

Hotel Chef of the Year (fewer than 250 covers) Sponsored by Convothem



Kenny Atkinson

Head chef, Seaham Hall Hotel & Serenity Spa, Co Durham

THE JUDGES

Hywel Jones, executive chef, Lucknam Park hotel
Henry Brosi, executive chef, the Dorchester
John Campbell, executive head chef, Coworth Park, the Dorchester Collection
Anthony Marshall, executive chef, London Hilton on Park Lane

When Kenny Atkinson took over as head chef at the Seaham Hall hotel's White Room restaurant in August 2008, he was fulfilling a dream to return to his native North-east. He was also at the start of his quest to put the region's culinary scene on the map.

It hasn't taken long. Back in January, he was awarded a Michelin star for the White Room restaurant – a mere five months after taking the job. This accolade set the White Room apart as the North-east's only Michelin-starred restaurant, and in testament to his cooking skills it was quickly followed by a third AA rosette.

But Newcastle-born Atkinson has done more than just raise the profile of Seaham Hall; he has become an ambassador for the North-east through his passion for local and British produce and his support of local suppliers. His appearance at food festivals and cooking demonstrations and his work with journalists has helped market the wider area.

What has also emerged since he took over his role at Seaham Hall is his commitment to his brigade. Atkinson works with each of his chefs on specific training needs. Recently, he has also been working with Newcastle College to assist young chefs in their careers,

which has helped him to develop his teaching skills and aid his own team's development.

Needless to say, he runs a cost-efficient kitchen. As head chef for the White Room restaurant and banqueting facilities at the hotel, Atkinson manages two teams of chefs and back-up staff. On taking the helm, Atkinson repositioned the menu, which included the introduction of a tasting menu with wines. This has led to a growth in average spend of more than 10% on 2008. His new lunch menu targets non-resident diners and has already driven bookings up by 12% on 2008. These two areas of growth have been critical to the hotel's success in 2009.

For Atkinson's team to have achieved so much in less than one year is true recognition of his ability to both motivate and manage his young brigade.

What the judges said...

"From a pool of strong candidates, who were all potential winners themselves, Kenny's achievements and development over the past couple of years marked him out as a clear and worthy winner."

*Hywel Jones, executive chef,
Lucknam Park hotel*

THE SHORTLIST

Kenny Atkinson,
Seaham Hall Hotel
and Serenity Spa,
County Durham
Stephen Crane,
Ockenden Manor,
West Sussex
Lee Streeton,
Brown's hotel, London

FORMER WINNERS

2007 Hywel Jones
executive chef,
Lucknam Park hotel
2008 Simon Radley,
the Chester Grosvenor
& Spa