefs leading the way when it comes to food waste innovation – Doug McMaster’s ‘zero waste’ Silo in Brighton; Adam Handling’s Bean & Wheat café in London, which utilises offcuts and byproducts from his fine-dining restaurant, the Frog. And Dan Barber’s WastED pop-up last year at Selfridges’ rooftop restaurant in London attracted chefs from the likes of Gordon Ramsay and Marcus Wareing to Tom Kerridge, Pierre Koffmann and Raymond Blanc, elevating waste and leftovers to fine-dining levels.

When it comes to catering, Lexington Catering is pushing the food waste agenda by making it the headline of its latest company chef competition, with the intention of making it a permanent part of its offering across its sites in London.

“Caterers play a massive role in terms of the numbers we feed daily without realising it. We serve 33,000 meals a day within central London in Lexington alone,” says Rob Kirby, chef-director of Lexington Catering, which is owned by parent company Elior.

“We’ve all got a part to play,” agrees chief executive Mike Sunley. “It’s the responsibility of everybody, but we – when we’re looking after our clients and our customers – have a responsibility to lead the way.”

Lexington’s answer is Trashed, its latest brand which was launched at the same time as being set as the theme of the company’s annual LexChef competition two weeks ago, with chefs challenged to come up with a three-course menu based around ‘waste’ products.

## What is ‘waste’?

The onus was on entrants to research and talk to their suppliers to define their own meaning of ‘waste’ – which could include sustainable breeds and cuts from animals such as retired dairy cows or billy goats; byproducts; or the utilisation and re-purposing of ingredients that generally end up being thrown away, such as coffee grounds, fish bones or ‘ugly’ veg.

The event was a team effort for Kirby and his food development colleagues, including Murray Tapiki, Jon Lilley and Alex Rowe. Hospitality development chef Sam Potter originally suggested the idea to challenge the chefs in a different way from the usual ‘mystery ingredient box’ competition.

“The guys get bored of it. I wanted to do something that really made them think,” says Potter. “It really tested us and bent our heads of what we can do as a company. We need to start thinking about this as an issue. Contract caterers can set a trend for other people to follow; we can make a bit of a difference.”

Potter was amazed by the amount of effort the chefs put into sourcing waste products and designing their dishes – everything from ‘rifling through the bins’ to see what their fish suppliers don’t use, to stripping down rotisserie chicken carcasses, and using less obvious ingredients, for example, broccoli leaves in place of lettuce.

The competition attracted judges including culinary director at the



Louise Roberts, junior sous chef at Lexington



Max Leslie, head chef at Lexington



Jack Shaw's millefeuille dessert



‘Tacos’ made from potato skins, chicken skins and broccoli leaves







Jack Shaw's starter of braised broccoli stalk, pickled walnut ketchup, egg yolk, blue cheese dressing and whey crumb



Peter Joyne, Elixir food development director, with Jamie Moir, hospitality head chef at Lexington



Jack Shaw, head chef at Savills



Judges Ben Tish and Peter Joyner



Judges James Golding and Brian Hannon

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN SHEPPARD

**“Contract caterers can set a trend for other people to follow, we can make a bit of a difference”**

**Sam Potter, hospitality development chef**

Stafford London, Ben Tish; chef-director of the Pig hotel group, James Golding; and head chef to the Royal Household, Mark Flanagan.

Judge Peter Joyner, food development director at parent company Elixir, describes the event as “a real eye-opener”. He says: “talking to the chefs about what they’d done, the research they’d done – the work has been incredible and the quality of what they’ve produced is as good as any fine-dining competition.”

“It just blew me away,” adds Sunley, “I didn’t know the level to which they would go.”

Jack Shaw, head chef at Savills, had a winning menu that consisted of a starter of braised broccoli stalk, pickled walnut ketchup, egg yolk, blue cheese dressing and whey crumb. His main was a pressed cod’s head

with celeriac, chorizo and cod roe; while his dessert was a croissant coffee and pear mille-feuille with almond milk ice-cream.

