UK Cookery School Of The Year Awards 2014: The Winners

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Bettys, Daylesford, Rosemary Shrager and the Women's Institute among the winners; with Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage on the awards' board, too

The third annual UK Cookery School of the Year Awards, a nationwide competition showcasing the best work in cookery schools, announces its 2014 winners today.

The awards are run in association with Tabasco Pepper Sauce to highlight outstanding achievements in an industry that encourages a nation of TV cookery show addicts to become more creative in the kitchen. As in the previous two years, choosing an overall winner from shortlists featuring such talented and hard working schools has been a bit like trying to cook a souffle blindfolded.

The winners and runners-up in each category are as follows:

Best cookery school

Winner: Bettys Cookery School, Harrogate, Yorkshire

Runner-up: Foodworks, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Best day cookery course

Winner: Feathered and Furred, White Pepper Cookery School, Dorset

Runner-up: Fish and Seafood class, Food at 52 , London

Best baking course (sponsored by Brioche Pasquier)

Winner: WI's Baking Weekender, Denman College, Oxfordshire

Runner-up: Five-day Baking Course, Squires Kitchen, Surrey

Best 'diploma' cookery course

Winner: Professional Cookery Diploma, Rosemary Shrager Cookery School, Kent

Runner-up: Demuths Vegetarian Diploma, Bath

Best community oriented cookery school

Winner: Chequers Kitchen Cookery School, Deal, Kent

Runner-up: Jamie's Ministry of Food, north of England

Best cookery school tutor

Winner: Carole Rose, Cookies Cooking School, Essex

Runner-up: Christine McFadden, Dorset

Best cookery school website

Winner: Phillegh Way

Runner-up: Vanessa Kimbell, Sourdough Bread Making

Most Sustainable Cookery School, in association with the Sustainable Restaurant Association:

Winner: Daylesford, Gloucestershire

Runners-up: River Cottage, Devon, and the Cookery School, Central London

Head of judging panel, Nick Wyke, reflects on this year's champion schools:

Bettys is a hive of industry. The school brings together all of the best elements of a winning cookery school from expert, "nurturing" staff to innovation in courses and from an on-site craft bakery to free bread making courses for school children. The judges were particularly impressed with how the school is attuned to its customers' needs, allowing them to cook individually rather than in pairs. They even have one customer who will soon be attending her 100th course.

Foodworks is a worthy runner-up, covering a broad remit from dynamic corporate classes to social outreach projects where excess food from classes is shared with a local residential home for the elderly and lots in between. Having access to the produce of Colesbourne Estate, where the school is located, is a bonus and a boost to its sustainable commitments - a recent class was able to cook with fresh crayfish caught in its streams.

Our new baking award was among the most hotly contested this year. So high was the quality of entries that we could have made a second shortlist. It's a tough call pitting the small, artisan millers against large established schools but we found the sell-out Women's Institute Weekend Baking course at Denman College hard to beat. It's a two-night residential that covers a lot of ground from chocolate potato cake to royal icing. Squires Kitchen, too, has been perfecting baking for nearly as long as the WI (30 years) and really have honed their accessible classes and choice of tutors to a fine art form.

The most community focused school is, perhaps, our favourite category. It's where many of you get to tell us about the wonderfully generous ways in which you are supporting local people and projects. Stephanie Hayman at Chequers Kitchen in Kent came out on top for her classes that support low-income families and others with learning disabilities. Jamie's Recipease cookery schools might have closed down recently in Battersea and Brighton but his Ministry of Food clubs provide a safe and affordable environment for people to learn the basics of cookery in less fashionable corners of the country.

We couldn't really argue with the support, loyalty and love that was showered onCarole Rose for the best tutor award. In her own words she has been teaching kids to cook healthy food in a fun way long before Jamie himself showed up with his pestle and mortar. Likewise, Christine McFadden continues to command a loyal following in Dorset with her inspired, innovative and meticulously researched classes.

Rosemary Shrager is a culinary force in her own right and she has cleverly added "professional" courses to the impressive portfolio at her pristine cookery school in Tunbridge Wells. Her diploma is linked to an apprenticeship scheme that helps young people to kickstart their careers. Demuths' eight-day vegetarian diploma, is perhaps the only one of its sort in the country and does what it says on the tin to the usual high standards of the school's founder and boss Rachel Demuth. They introduce a vegan and professional diploma next year.

We were delighted to see a number of schools interested in our most sustainable cookery school award diligently overseen by the Sustainable Restaurant Association. On top of all the other boxes to tick when running a small business it's not always easy being accountable to the environment but plenty of schools are aiming high. Daylesford is setting a great example, followed closely by River Cottage and the Cookery School in London, and you can read how here.

Courses are so thoughtfully crafted by Luke Stuart and his team down at theWhite Pepper Cookery School. Even the name of his Feathered and Furred class piques your interest and the course is gripping from start to finish. It comprises active forays in the Dorset countryside, hands-on acquisition of new skills back in the kitchen and is rounded off with a true field-to-fork meal. Food at 52 offers a similar 'holistic' experience in the city, the highlight of which is often the collaborative, dinner party finale in its cool kitchen.

Best website? There are lots of compelling cookery school websites out there and, it has to be said, a fair share of turkeys. We picked Philleigh Way for its freshness, colour and simplicity. The bold images, quirky team profiles and easy navigation of scheduled courses not only reflected the family-run, roll-your-sleeves-up, down-on-the-Cornish-farm vibe well but made you want to sign up. Vanessa Kimbell of Sourdough Bread Making has created a stylish, long-form website with a home-spun, artisan feel perfectly suited to her baking classes and interest is baking heritage.

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tess@foodmatters.co.uk

UK COOKERY SCHOOL AWARDS
As the leading independent cookery schools directory and website, Looking to Cook established these awards in 2012, to be presented annually in recognition of outstanding achievement in a range of areas in which cookery schools work and have influence. The awards are the only ones judged entirely by professional food writers, journalists and editors.

LOOKING TO COOK
Looking to Cook was founded in 2011 by the food writer and Times journalist Nick Wyke. It is the highest ranked independent cookery schools directory on the web, listing more than 200 UK schools.
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For more information please contact Nick Wyke on
0207 228 7991 or 0794 111 5857 or email info@lookingtocook.co.uk

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