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Get intouch...

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All establishment enquiries, including inspections, reports, ratings, signage, training and consultancy.

01256 844455 Fax: **01256 491647**

HotelServicesCustomerSupport@theAA.com

Hotel Services Accounts

All financial and payment enquiries.

01256 491740

Advertising Sales

Adding photographs to guide listings, advertising in the guides.

01256 491545

contactadvertisingsales@theAA.com

Lifestyle Guides

For information on your guide listing and establishment questionnaires.

LifestyleGuides@theAA.com

Hotel Services Marketing

Logo requests, on and offline promotional opportunities, award event enquiries.

01256 494974

emma.davis@theAA.com

intouch Newsletter

Submitting articles/letters for the members' newsletter.

01256 494974

INtouch@theAA.com

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enquiries@skchase.com

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0800 422 0088

enquiries@eviivo.com

AA Hotel Services

14th Floor, Fanum House, Basing View, Basingstoke, Hants, RG21 4EA.

www.theAA.com/travel

www.AAHotels.com

intouch

SUPPORTING YOUR BUSINESS

AWARDS UPDATES FOR 2012

PLUS...

TOP TIPS FROM THE
INDUSTRY EXPERTS

PROFILING THE RECENTLY
REFURBISHED DUKES LONDON

GET THE LATEST OFFERS AND
NEWS FROM THE AA

Hotel Services

Welcome

We are well underway with preparations for our upcoming awards events: the AA B&B Awards, which are being held on Tuesday 15th May at the Royal Horseguards Hotel, and the AA Hospitality Awards, held on Monday 24 September this year at the London Hilton on Park Lane; turn to page 10 for further details.

Establishments can benefit from an exciting range of opportunities this year, see page 8 to view our range of open training courses and don't miss out on your last chance to advertise in the 2013 editions of the guides – turn to page 5 for booking deadlines.

Find out top tips on AA inspections and key tips for choosing and keeping your tableware on page 4. You can also view details on the new Hotels Quality Standards brochure on page 14.

This issue we profile Dukes London, the independently owned luxury boutique hotel located in the heart of London's West End St James who have recently refurbished their bedrooms and restaurant. We also feature a great range of promotions from our sponsors and partners.

As ever, we're delighted to receive letters and questions. Intouch is your forum for communicating with the AA Hotel Services community so send us a letter or drop us an email at intouch@theAA.com.

Best wishes

The Marketing Team

Contact Details

AA Hotel Services, 14th Floor, Fanum House,
Basing View, Basingstoke. RG21 4EA
General Enquiries: 01256 844455
Fax: 01256 491647
Email: intouch@theAA.com

- **Inside...** 2
A brief introduction to this issue's highlights
- **Informed** 3
News and offers from the AA
- **Villeroy and Boch** 4
Key tips for choosing and keeping your tableware
- **Top tips on AA inspections** 4
Get the most from AA Recognition and from your AA Inspection
- **AA Restaurant Club** 5
Exclusive to AA Rosette-awarded restaurants
- **Advertising opportunities** 5
Maximise your establishment's exposure to the public
- **View on the industry** 6
- **Profile on Chef** 6
- **Eastbourne Holiday Cottages** 7
Business Award Winners'
- **AA open training courses in 2012** 8
AA Hotel Services offers a comprehensive range of training and consultancy services
- **Gold Stars** 9
AA Hotel Services introduce new award
- **beacon** 9
How beacon membership could benefit your business
- **Awards Update** 10
Updating you on our upcoming awards events this year
- **Spotlight** 12
- **Caterer.com** 13
- **New Quality Standards** 14
Updates to the Hotel Quality Standards
- **Raising the Bar** 15
How to recognise and taste good chocolate
- **AA Business Insurance** 16
Get covered with AA Business Insurance
- **Get intouch...** 16
Latest contact details for AA Hotel Services.

AA Campsites of the Year

In February, the AA Campsite of the Year Awards coincided with the launch of the AA Caravan and Camping Britain and Ireland Guide for 2012.



