

Head chef of The Embankment, in Bedford, a Peach Pub relaunched at the end of March, Christophe Perney heads up a team of seven in the kitchen and is responsible for creating the Victorian inn's strong seasonal offering of traditional and pub classics with a twist alongside more sophisticated dishes. Born and bred in Paris, he trained under Joël Robuchon and at the Park Lane in London, before settling this side of the channel. Christophe draws his influences from his background in classic French cuisine and his growing passion for cooking with British seasonal produce. Great, British ingredients have certainly got under his skin; he loves nothing more than creating a really great plate of food made with simple but honest seasonal ingredients, cooked with love and care. Before The Embankment, Christophe was chef-patron of The Waggoners near Welwyn and The Boot in Chipperfield. He also worked at Chez Tonton in Barnet and Sopwell House in St Albans.

Having gained early success, what advice would you give to young chefs?

I'd definitely recommend that they should do everything to soak up what they see in the kitchen. Take every opportunity to look, listen and ask questions, it's really important. Also set yourself targets to aim for – a skill you'd like to have acquired or a dish perfected – and a deadline. And keep yourself really motivated – that's essential.

Who has inspired you in the culinary world?

Gaston Lenôtre. When I was quite young I got into his books and I found it hard to put them down. His ideas were so remarkable and his output so prolific – I've no doubt he influenced me in my decision to become a chef.

What are your earliest kitchen memories?

Washing up, cleaning greasy extraction gear, peeling vegetables – all the kind of jobs you have to do in the beginning which are a chore but all part of learning to be a chef.

What is your favourite dish to cook and to eat?

I love to cook with fresh seafood like scallops. They're so delicate and so diverse. You can do so many different and wonderful things with them, although I like them simply pan-fried with black pudding and bacon. If it's something to eat, there's no contest either; it would have to be foie gras with toasted brioche.

What do you think will be the next cuisine trend?

I think it will be going back to the start, almost, with good quality food at reasonable prices. 'Feel like home' kind of cuisine, if you like – simple, honest food carefully prepared with great ingredients.

Any views on celebrity chefs?

I think TV has moulded these chefs and created a 'celebrity chefs' culture. I'm divided though about whether it's a good thing. Some of them are really encouraging young chefs into the trade and making standards higher by showing good skills, and the rest of them should go back to college.



*Christophe
Perney*