

THE MENU FOOD AND DRINK AWARDS

Plenty of food for thought

Our panel of judges tell Caroline Lindsay how choosing the cream of the culinary scene gave them plenty to chew over

Drum roll, please. It's the moment we've all been waiting for – the shortlist for The Courier Menu Food and Drink Awards has been announced. These inaugural awards will celebrate the outstanding talent across the region and it was obvious from all the entries that Courier Country has this in abundance.

The panel of six judges – Andrew Scott, owner of Victus Consultancy; Graeme Broom, wine development manager at Wine Importers; Ian Gibb, food studies and hospitality sector manager at the University of the Highlands and Islands Perth College; Ian MacDonald, food and beverage manager at St Andrews Links Trust, “the Home of Golf”; Martha Bryce, the founder of Martha Bryce PR; and Catriona MacInnes, acting editor of The Courier – got together this week at The Courier publisher DC Thomson's flagship building in Dundee to painstakingly go through each and every entry.

The panel was overwhelmed by the number of top-class entries they received for all 10 categories, each one showcasing the fantastic talent across the food and drink industry in Courier Country. All six judges agreed it was tough job deciding on a shortlist.

Catriona MacInnes, acting editor of The Courier, said: “I was so very impressed by the calibre of the entries; it made the judges' job both enjoyable and difficult. We have so much talent in Courier Country and this has just proved the fact.”

Over the next few weeks, we will get to know everyone on the shortlist before the overall winner of each category is announced at a five-star gala dinner at the Old Course Hotel St Andrews on March 15.

THE PANEL'S COMMENTS

Andrew Scott, owner of Victus Consultancy

“The quality of the entrants was simply incredible. Every business, irrespective of size, location and product, oozed passion, investing in people, quality and provenance.

“It was a pleasure to judge. The key, stand-out aspect that I look for is community and that was in abundance. We should be so proud of the larder on our own doorstep and now I simply can't wait for the awards night itself.

“I would personally like to wish everyone taking part the best of luck – fingers crossed.”

Ian Gibb, food studies and hospitality sector manager at the University of the Highlands and Islands Perth College

“I was very impressed with the number and calibre of the entries – the innovation was world class.

“From a personal perspective, it was nice to be judging, as opposed to entering!

“I thoroughly enjoyed the judging process and working with the crème de la crème of industry judges, and I'm looking forward to the awards dinner on March 15.”

Graeme Broom, wine development manager, Wine Importers

“All the judges were impressed by the number of the entries from such a broad spectrum – there are so many ordinary people doing extraordinary things and not only using the best of local produce but using them in traditional or innovative ways.



The judges deliberate the shortlist for the awards. Picture: Mhairi Edwards.

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“The craft drinks producer of the year category is a prime example of what we're talking about here – all the entries were from innovative entrepreneurs serving the local community and offering outstanding customer service.

“The same applies to the street vendor category. Street food is a relatively new trend here but all the entries made me hungry and thirsty – I wished they were all in my own locale!

“Overall, we found it a tough process, choosing the shortlist, because, more often than not, it was almost impossible to separate producers and companies doing great things. It certainly provoked lively debate among the judges, all of whom were keen epicureans.”

Ian MacDonald, food and beverage manager at St Andrews Links Trust, “the Home of Golf”

“I was delighted to be asked to be a part of the judging team for the inaugural awards. I found the level of entries to be excellent and it's good to see so many established and start-up companies, so obviously proud of their products,

and the use of so many home-grown produce. I am sure that The Courier Menu Food and Drink Awards will be seen to be the one to win, as well as those shortlisted.”

Martha Bryce, Martha Bryce PR

“The huge variety and sheer quality of the award entries has been wonderful and a real testament to the calibre of the scene in this part of Scotland.

“The craft drink sector is booming, with the number of new starts, established producers and with real innovation; we have outstanding food producers, too: those with quality and ethics at their heart, combined with real ambition to take their work to a global marketplace.

“The talent in the area's restaurants, bars and coffee shops was outstanding, too: from fine dining to simple, everyday fare. It just goes to show that food and drink involves everyone. It's something we all have a stake in and something local people can truly be proud of.

“It didn't half make it hard to decide on the shortlist and winners, though!”

The shortlist

COFFEE SHOP OF THE YEAR

KitschnBake, Newport-on-Tay
Pacamara, Dundee
Parlour Café, Dundee

The judges were looking for the coffee shop which is best able to create an outstanding customer experience – a warm welcome, high-quality coffee and/or tea plus a range of other drinks, tasty food made from fresh, local produce, all served with an excellent level of customer service.

Entries were judged on the following criteria:

- Style and experience
- Value/affordability
- Customer service
- Accessibility and facilities
- Quality of offering

STREET VENDOR

OF THE YEAR

Artisana Vintage Mobile Tea Room & Patisserie, Kirriemuir
Logiealmond Ltd, trading as Wild and Smoky, Dundee
LovEvents, Bankfoot
The Cheesy Toast Shack, Fife

Good food on the go has become an important part of modern living and, as such, the demand for street food and impromptu pop-ups has never been greater. The judges were looking for someone who's bringing something unique to the table.

Entries were judged on the following criteria:

- Innovative concept and product offering
- Vehicle/pop-up design and branding
- Use of local produce