AA Campsite of the Year winners:

England & Overall Winner of Best Campsite of the Year: Ross Park, Newton Abbot, Devon

Scotland: Skye Camping & Caravanning Club Site, Edinbane, Isle of Skye, Highland

Wales: Islawrffordd Caravan Park, Tal Y Bont, Gwynedd

Regional winners:

South West England: South Lytchett Manor Caravan & Camping Park, Lytchett Minster, Dorset

South East England: Tanner Farm Touring Caravan & Camping Park, Marden, Kent

Heart of England: Two Mills Touring Park, Touring Park, North Walsham, Norfolk

North West England: Riverside Caravan Park, High Bentham, North Yorkshire

North East England: St Helens Caravan Park, Wykeham, North Yorkshire

Roger Almond Award - Most Improved Campsite:

Trethem Mill, St Just in Roseland, Cornwall

Details of the award-winning sites can be found in the AA's new Caravan and Camping Britain and Ireland 2012 guide. The guide features over 900 annually inspected and rated sites giving details of location, AA Pennant rating, contact details, prices opening times and a description as well as local information.

David Hancock, editor of the guide, commented, "I wish to congratulate all our winners, who have been awarded in recognition of exceptional quality and attention to detail across their parks and who are included in a feature in the 2012 AA Caravan & Camping Guide. The guide also lists local attractions under each location, nearby pubs and restaurants under each site entry, 'Best For' lists to help campers find the best parks to go Glamping (posh camping) or for stunning views, for example, as well as colourful, fully updated introductions to key destination counties, and a section containing 20 new Walks and Cycle rides."

The AA Caravan and Camping Britain and Ireland Guide for 2012 is priced at £9.99 and can be purchased online at theAA.com/shop



New Three Rosettes awarded

We are delighted to announce that the following restaurants were newly awarded three AA Rosettes in January. The higher AA Rosettes, awarded just twice a year, celebrate the exceptionally high standards of cuisine that these restaurants offer.

Two of these restaurants are in London, while the remaining five range from Scotland to West Sussex.

Hakkasan Mayfair, London

Roganic, London

Cotswold 88, Painswick

Tuddenham Mill, Newmarket

Gravetye Manor, East Grinstead

East Lodge Country House Hotel, Rowsley

Mark Greenaway at No 12 Picardy Place, Edinburgh

Follow us on twitter!



Follow us on **@AAHotels** for regular updates on newest additions to the scheme, hospitality news content, interesting stories from our establishments, updates on the Awards events and much more!



Top tips from Villeroy & Boch

Villeroy & Boch's hotel and restaurant division is responsible for creating sophisticated tableware, glassware and cutlery for the trade industry and is recognised for its high degree of customer support. Here are some of their key tips for keeping your table top fresh and for your customers:

With consumers dining out more frequently, smart restaurateurs are beginning to realise their regular customers will soon tire of the "same old, same old" restaurant experience. New tableware is an easy way to enhance and elevate the dining experience quickly, transforming it from the mundane to the unexpected.

In spite of the gradual economic recovery, margins are still at an all-time low. Food costs are spiralling, and energy cost increases have not yet abated. It might be difficult for an executive chef or restaurateur to afford new tableware in

this environment but with a few simple upgrades it can be made simple.

All of this can be achieved by following through with ideas to "transform your table top" with a few, simple pieces you can enhance your signature dishes and create a new dining experience for each and every customer.

If a restaurant has around 60 seats and turns the tables twice, the goal is to give each table of customers a different look for one course. The current tableware can continue to be used but the operator simply needs to add to it with a selection of new items. At an average cost of £10 per plate, this is an £800 purchase. With 120 meals a night, over four nights a week, if the operator can increase cost by 20 pence per menu item the new plates are paid for in 8 weeks. Most importantly, the operator has enhanced the guest experience driving customer loyalty and return visits.



AA Restaurant Club

AA Hotel Services is pleased to work with the AA Restaurant Club, promoting hundreds of participating restaurants to over four million AA Customers.

The AA Restaurant Club features on the AA Rewards site, which provides offers and benefits exclusively to AA Customers. Members can view participating restaurants by region, with each restaurant's offer and its availability clearly listed.

Interested in taking part?

- Scheme only open to AA Rosette-awarded restaurants
- No fees or subscription to pay
- You specify the discount and/or offer
- You specify the availability and cover numbers

To find out more simply call **AA Rewards** on **01256 492963**.



