

## Carl Wills, NZ-UK Link Foundation Cookery Modern Apprentice of the Year 2005

In July 2005 I was named the NZ-UK Link Foundation Cookery Modern Apprentice of the Year.

My prize was six weeks work experience in 5 restaurants of my choice with all expenses paid.

After a lot of thought I had come up with a range of restaurants that would show me something different in each place. My choices were: Peter Gordon's restaurant, The Providores and Tapa Room in Central London, because of my extreme respect for his food, and to have a friendly face for when I first arrived.



*Carl Wills surveys his opportunities from the top of New Zealand House in London.*

The Fat Duck in Bray was my second pick. I wanted to see if the stories I had heard about were true which now I can say they definitely all are!

Third was St Johns restaurant in Spitalfields, London, for its interesting nose to tail eating. The fourth one being the Savoy Grill with Josh Emmet. To see what it's like to work in a large kitchen with an extremely intense environment.

Last but definitely not least was Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons in Great Milton, near Oxford for a taste of the (Michelin) three-star French kitchen.

So, after packing, planning and farewells, I set off for London, England on the 18th of September (which is a very long and uncomfortable flight and when the wing of your plane gets hit by lightning at those altitudes it doesn't do much for the nerves! Luckily, there was no damage).

After 24 hours on the plane I landed at Heathrow International Airport and was met by the family of Francis King, Executive Officer of the Link Foundation, and was put straight into the car and taken for a day of beer, punting and a course of tea and scones to finish the day, next to the amazing water ways of Oxford.

After an exciting first day I headed back to London, to my home for the next six weeks, The Generator Hostel in Russell Square (which was more like a night club with beds).

I had some well needed sleep and was off to The Providores for my first shift. I was working with the Head Chef, Miles Kirby from Wellington, learning about all the different tastes of Asia and finding out how to get the perfect balance of flavours to make Peter's famous Fusion foods.

Also during my first week I went to the restaurant show, where the young chefs of the U.K were competing for the NZ/UK Link Foundation Culinary Challenge, with the reverse prize of mine, six weeks work experience in New Zealand.

I had the honour of meeting Sophie, the Countess of Wessex and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

Next I went to the Fat Duck, in the little village of Bray. Here I had the first taste of the long hours that the chefs work in the UK, doing 90 hours in a 5 day week. I can say that the food there is amazing and the time that goes into preparing each dish is unbelievable! I would describe the Fat Duck as the Charlie and the Chocolate Factory for chefs with the madness of dishes such as, Bacon & Egg Ice-cream that is made at the table with liquid nitrogen and cooking Pork belly for 24 hours in a water bath at 60 degrees Celsius. And let's not forget the snail porridge!

I also had the privilege of working in the lab for an afternoon where there are scientists working full time coming up with new, crazy culinary delights. During that afternoon in the lab I helped create a sauce for a mussel dish, which was derived from oyster shells, seaweed and rope! My week at the Fat Duck definitely opened my eyes to a whole new world of cooking.

From there I was back on the train to St. Johns in London where everything that would normally end up modern day butcher's rubbish bin ends up on your plate, from Pigs Cheek Salad to Terrines made from the livers and hearts from almost every game bird you could think of. Also roasting whole Suckling Pigs! And how many people can say that they have shaved pigs heads with a BIC razor.

Next I was across town at the Savoy Grill to work with another fellow Kiwi, Josh Emmet. This is one of those extremely hard kitchens where the tension and adrenalin are always running high. At the Savoy I learnt the pressures of working in a large team in a busy kitchen also a few colourful words, which didn't surprise me as it is a Ramsay kitchen!

From the Savoy I jumped back on another bus and was on my way to Oxford for my week at Le Manoir which is by far the most amazing kitchen I have ever seen! It is my definition of fine French food. Le Manoir has its own full butchery and they grow their own produce with 20 different varieties of cress and mushrooms that grow in a small valley that runs through the Hotel grounds. From here the 30 plus chefs that work each service, turn this produce into some of the most beautiful accompaniments to some of the finest cuts of meat, poultry and fish, that you can find.

My experience over the six weeks has turned me into a more confident and dedicated chef. Also the friends I have made and the life skills picked up from living in the hustle and bustle of the London way will be a real asset to me in the future.

I am presently working full-time at The Providores and Tapa Room, have been since I ended my 6 week experience. I am loving it, from the new skills I am learning in this kitchen to the great group of people that make up the Providores team, it really makes for an excellent working environment.

A special thanks to everyone at the NZ-UK Link Foundation, Hospitality Standards Institute and Peter Gordon for making it all possible.



*Hard at work at Providores*

***Carl Wills, 28-12-05***