

Crackerjack Food

www.crackerjack.co

Kate Learner places great emphasis on using seasonal and local ingredients



All tastes catered for

The sweet smell of baking and good old-fashioned home cooking fills the basement of Kate Learner's Clifton home.

It's only lunchtime, but she has already baked a number of cakes and tarts for a special afternoon tea being held by one of her business clients.

There's carrot cake, chocolate cake, homemade cookies and mini-lemon tarts, all cooling off on racks before being taken to an office in Bristol for people to nibble on between listening to speeches and studying flipcharts.

Kate runs Kate's Kitchen, a Bristol-based catering company specialising in business lunches, celebratory events, parties, canapés, parties, weddings and drinks parties.

She also caters for picnics, hampers and barbecues. Basically, if you are hosting an event and want good food to match, Kate takes care of everything, including waitress service.

Catering for local businesses and private clients is highly competitive, but Kate's selling point is that she uses seasonal, high quality ingredients, sourced as locally as possible.

Her canapé menus include a large range of delicious items, including free-range chicken bites marinated in lime, coconut milk and ginger; courgette and halloumi fritters topped with tomato salsa;

lemon marinated tortellini with sundried tomato and basil; freshwater trout, dill and spinach roulade and locally smoked mackerel, lime and dill filo parcels.

It's a far cry from the usual office and party fodder - the dry, curled up sandwiches lurking beneath the cling film and the paper plates of rubbery prawns in filo pastry which were mass-produced in a central kitchen somewhere and then microwaved.

Kate's Kitchen caters for occasions of any size or budget and the menus are individually tailor-made to the event or client.

According to Kate, 27, it's this personal, one-to-one approach which sets her small business apart from the big catering companies.

"I try to make things a bit different and people seem to like the personal service I can offer them. "They like to put a face to the name, rather than dealing with big companies where they talk to several anonymous different people on the phone in some head office.

"Because I work from home and I only employ one other chef, my overheads are lower so I'm also cheaper than big catering companies which is why I can offer competitive prices to local businesses."

Kate's passion and enthusiasm for food using high quality

People always say my food looks very home cooked, which is a huge compliment

seasonal and local produce stems from her childhood.

Growing up in Clifton Wood, there was always good food on the table at the family home. Her mum, Sue, cooked every day and even grew her own vegetables. Her grandmother was a cookery teacher and from an early age, Kate always wanted to work with food.

"There was always cooking in the house and I started when I was really young. I always wanted to be a chef."

At the age of 14, Kate got jobs washing dishes in local restaurants and then started to cook at the Primrose Cafe in Clifton Village.

After doing a hospitality and management course at university she went travelling and worked as a chef in New Zealand before returning to Bristol to work for local catering business Skyblueplank.

"Until then I had always worked in restaurants, but I wanted to do events because it's more varied work, and that's when I started to think about launching my own

business because I always wanted to work for myself."

She launched Kate's Kitchen in January 2007, and the business has grown quickly, mainly through word-of-mouth recommendations.

Her website includes several glowing testimonials from satisfied customers and she gets regular event work from big ethical and environmental companies like the Soil Association, Triodos Bank, Natural England and Sustrans.

Kate makes everything herself ("apart from the puff pastry") and she has built up a network of local suppliers, including Bakers The Butcher of Nailsea, Valley Smokehouse in the Chew Valley and Leigh Court, the organic vegetable growers.

Says Kate: "Using good quality ingredients from local suppliers makes a difference. "In the summer I try to buy as much

as possible from the farmers' markets and that way I can keep the menus fresh and seasonal.

"A lot of big companies market themselves as 'using seasonal and local ingredients', but they obviously don't. It has become a bit of a soundbite. If you go to Bristol farmers' market on a Wednesday you'll often see me laden with bags of local produce.

"Of course, you can't source everything locally and you have to be realistic, but I do have a passion for it. In the future, I'd like to get my own vegetable patch so I can grow my own produce for the business."

Although each job is priced differently and tailored to the individual client, the average cost of a buffet is about £8 a head, and the menu could include seasonal vegetable tarts, salads, fruit platters and homemade cakes.

Kate employs a number of experienced waitresses to help serve the food, which is another point of difference.

"My waitresses have worked in restaurants for years so they know what they're doing. Some big companies get inexperienced youngsters from recruitment agencies and that can let your business down.

"I've entered quite a competitive business and there are some good companies out there so you have to make yours stand out.

"I try to make things look really colourful and different when it comes to presentation, but the food is obviously what people remember and people always say my food looks very home cooked, which is a huge compliment."

Kate's Kitchen can be contacted on 0117 330 8189 or via the website, www.kateskitchenbristol.co.uk



Mark Taylor talks to Kate Learner, whose Bristol-based catering business offers the personal touch

Tucking in

What you're saying about Bristol's restaurants on our website

On Riverstation, city centre...

It's taken me a decade of living in Bristol to finally make it to riverstation and it was worth the wait. Great food, not too pricey, although the service at times was a little on the "quirky" side.

On Howards Restaurant, Cumberland Basin...

Too old fashioned. Nice location but the menu seems stuck in the 1980s. Time for a revamp guys as these kind of bistros are old hat now.

Had a great meal? Had a truly terrible one? Let everyone know by logging on to our website www.crackerjack.co.uk



Above: Kate in the kitchen preparing for another event. Left: Kate relies on her experienced waiting team of (left to right) Joyce Warhurst, Margaret Boyle, Alex Lievesley, Margaret Neker (Kate), Tom Harper, Judith Stockpole and Jean Oakley

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On the menu at Kate's Kitchen

- Prosciutto wrapped peaches and melon
- Smoked chicken, mango and coriander filo tartlets
- Poised duck pancakes with cucumber and spring onion
- Mixed meat crostini
- Beef carpaccios with pesto oil
- Charizo, parmesan and courgette
- Cucumbers with Roquefort pate and crispy bacon
- Forbed pancakes filled with blue cheese and pear
- Poached salmon, dill and lemon creme fraiche in crostettes
- Grilled mussels with lime and tomato dressing
- Tandoori style king prawn sticks with tzatziki dip
- Seared scallops wrapped in streaky bacon
- Crab cakes with lemon, chilli and ginger with saffron aioli
- Seared squid, lime and sesame wonton cups
- Greek salad, cucumber cups
- Rare roast beef with wholegrain creme fraiche in poppy seed tartlet cups
- Mixed lamb rosemary kebabs with tahini and honey dip
- Spinach, ricotta and sun-blush tomato tartlets
- Pea, mint and goats cheese filo parcels
- Paprika and cheddar straps with marinated olives and babe ganshuk dip
- Spicy bean and tomato patties with minty sauce

10% discount off final food bill with this advert *cannot be used in conjunction with other offers

Bristol's One & Only Authentic Sichuan Restaurant

Sichuan Earthquake Fundraising Dinner, Auction & Raffle - Thursday 5th June, 7pm £35 per head - book now and support this worthy cause

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Call & book a table on 0845 371 3888

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