Get the most from AA Recognition and from your AA Inspection

Make sure your team have read and understood the AA Quality Standards booklet. The content is vital in order to understand the requirements at each star level.

The debrief with your inspector is a two-way conversation. Whilst it is important to listen to the inspector's account of the stay and to note any tips and advice they offer, it is also an opportunity to ask lots of questions and to advise them of any plans you may have to make changes or improvements to your operation.

It is critical that you advise us of any changes to your operation. This may be something like a change of chef, which we need to know about if you have AA Rosettes or it maybe about refurbishment you have carried out or you are planning. You may want us to postpone your visit because of work being carried out or you may want us to reflect the changes you have made in your description.

Your inspector is here to help; as are our office administration

team. Please feel free to call us as we are available all year round, not just at the time of your inspection.

Make sure you familiarise yourself with all the other benefits that are available to you as they could save you money or enhance your marketing.

Make sure you send us quality pictures to fill the multiple image spaces on your page on our website. Good pictures will enhance the customer's first impression of a property and could influence them to make a booking.

Ensure you fill in the questionnaire we send you each year about your establishment to ensure we have up to date information about your property on our website and in our guide book.

Make sure your AA signage is correct and up to date. For information on signage or to purchase new or additional signs telephone **01256 844455** or email **HotelservicesCustomerSupport@theAA.com**

Increase your visibility and impact by advertising in the 2013 Guide!

Advertising in the AA Hotel or B&B Guide is an effective way of maximising your establishment's exposure to the public.

Options range from including one or two photographs with your listing, to selecting a third, half, or full page advertisement. For further information, contact advertising sales on **01256 491545** sales on **contactadvertisingsales@theAA.com**

Why advertise in the guide?

- The AA has the biggest market share in lifestyle guides – we reach more people than anyone else
- Choose an advertising option to suit your establishment
- Dedicated design and artwork team to produce your advertisement
- Receive a FREE copy of the guide on publication



Booking deadlines are still open for the following guides:

Hotel Guide 26th April 2012
(Copy deadline 16th May)

B&B Guide 3rd May 2012
(Copy deadline 6th June)

Industry view from Fred Sirieix - Galvin at Windows General Manager and founder The Art of Service training board game.

How do you motivate your team?

I let my actions do the talking. I am a natural enthusiast and a positive person. I believe in working hard and in the beauty of rigour and discipline to achieve one's goal.

What is your greatest challenge?

Without a doubt staying at the top and keeping the consistency as well as finding ways to always get better.

If you weren't working in the hospitality industry what would you be doing?

What is important for me is to enjoy what I do and make a difference. I'd quite like to work in education and be able to give more opportunities to more people.

How do you deal with complaints?

I always listen, take it in and learn from the comments made. I see it as constructive criticism and use them to get better. I am both thankful and grateful for people who tell me where I go wrong. Without that I can't be the best.

Top 5 tips for customer service?

1. Eye contact, smile and give your full undivided attention to guests.
2. You must have an inner desire to please and make people feel special.



3. Be positive, warm, welcoming, hospitable, kind and generous and make sure you radiate these feelings to guests and those around you at all times.
4. Be awake, aware and ready for the unexpected.
5. Be proud of yourself and what you do. You are the best!

Who's your inspirations?

I feel so grateful and lucky for those around me. I have had many mentors in my life. My parents were my first inspirations. They taught me the very important basics and gave me the foundations one needs to succeed and be happy. People like Silvano Giraladin, Michel Roux jnr and Chris Galvin have been (and are still) a huge source of inspiration for me.

Most memorable service experience?

Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons

Any service trends moving forward?

It is important we position our industry and service as a true and rewarding profession and as a career choice. We also need to take education much more seriously and teach the young generation the right values and the basics which they need to be successful. If we do that I can see service improving and quality and excellence going all the way up.



Congratulations to Eastbourne Holiday Cottages on winning the Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Business Award



This edition of intouch profiles Alyn Williams, Head Chef at The Westbury

How did you get where you are now?

