



# A TASTE OF SUCCESS

Accrington-based Dan Merriman, a culinary artist with a passion for fine dining, has claimed the prestigious title of MasterChef: The Professionals. His journey to victory is a testament to hard work, dedication and a touch of Northern grit, as *Ali Gudgeon* finds out

**D**an saw off the competition from 31 other chefs throughout the series, outcooking fellow finalists Chiara Tomasoni and fellow Northerner, Burnley-based George Birtwell, to take the acclaimed trophy.

Talking about the win, Dan said: "I'm still in constant disbelief and shock. I really wasn't expecting it! It's been a crazy experience. I put my heart and soul into it and to be crowned the winner really is amazing."



Once filming had wrapped up and Dan got home, he celebrated his win with his partner Chloe, a takeaway and a bottle of wine. "We had a little mini celebration but it was a hard secret to keep. I couldn't talk about the win to anyone."

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Dan is used to working alongside experts in the industry, having trained at Michelin-starred Northcote, Plas Bodegroes and Fishmore Hall in Ludlow. Dan currently resides as senior sous chef at the Black Bull Inn in Old

Langho, a bustling gastro pub in the heart of the Ribble Valley.

Originally from Worcestershire, he grew up on a council estate as the eldest of five boys and started working in kitchens as a pot wash to earn money but quickly found cooking to be his passion. Twelve years on, he now lives with his partner and baby boy Ernest in Accrington.

Dan's winning menu for the final started with a barbecued scallop dish, followed by ex-dairy beef cooked in beef fat and smoked butter, finishing with a blackcurrant cassis mousse. "I wanted to produce something never done before on the show and had purposely not cooked scallops or beef earlier in the competition, saving these for the final," Dan explained. "I wanted to showcase my technical ability and use some of my favourite flavours."

"My menu was influenced by people I love and who have helped me on this journey," Dan adds. "My starter was influenced by Ahmet Dede, the main course by Lisa Goodwin-Allen and the dessert was inspired by my grandad."

During the final week of the competition, Dan was part of the Chef's Table challenge in the Michelin-starred Dining Room restaurant of the Goring Hotel, cooking for

24 culinary giants with 27 Michelin stars between them.

"This was one of the highlights of my time on MasterChef. Cooking for chefs I have looked up to all my career was a dream come true and I will take that memory to the grave with me."



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Having eaten Dan's dishes, judge Monica Galetti said: "You've been one of the most humble chefs I've seen walk in here – very reserved, quite unsure where he stood –

maybe not just in the kitchen, in the world. Take my word for it, we see something great in you." High praise indeed.

Despite preparing exquisite dishes and immersing himself in fine dining, Dan is just as happy with a cheeky Nando's or a Tesco dine-in deal when it comes to his food of choice. "It's quite rare that I eat out," says Dan. "I'm just a normal guy at the end of the day."

Dan is acting on his TV success with a number of exciting collaborations with other chefs, offering private dining events, whilst securing guest chef appearances. Tickets have sold out as soon as they have appeared, as people are keen to sample Dan's fine dining but keep a look out for more events being announced. Watch this space.

"The ultimate aim is to have my own restaurant," adds Dan. "To have the freedom to cook all my own food and share it with as many people as possible. MasterChef has changed everything for me. It's made me realise that I am talented. I am good at what I do." ■

All episodes of MasterChef: The Professionals are available to watch now on BBC iPlayer.

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