“As a hospitality chef, waste is not something I tend to think about too much, but once I got into it, I realised there’s a whole world of produce and stuff you can use that you just don’t tend to think about,” he says. “It’s an ethos me and the rest of the team will carry through.”

Development chef Daniel Rampat designed the guests’ menu for the evening, which included ‘tacos’ made from potato skins, chicken skins and broccoli leaves, with fillings including blue cheese rind, charred broccoli stalk, coriander stalks, anchovy oil and barbecued chicken hearts. Curried billy goat was





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Jack Shaw's main of pressed cod's head with celeriac, chorizo and cod roe



Jamie Moir



From left: Hannon, Claire Clark, Mark Flanagan, Joyner, Shaw and Kirby



also on offer (billy goats are useless to the dairy industry and are often slaughtered at birth), and a marrow broth was served in pieces of tuna spine – which turned out to be far more stylish than it sounds.

"You can produce something suitable for a Michelin-starred restaurant out of something that just gets thrown away... It goes to show what you can actually do with stuff if you root through the bins," adds Potter.

## Taking it forward

However, the company isn't just relying on the competition to raise awareness among its chefs of waste in the kitchen. It is hoping to establish Trashed dishes at sites from February 2019, joining its existing brands such as vegetarian range Grains & Greens and healthy grab-and-go selection Blend. The plan is to launch Trashed at three to five sites in February and then slowly roll it out.

"The challenge will be to make the food sexy and to make food people really want to eat and keep it at a price that people can afford – there's an initial response that if it's trash, it'll be cheaper, but that's not really how it works," says Kirby.

The competitors at LexChef were tasked with keeping dishes within £8 per head, and when it comes to rolling out the Trashed counters, the focus is on making full use of the

ingredients available, and possibly being able to buy slightly fewer ingredients, which may save money in the long run.

The other challenges Kirby foresees are marketing – "your wording has got to be really clever" – and training.

"It would be unreasonable for me to go to 100 of our chefs and say, cook cod's head tomorrow," he adds. "We've got to put the training behind it for our chefs to be able to deliver it. The challenge is also getting front of house staff to understand why we do it, because they'll be the ones delivering it, so it's the training for front of house, and to work alongside marketing to make sure we get whole company buy-in and our clients' buy-in as well."

It's also not as straightforward as simply putting a 'waste product' dish on the menu, as once the byproduct is used up, to order more of it misses the whole point.

"Education is the way forward – getting your young team to understand why you shouldn't throw away something that is perfectly good to eat," agrees competition judge Golding, who has been a sustainability stalwart while working across the group of Pig hotels.

He says: "When you have a product that's been grown and is a big part of your philosophy and ethos, you want to utilise every single part of it. The slight problem within any kitchen

where you pick up the phone, you get it delivered, it comes in the next day – you haven't got that same connection with the vegetable, which means you don't utilise every single part of it because it's not personal to you.

"What we're trying to do is get kids to understand that it has to be personal. It's about getting younger chefs to understand the importance of using absolutely everything they can."

He adds: "We're talking to our suppliers, saying, 'do not bring fish in polystyrene boxes, do not bring potatoes in plastic sacks'. We're making a difference, all we need is for everybody to take responsibility for their own actions."

As for client buy-in, Kirby is confident in clients' interest in the concept. "From a client perspective, it's happy days because it ticks all of their CSR boxes," he says, while Sunley points out if savings are made, those can be passed back to the customer.

"In all our agendas, all our meetings, CSR is right at the top of our agendas, so we need to bring that to the top of our agenda for our competitions and restaurants," agrees Joyner.

"Everybody has embraced it, especially our young chefs," adds Kirby. "It's making sure we give longevity and make changes. This isn't just for me, it's for the next generation of chefs, making it sexy so they want to do it. That's important."