I started cooking soon after leaving school, it was always something that I was interested in and quickly realised that I wanted to make a career out of it. After leaving college I worked at Les Allouettes in Claygate, Surrey, after this I worked for many great restaurants including Petrus in St James's, Claridges, Groucho Club and The Berkeley, After this I set up the restaurant that is now Alyn Williams at The Westbury.

Who is your greatest inspiration?

My father is a very good cook and taught me to appreciate food and flavours. My mother was one of the most positive people I have ever known, she passed that on to me. Within my career I would have to say a collection of chefs from the Gordon Ramsay group. Angela Hartnett, Mark Askew, Stuart Gillies, Gordon and Marcus all imparted a lot of information and experience, they all inspired me in many ways.

What are your top tips for an aspiring chef?

It all depends what area of the industry you choose to follow. I always wanted to be able to cook at many levels and in different styles, so my career has taken me from cooking good pub food and busy brasseries all the way through to 3 Michelin starred food.

If you weren't a chef, what career would you have chosen?

I would have loved to have been a singer, a crooner like Michael Bubl , it just so happens that I can't sing, so it's a good thing I became a chef. Being a pro snowboarder is also something that I would have been happy doing as a long term career.



What has been your greatest career achievement to date?

It would have to be opening the doors to my own restaurant.

What is your favourite ingredient?

That's question impossible! I have different favourites all the time. My favourite meat is pork for its flavour and versatility, I love every cut. But the most important ingredient of all is Salt.

What would be your 'Last Supper'?

Being brought up in East London I would see out my last day with traditional pie and mash.

Where do you eat on your night off?

I have two young boys so we often go to a nice pizzeria on the Kings Road. Without the boys, I enjoy a good steak at Goodman and have always been a big fan of Richard Corrigan's cooking.

Eastbourne Holiday Cottages have won the Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism category of the Eastbourne Business Awards 2011 and were Highly Commended in the Best Small Business of the Year category.

David Irvine who owns Eastbourne Holiday Cottages said "I am thrilled to receive this award and I am sure the success of our business is due to the commitment we give to providing quality Self catering accommodation. Our properties are graded by the AA and we only have four and five star rated properties in our portfolio. Of course the properties themselves are important but equally important is the service we provide. We aim to ensure all our guests are fully informed of the tourist attractions in the area and all guests receive a personal visit from one of the team. We do feel it is important to have a quality standard that people will recognise and the AA provides us with just that. We have a good working relationship with our inspector who takes an interest in our business and is always available to help and advise."

"Of course the properties themselves are important but equally important is the service we provide"

Eastbourne Holiday Cottages was formed five years ago to provide quality self catering accommodation in Eastbourne. From its beginning with one cottage it has now grown to sixteen properties and has a mixture of cottages, town houses and apartments in Eastbourne's prime locations. The company offers a managed service to owners of suitable properties and has seen significant growth in this sector especially in 2011.



David said "We have seen a huge increase in overseas guests coming to Eastbourne and last summer over 30% of our bookings came from Germany. We have seen a great start to 2012 with a rise in bookings and many of our properties have already been booked for the weeks of the Diamond Jubilee and Olympics. In Eastbourne we are fortunate to have a great number of attractions and the International tennis week and the fantastic air show in August are always popular."

For further information on Eastbourne Holiday Cottages visit:

www.eastbourneholidaycottages.co.uk

AA OPEN TRAINING COURSES IN 2012

Food & Beverage Service Academy and Rosette Academy

These interactive day courses provide the perfect opportunity for attendees to increase their knowledge of the AA Rosette scheme and improve their understanding of the criteria by which the AA assesses food quality. Ideal for chefs, food and beverage managers and general managers, these courses feature a range of modules which demonstrate and provide advice on a host of topics including industry best practice, increasing your revenue, menu review and terminology, seasonality and locality, flavour and blind tastings.

The fee for either Food & Beverage Service or Rosette Academy is £160 + VAT. If delegates book both the fee is £265 + VAT (£318 Incl VAT); dates available are shown below.

