

Hell's Kitchen Lite

THE TASTING PANEL GETS BEHIND-THE-SCENES FOOD AND WINE PAIRING INSTRUCTION AT **GORDON RAMSAY** AT THE LONDON WEST HOLLYWOOD

story and photos by Richard Carleton Hacker

Not every restaurant has a triple-A-personality celebrity chef like Gordon Ramsay, who is equally effective behind a stove and in front of a camera. However, every restaurant has a chef. And many restaurants have wine lists and waitstaffs familiar with them. These are the main ingredients needed to emulate a popular new program from Gordon Ramsay at The London West Hollywood, one of the most talked-about dining establishments in Southern California.

This newest Gordon Ramsay restaurant has embarked upon an innovative wine and food pairing class that has been attracting both locals and tourists, as well as a few celebrities and apprentice chefs. And unlike the chaos sometimes seen on Ramsay's *Hell's Kitchen* television show, it can be done with the easiest of menus.

Every other Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., the hotel's Wine Director, Aaron Elliott, and Executive Chef, Andy Cook (who has worked with Chef Ramsay for ten years and opened four of his restaurants), open the kitchen to ten individuals who pay \$150 each for a behind-the-scenes cooking and wine pairing class. The price includes Chef Cook's

step-by-step preparation of a Ramsay-inspired appetizer, main course and dessert, plus Elliott's detailed descriptions of the wines to go with them and, of course, the actual meal itself, during which multiple bottles are poured. The class begins with glasses of J Vineyards & Winery Brut Rosé and a tour of the kitchen. Chef Cook then explains each course in detail as he prepares and serves it.

"Keep it simple," Chef Cook admonishes, in his clipped British accent, of his pumpkin purée soup, while Elliott explains why its creamy texture works with both the Tsukasabotan junmai daiginjo saké and rare 1977 Austrian Riesling he pours. Cook's bacon-larded turkey breast complements the delicate raspberries of a Robert Groffier 2006 Burgundy, while an eggless custard is embraced by a honey-eyed Gutierrez de la Vega 2006 Muscat from Spain.

Along with that "full" feeling, guests leave with their aprons and a copy of Gordon Ramsay's *Healthy Appetite*, plus complete recipes and wine descriptions. For imparting knowledge while creating customer loyalty, this is one promotion Gordon Ramsay swears by. ■



Gordon Ramsay Executive Chef Andy Cook ladles out his pumpkin soup for students as sommelier **Aaron Elliott** prepares to describe the junmai daiginjo saké and Austrian Riesling he has poured.