

The French Dining School - Poul & Niall

Jon Poul, if I can start with you. You're actually a Dane.

Poul Yes.

Jon And we have running this organisation a Dane, and an Irishman, and yet you're running The French Dining School, so how do you explain that one?

Poul Well I'm actually a trained French chef, was working in Denmark in a very, very French restaurant and was trained there as a chef but also as a sommelier, so I had both sides of the trade. And I've been working in Australia, I've been working in Jersey, I've been working in London ...

Jon In French restaurants?

Poul In restaurants, very much French, yeah. And when I met Niall in London we ended up buying this property here in the middle of nowhere. And what can do you? Well I thought 'do a cooking school', because my old boss actually runs a cooking school, but in Nice. And we thought due to that England was so close and London market was so close we thought it would be the Brits, but it's actually the rest of the world that comes here. Brits are a few, do come but I think they'd rather go further south, like most Nordic people would.

Jon So you actually have two students here today. Whereabouts are they from?

Poul They're from the Cayman Islands, in the Caribbean ...

Jon Sounds very exotic.

Poul It was, it's exotic, and for them it's exotic to be here... yes.

Jon So how long have you actually been here?

Poul I have been here ten years, yeah, but we've been running the school for seven years? Yes, seven years.

Niall About seven.

Poul Seven years, and it's the last two years that we can live off it. The first year was slowly because we also had to refurbish this old ruin of a house - it's a 417 year-old house so....



www.spotlightonbrittany.fr

Jon It's certainly no longer a ruin. It's a lovely house. You have ... are they one week courses you run here?

Poul One week, yeah. They come on a Sunday evening, when we would have a dinner together, so they can see what it's like, and then Monday morning it's a hard core week. They go straight into cooking stocks, and lunch and dinner. And then we do it every day for five days, except Thursday lunch. Lunch is off, so people have a chance to go and see Mont St Michel if they haven't seen that.

Jon Sure. So we have Niall here, the Irishman, the other half of the business.

Niall Bonjour!

Jon Nice Irish word, thank you. How do you actually split the business up?

Niall I deal with the marketing, and taking the money and accommodation ...

Jon That sounds the nice half.

Niall And being the positive nice front of house ...

Jon The typical genial Irishman.

Niall Absolutely, yeah.

Lorrie Providing the entertainment.

Jon In the average year, you run courses for how many weeks?

Niall I would say it's about two a month. Between March and October.

Jon Okay. And we actually have some students here. Can I ask them one or two questions while you're working? What are you making at the moment?

Lorrie Well, I'm just grating some Parmesan cheese I think to top off some Caesar Salad. Is that, is that correct?

Niall That's correct, yeah.

Lorrie So we're making some mussel ... mussel soup, or mussel stew.

Jon Sounds good.

Lorrie I can't wait for lunch.



Jon What would typical Cayman Island cuisine be?

Lorrie Salt beef and beans, rice and peas, fish, eskovich, Pamela can tell you, she's probably a lot more ...

Jon Pamela, what would you normally be eating in the Cayman Islands?

Pamela We have a lot of jerk-chicken, jerk-pork, we have oxtail, we have ... turtle is our national dish, actually akee and salt fish for breakfast, yeah, delicious, very hearty.

Jon Sounds good. Tell me, what have you learnt this week?

Pamela Well, I actually have no cooking experience at all. So, from the basics all the way up to the final dish and plating it's just amazing and the food is so delicious.

Jon I'll bet. Okay, so back to you then Niall. What can you realistically hope to teach in a week?

Niall To teach in a week? Well, we are called The French Dining School, and as you know, dining is not just cooking. Dining is the whole shebang – getting the food, presenting it, sitting round the table, having fun, enjoying the food ...

Jon Creating the right atmosphere that we have now with the roaring fire ...

Niall Welcoming our guests, and, and enjoying the fact that we've got the opportunity to make so much great friendships around the world. So in the course of a week, students say to us not only have they learnt the basics about dining and the skills required to do everything and replicate it when they go back home, to their homes, that's very important for us because we like to think that it's not just fancy food, it's great food that can be reproduced back home. But they've also learned how to plate up, how to have a dinner party without panicking, so a lot of it is preparation in advance. We do a little bit of ... Paul's a sommelier as well, so they do a little bit about wine and what wine should pair with what food. So it's a whole combination of things. We want our students to enjoy the week. To learn lots but to enjoy it, and to really feel relaxed. Everyone is different, everyone has a different idea about what they'll take away with them. We want them to not just learn the skills but to have had a great time.

Jon Girls, have you had a great time?

Lorrie Oh absolutely, the most wonderful holiday, really.

Pamela It really is the best ever.

Jon A good place to end it, Niall. Thank you very much.



Niall You're welcome.