Food & Beverage Service Academy

- 15 May** Portsmouth Marriott, Portsmouth
- 12 June** The Vale Resort, South Wales
- 3 July** Cheltenham Chase Hotel, Gloucestershire
- 18 September** Thornton Hall, The Wirral
- 17 October** The Oxfordshire Hotel, Thame
- 20 November** Copthorne Tara Hotel, London

Rosette Academy

- 16 May** Portsmouth Marriott, Portsmouth
- 13 June** The Vale Resort, South Wales
- 4 July** Cheltenham Chase Hotel, Gloucestershire
- 19 September** Thornton Hall, The Wirral
- 18 October** The Oxfordshire Hotel, Thame
- 21 November** Copthorne Tara Hotel, London

Chocolate Courses with the Chocolate Academy

These courses take place at the state of the art Callebaut Chocolate Academy and consist of exciting practical workshops and innovative chocolate demonstration. Designed specifically for chefs they cover tempering, petit fours, and simple yet stunning dessert enhancement and garnishes.

Entry is priced at £135 + VAT per day delegate; dates available are shown below:

- 16 April** Braehead Foods, Kimarnock, Scotland
- 25 October** Westminster Kingsway College, London

Half day open Housekeeping course

£60 + VAT per delegate

This interactive workshop session offers help and advice on quality standards within bedrooms and bathrooms for housekeeping staff and management.

- 14 June** Portsmouth Marriott, Portsmouth
- 24 July** Cotswold Water Park Four Pillars Hotel

Book your space today - Contact Martin Jeffery on **01256 493442** or email martin.jeffery@theAA.com
Visit www.AAhotels.com for information on our full range of training courses and consultancy services.



AA Hotel Services introduces **NEW GOLD STARS**

AA Hotel Services are pleased to announce that after careful consideration of proprietor, general public feedback and inspectors' comments we are replacing the current Yellow Star Highly Commended award with AA Gold Stars Highly Commended.

AA Gold Stars will be awarded to the very best of Guest Accommodation within each of the 3, 4 & 5 Star rating bandings, and will continue to be known as Highly Commended, to further highlight the outstanding achievement these establishments have accomplished. This award will encompass all designators: Farm House, Guest Accommodation, Inns, Restaurant with Rooms, B&Bs and Guest Houses.

The change will come into effect from the close of the 2013 edition of the B&B Guide in May when establishments will be sent a letter confirming winning of this award for 2012-2013. The new style certificates will be sent to each establishment. However there is no change to the layout of the existing logo which will be made available for use once the awards are confirmed.

Reference to the new award will be reflected in the 2013 B&B Guide and on **theAA.com**.



Times are tough...

We're all under pressure to cut costs, maximise efficiencies and get the most from every pound we spend. Do you ever wonder if you're paying too much for the goods and services you buy? Would you benefit from measurable savings and improved efficiencies?

Need some advice?

beacon are purchasing specialists. We've been reducing costs and increasing margins for thousands of businesses just like you for over a decade.

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beacon online operates 24/7 - a proven system, reducing time to check and process electronic invoices and allowing you to purchase, as well as monitor, manage and compare product costs instantly.

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To book your free online e-procurement demo please email

all@beaconpurchasing.co.uk



please quote 'AA In Touch' when you call.

AA B&B AWARDS 2012-2013



The B&B Awards are an opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the excellent services provided by our very best establishments. Continuing in the footsteps of previous successful events, the event awards B&Bs in six different categories celebrating the best of their achievements.

The awards will be presented at a luncheon event on

Tuesday 15th May at **The Royal Horseguards hotel** in London.

Finalists have all been sent an exclusive invitation and winners will not be announced in advance.



AWARD CATEGORIES FOR 2012:

- AA Guest Accommodation of the Year (England)
- AA Guest Accommodation of the Year (Scotland)
- AA Guest Accommodation of the Year (Wales)
- AA Guest Accommodation of the Year (London)
- AA Friendliest B&B of the Year
- AA Funkiest B&B of the Year



AWARD CATEGORIES FOR 2012:

- AA Hotel of the Year (England)
- AA Hotel of the Year (Scotland)
- AA Hotel of the Year (Wales)
- AA Hotel of the Year (London)
- AA Restaurant of the Year (England)
- AA Restaurant of the Year (Scotland)
- AA Restaurant of the Year (Wales)
- AA Restaurant of the Year (London)
- AA Pub of the Year (England)
- AA Pub of the Year (Scotland)
- AA Pub of the Year (Wales)
- AA Wine Award (England)
- AA Wine Award (Scotland)
- AA Wine Award (Wales)
- AA Hotel Group of the Year
- AA Small Hotel Group of the Year
- AA Chefs' Chef of the Year
- AA Eco Hotel of the Year
- AA Lifetime Achievement Award

AA HOSPITALITY AWARDS 2012-2013



This immensely successful annual event is attended by industry-leading chefs, hoteliers and restaurateurs and recognises the accomplishments of high-achieving establishments and individuals within the hospitality industry.

