

## **Where / when did your love for food and cooking start?**

It's in Belgium, where I'm originally from that I've discovered at an early age, the pleasure of flavours, colours, tastes, and sharing of food. Everything has started with mum's love for food! She always had me close by her side while cooking for buffet style family parties or sharing recipes of a "Flemish stew", or even better: a nice gourmet strawberry tart covered with vanilla "crème patissière!"

## **What's your history as a chef?**

I decided to apply when I was just fourteen years old to a cooking school located in the North of France, where as an apprentice they sent me to a well-known fishmonger/caterer to learn for a couple of years. This then led me to the French Alps near Annecy where I stayed for 7 years working alongside the Chef Marc Veyrat's family where they guided me and taught me a lot, with passion and respect for the fresh products, but also to live and work with a team... which they used to call family! I also gained experience in bakeries and butchers and altogether this opened a few other doors for me, including going back to my roots in Belgium and the opportunity to work in a Michelin star restaurant called La Villa Lorraine. More recently, I've worked as a freelance chef in various private properties such as chalets and chateaux all around France, followed by 6 years in the luxury hotel barging industry.

## **What do you like most about working at Alladale?**

Alladale is for me the chance to play with the knowledge I've acquired during the last 15 years through my different experiences around Europe, but also to be able to "pick" anything I (or you!) want from Alladale's larders - it is for me the best way of cooking, to use spontaneity and freedom.

## **How would you describe your food?**

My food is more like a family thing, when you're eating it I want you to feel the heart I put into it, the curiosity, and the wonderful tastes... not pretentious but mainly the comfort my dishes brings you is what matters to me!

## **What are your favourite ingredients to cook with?**

My favourites ingredients are olive oil, curry, coriander, tomato vinegar, and a very good crystal sea salt which will give you more of a taste than just saltiness!

## **If you were to put up a dish that would symbolize Scottish food as a whole, what would it be?**

Definitely slow cooked venison stew, roasted new potatoes in garlic and thyme, glazed carrots in honey and cinnamon with pea purée.

## **Where do you get your inspiration from?**

If you ask me in the morning "Hey Max what's cooking today?" to me, is exactly like asking me "How are you?". Basically, my food changes every day depending on the weather, the availability of the food and suppliers... plus the energy with my guests, but also how I feel myself!

## **What is the nicest compliment your food ever received?**

"Max, if I had to decide on a dish which I will have as the last one before dying, could you please come in the US to cook it for me? And I promise I'll wait for you!!"

### **What kind of food do you like to cook at home?**

Well, now that I'm living so far away from town, I have to find a substitute for KFC!!

### **What is your favourite food memory?**

My favourite food memory was actually the first time I went to a Michelin star restaurant not for work but for eating... I invited my family and it was just incredible how things are when you are on the other side of the kitchen! The presentation, the plates, the service, and the flavours of everything were just like 10 times more concentrated and powerful than when you cook at work. That was quite mind blowing!

### **Funniest kitchen incident?**

It happened during a really busy Sunday lunch. We all had lots to do so I asked my apprentice, who actually started that same morning, to move 2 fully loaded big containers without lids on them, down in the walking fridge... So he left... And about five minutes later, I just realised that he took both of the containers so I'm thinking: 'there must be something wrong!' I ran downstairs, couldn't see him near the fridges, but I did hear some noises and screaming next door where he locked himself in the walking freezer in the dark, sitting on his knees, and covered by the content of the 2 containers he had just spilled all over the inside of the freezer!! I couldn't be mad at him, so we just laughed!!!

### **Who in the food world do you admire most?**

On the professional side of it there are a few of good chefs I really admire by their talents, inspirations and creativity but none of them equal the love my mum put into her dishes!