



ORIENT SUCCESS



Jordan Sclare, executive chef at aqua kyoto on his Jewish childhood, why working for Ramsay was a living hell and the spirituality of Japanese cuisine

新东方

The stunning dining room of London's aqua kyoto is as much a place to be seen, as it is a high temple of gastronomy. Presiding over this room of urban hipsters and enthusiastic foodies is an executive chef whose CV includes head chef roles at Park Lane's Nobu and the Buddha Bar, plus stints working for Gordon Ramsay and at the Savoy Hotel. Meet Jordan Sclare, the man who's helping to bring the wow factor back to West End dining...

My parents went bankrupt when I was born. They had a nice home in Southgate, north London, where they ran a newsagent, but we had to move to a council estate until I was six. I have three sisters so all six of us had to move, which must have been pretty traumatic for my mum with a baby. We lived there while my dad tried to build up his businesses again, working two jobs. He did so and opened Get Stuffed in Islington, now a pretty well-known taxidermist's.

My family was an inspiration to me – my dad lost everything and won it back. The message I learnt was, work hard. My mates used to laugh at me because we used to have family conferences. I was pretty quiet for years with three older sisters but when I hit my teens, I made my feelings known...

My first catering job – I was 14 – was at the function room where I'd had my bar-mitzvah. A place called The Firs in ▶



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through to the Savoy who were taking on their annual four apprentices and by chance they were holding interviews that day. So she rang my mate's house where I was hanging out, and told me to run home and get my suit on. We got the tube into Covent Garden and jumped into a taxi, typical clueless Jewish family in town [Covent Garden is a short stroll from the Savoy] and pitched up to meet Anton Edelmann. And that was that.

When I got the apprenticeship I went round grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

I did some trial shifts to see if I would fit into this enormous West End hotel restaurant that was on five levels and had 110 chefs. It was really tough – Anton Edelmann said to me, “You know, this is really hard work so be sure it's what you want to do.”

Each year they need two apprentices but they take on four because they know historically that two will drop out pretty quickly, which is what happened.

I asked Mr Edelmann for a pay rise from £6,000 to £8,000 in return for working on my day off. It was pretty nerve-wracking.

I was only 17 and he was sitting in his office with his enormous chef's hat on, and portraits of Escoffier on the wall behind him. I was doing four days in the kitchen, one day at college and two days off. So I offered to take only one day off and he agreed.

I went to work at Gordon Ramsay's as a dare to myself. I'd seen him on a series called *Bolton Point* and I thought, no way, it can't be that bad in real life. But it was.

It was a living hell. There were no breaks. No staff food to speak of – at 11pm

we had cheese on toast, stale bread or trimmings mashed into a soup. And when the restaurant shut for the night we had to double up as kitchen porters, cleaning out the ovens with a toothbrush till 1am or 2am. It was pure hell. We did 92-hour weeks – not once or twice, but week in, week out. I planned to leave after a week but lasted well over two years. I lived in a hostel in Chelsea with all the drunks and unfortunates of society. Most moved on after a week so after two years I pretty much ran the hostel.

With the hell that was Gordon Ramsay's came this idea that to be successful you had to be foul-mouthed, vile and aggressive.

I had never sworn at school but now at the age of 22, it was as though I had a form of Tourette's. But the aggression was worse. I knew it was time to change when I found myself in my local Asda in north London screaming “Coming through!” as an instruction for people in the aisles to jump out of my way. At Gordon's they push you to your limit, which I think is a terrible way to get the most out of people.

Going to Nobu after Gordon Ramsay's was a revelation. It's a completely different vibe,

with much more respect and much less stress on staff. I learnt all about Japanese food and I love Japanese philosophy. If the food is not made with love it will not be good. I have become a much calmer person for it. The food needs to be zen, it needs to have the music and poetry of Japan flowing through it. If you can imagine wood and wind chiming, that is the feeling you want to create in your dishes. Japanese cooking is the fusion of respect and passion, and looks to the best in the mankind, not the basest. ♦ aqua.com