This year's spectacular black-tie event will be held on:

Monday 24th September at the **London Hilton** on Park Lane

And will truly be a night to remember! Tickets are on sale now; to avoid disappointment, book before 30 June and receive an early bird discount.

For further information on the awards, venue and ticket availability, visit AAhospitalityawards.com or email Awards@theAA.com

Tickets can be purchased from the from the awards website by invoice request using our ticket booking form functionality or by completing a downloadable booking form and sending it to:

AA Hospitality Awards, 14th Floor, Fanum House, Basing View, Basingstoke, RG21 4EA

We are delighted to announce that **Jason Atherton** will be creating the evening's menu in conjunction with the London Hilton on Park Lane team.



Jason Atherton was the first British chef to complete a stage at Spain's famous elBulli restaurant in 1998. This invaluable experience laid the foundation for his unique creative style and fuelled his insatiable thirst for culinary knowledge.

With seasoned experience, having worked under great chefs including Pierre Koffmann, Nico Ladenis, and Marco Pierre White, Jason joined the Gordon Ramsay Group in 2001 as the executive chef for Verre in Dubai. In 2005, Jason returned to the UK and opened Maze in the heart of London, launching what would be the most successful brand in the group.

In November 2007, Jason and Gordon Ramsay oversaw the launch of Maze in the Hilton Prague Old Town. April 2008 saw the launch of Maze Grill, which sits alongside Maze in Grosvenor Square. In 2009 Jason opened Maze in Cape Town at the One and Only Hotel and also Maze restaurants in Melbourne and Qatar.

Jason left Gordon Ramsay Holdings in 2010 to launch his own restaurant company, Jason Atherton Ltd. His flagship restaurant, Pollen Street Social, opened in April 2011 in Mayfair.

With three AA Rosettes, it showcases a 60 cover restaurant, a large bar area, an exciting private room and London's first ever dessert bar. When reservation lines opened Pollen Street Social secured over 5000 bookings on the first day. Jason has maintained a high profile whilst always keeping the focus on his restaurant, since the launch Pollen Street Social has established itself as London's hottest new opening and is a key current industry talking point.

We are pleased to enjoy the support of the following companies as sponsors of our AA B&B and Hospitality Awards events:

AA Friendliest B&B of the Year Award
Sponsored by eviivo



eviivo® is a global licensor of software solutions headquartered in the UK. In a global setting, we work with National Tourism Offices and Destination Management Organisations as well as private sector partners. In a local setting, we are focused on targeting accommodation providers, tours, attractions and event businesses in the SME sector with our unique and award-winning product eviivo frontend®.

AA Rosette scheme
Sponsored by Villeroy & Boch



Villeroy & Boch has been a leading international brand and world-class leader in the design and manufacture of fine tableware since 1748. This iconic brand is highly sought after for restaurant, hotel and banqueting venues for its stylish elegance, versatility and hardwearing properties, with its high quality porcelain and bone china, glassware, and cutlery much sought after by the discerning hotel and restaurant trade. The quality materials, functionality and innovative design combine traditional values with the latest state-of-the-art manufacturing technology, ensuring it is extremely tough and durable and able to withstand the most demanding situation and still look as good as the day it was purchased.

AA Wine Award
Sponsored by T & W Wines



T & W Wines was formed 35 years ago by Trevor Hughes, a hotelier by profession who found his interest lay more and more in creating a remarkable wine list for his restaurant, rather than in the running of the hotel. So in 1977 he sold his shares and T & W Wines was born. Over the years they have built up a large portfolio of small, dedicated producers who make the type of wines that we like to drink. Quality is their prime criterion and their interests have spread too many countries, including America, Italy and Austria where the same values apply.

