

GABOR KATONA – HEAD CHEF

How do you describe the food at Castle House? Castle House's food is classic British with an international mix. All the dishes are made with fresh, seasonal produce from local producers and growers that we know personally. We are really lucky to have a huge kitchen garden on the owner's Ballingham Hall farm. We all work together to ensure we have a constant source and flow of all sorts of vegetables, fruits and herbs. Colin, the gardener, lets us know what's coming up next and there's a real buzz in the kitchen when George (Watkins, the General Manager and owner) arrives with a tray full of fresh produce that Colin has picked that morning. The team gathers round and everyone has a look and a smell!

For me the rule is that the food should always produce a sensory experience. It should look good, smell good and taste good! When you present a plate to a customer, the colours on the plate are really important. It is what the customer sees first and they must be visually enticing. Smell; the dish should have a great aroma and Taste; supremely important, of course!

How often do you change your menus? Regularly, with some exciting daily specials

What would you say is your signature dish? I'd say my signature dish is a Hungarian Goulash with a breaded croquette fritter, sour cream and paprika sauce. Herefordians love it!

What's your favourite dish to eat? (And why?) Apart from anything cooked by my mother, working late hours I have no time to eat. My guilty pleasure is what I call a 'naughty sandwich'. Two slices of my sourdough bread with everything I can find in the fridge in it!

What dish would you never cook again? I enjoy all foods but one dish I will never make again is Lemon and Rosemary Soup which was a favourite (how, I don't know) at the sports complex where I worked.

What is your top cooking tip? Always season twice.

Which ingredients would you take if you had to be stranded on a desert island? (And why?) I could extract my own salt presumably, so Paprika and a fertile chicken.

Who cooks at home and what is the family's favourite dish that you cook? My wife Krisztina loves to cook and is definitely in charge of the home kitchen but they all love my homemade roasted onion sourdough though.

What is your favourite Herefordshire restaurant (apart from your own)? Beefy Boys in the New Market. It is always friendly and fun.

Has anyone or any chef particularly inspired you? Many people and chefs in my life have inspired me and I still ring my Mum for advice – she is definitely my mentor. One chef I do think is inspirational though is Tom Kerridge. I would love to take my wife to his restaurant one day. He seems such a nice person without a huge ego.

What advice could you give to all of those people who do not cook to encourage them to start? I think you have to have some passion but perhaps try to get in touch with your sensory side. Look for encouragement, the media is awash with tips and good programmes on how to cook, so just persevere and experiment.