AA Chef's Chef of the Year Award
Sponsored by Caterer.com



Caterer.com is the UK's leading and most successful hospitality recruitment website for hotel, restaurant, bar and contract catering professionals. We are the experts in providing e-recruitment advertising solutions, designed to deliver great candidates for recruiters of all sizes - throughout the UK. As a patron supplier for British Hospitality Association (BHA), Caterer.com is dedicated to creating strategic partnerships with key industry bodies and is proud to be recognised as the patron supplier to AA Hotel Services for recruitment services.

AA Small Hotel group of the Year Award
Sponsored by beacon



Beacon is the AA's preferred purchasing consortium, and the UK's largest. beacon specialties in purchasing for the independent hospitality industry, with more than 2,000 members. Customers can expect better pricing, discounts, easy ordering, dedicated account managers and hassle-free billing. Food and drink, housekeeping, utilities, equipment and refurbishment are amongst the products and services that beacon supply.

AA Hotel of the Year London
Sponsored by AA Business Insurance



Bollington is one of the largest independent insurance brokers in the UK. Established in 1973, they are a well established and financially stable broker who can be trusted to deliver first class service and a high level of professionalism. AA Business Insurance can offer insurance for all types of businesses operating within the hospitality industry. Whatever your size, Bollington can tailor a policy to suit your business along with highly competitive premiums, quick quotations and instant cover.

Spotlight



This issue, intouch profiles **DUKES LONDON**, the independently owned luxury boutique hotel located in the heart of London's West End St James

Debrah Dhugga, managing director, is always on hand to welcome hotel guests and advise them on where to while away their evening at the hotel. Guests can choose to visit the famous DUKES Bar, where Alessandro and his team are on hand to serve you a special martini, the new PJ Lounge, or the acclaimed restaurant Thirty Six By Nigel Mendham. DUKES LONDON offers something for everyone satisfying all tastes with a perfect balance between modern and traditional style.

DUKES LONDON's design offers a combination of classic and contemporary features, including an impressive art collection and sophisticated decors; recently the notable designer Shaun Clarkson has contributed to the property introducing fabulous interiors for the elegant Perrier Jouet Lounge, the classic DUKES suite and for Thirty



Dukes Bar is the birthplace of the famous "shaken, not stirred" line from James Bond



Six By Nigel Mendham. Featuring 90 rooms, including 11 suites and one Penthouse Suite, DUKES provides an intimate feel without compromising the luxurious surroundings and finishing touches - in fact, it's rather special.

The DUKES Bar is a world famous venue itself, serving London's no1. martinis and is the birthplace of the famous "shaken, not stirred" line from James Bond creator Ian Fleming; while the recently unveiled Cognac and Cigar Garden serves the finest cognac and Cuban cigars in a heated outdoor area, open all year-round. To complement the DUKES bar, the Cognac and cigar garden and the PJ Lounge, Thirty Six provides a fantastic dining option for guests and locals alike serving classic British food with a modern twist from award winning chef Nigel Mendham who recently joined the hotel in September 2011. DUKES LONDON also features a Drawing Room where guests can enjoy coffees or afternoon tea, a gym and a health spa.

Overseen by Debrah, DUKES LONDON has grown from strength to strength over the past year not only through its introductions and recent renovations but also due to the professionalism and dedication shown by the DUKES staff. DUKES LONDON's success has been recently reflected at the 2011 World Travel Awards with the hotel receiving the title of 'England's Leading Hotel' in addition to the 'The World's Ultimate Service Award in Hospitality'.

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CHANGES TO COMMON STANDARDS

Recent market research and an extensive review of the star rating scheme has resulted in changes covering both sectional consistency (critical areas) and minimum requirements (services and facilities), all of which are designed to reflect contemporary expectations and achieve a unified standard. Hotel guests should find that the star rating of a hotel reflects the quality of the overall guest experience, rather than just the range of services and facilities offered.

Critical areas - Move to full Sectional Consistency

These are six areas within the inspection that are rated individually. This is an increase from five areas previously (Bedrooms, Bathrooms, Service, Cleanliness, Food), now including Hospitality as a critical area. Importantly, all these six areas must now reach the required standard at the desired star rating or above (previously allowing two to fall below).

Services and Facilities - Updated

Following extensive review, these standards have been updated with guest comfort, ease of use and appropriateness in mind. Your local inspector will be able to advise you of changes impacting your establishment and some of the key changes at each star level are highlighted below.

When will these new standards be implemented?

Standards are being implemented gradually for existing members, with an aim for full compliance by 2014. Properties that are new to the inspection process will be assessed under the new standards with immediate effect. Guidance and support will be given from the AA team, assisting you in achieving aspirations and enhancing quality. Failure to comply could result in re-classification.

How can I get more information?

Download the new Hotel common Standards at www.AAhotels.com

BEST PRACTICE



Don't forget the AA offers a comprehensive range of mobility products that may be beneficial to guests with limited mobility. Products include wheelchairs, walking aids, shower chairs and specially adapted cutlery and crockery.

Visit theAA.com/shop for further details.



KEY CHANGES

THREE STAR ★★★

- Dinner should be served six days a week, with an alternative available on the seventh.
- Phones in bedrooms can be internal only.
- Restaurant does not need to be open to non-residents.
- Opening hours of restaurant to suit the market.
- Laundry service optional.
- Wi-Fi/internet connection required in public areas and recommended in bedrooms.

FOUR STAR ★★★★

- Requirement of 50% of en-suite bathrooms to have a bath has been reviewed; now a 100% quality shower only provision is acceptable.
- Night porter can be on call and does not necessarily need to be on duty all night, unless in a city centre location.
- Hotels should demonstrate a range of additional services to suit their market.
- Laundry service required, but dry cleaning service now optional.
- A minimum of one easy chair in each bedroom, plus an additional chair providing comfortable use at a writing table.
- Wi-Fi and/or internet connection required in all bedrooms.
- Bedroom TV to measure at least 24 inches.
- No requirement for a suite.

FIVE STAR ★★★★★

- Requirement for 100% of en-suite bathrooms to have both a bath and shower now reduced to 80%.
- A minimum of one easy chair providing comfortable ease of use in each bedroom. Plus an additional chair providing comfortable use at a writing table.

RAISING THE BAR

British consumers are far more interested in the quality and provenance of the food they eat these days, and chocolate is no exception. It's good news then that chefs are seeking out higher quality chocolate and experimenting with varying types from different parts of the world.

How to recognise – and taste – good chocolate

The Academy of Chocolate academyofchocolate.org.uk, which was set up in 2005 with the aim of raising awareness of good quality chocolate, says chocolate should have a minimum cocoa content of 60 per cent for dark and 30 per cent for milk. It shouldn't contain anything you don't recognise – so if you see an E-number, artificial preservatives or hydrogenated fats in the ingredients list, then steer clear.

Appearance

Chocolate should be flawless, evenly coloured and a deep shade of mahogany or red. Black is not necessarily an indicator of a good chocolate – it tends to indicate that the beans have been over-roasted. There should be no cracks or air pockets, streaks or sugar bloom.

Aroma

The chocolate should smell good as you unwrap it with a complex fragrance. It should be sweetly fragrant but not overpowering, with notes of vanilla, berry, caramel, roasted nuts, etc. It is bad to have no smell at all – if you can't smell, you can't taste. Burnt, musty, chemically or medicinal is not good.



Touch

It should feel silky, not sticky, and should just begin to yield to the warmth of your finger.

Sound

Take a piece and break it – it should snap cleanly. If it splinters or crumbles, that's not good.

Mouthfeel

Most taste buds are on the front of the tongue which is where you should start tasting the chocolate. If it doesn't start to melt straight away this is probably a sign of poor quality. The texture should be smooth and buttery, gently dissolving into a creamy liquid filling the mouth with its complexity of flavours. It must not be grainy or gluey. If it's waxy or clacky it sometimes means the cocoa butter has been replaced with vegetable fat and it is not real chocolate.

Flavour

Essentially, chocolate is bittersweet, fruity and spicy with a good balance of acidity, and should be subtle rather than overpowering.

Aftertaste

You want the flavour to linger for several minutes (good chocolate can linger for up to 45 minutes) with a clean aftertaste and no residue. It certainly shouldn't be overpoweringly sweet.

