

PREPARING MEALS FIT FOR A QUEEN

An interview with Queen Mary 2 Executive Chef Klaus Kremer

By Richard H. Wagner

Dining is an important part of any cruise experience and with Cunard's emphasis on tradition, style and sophistication, dining on Queen Mary 2 must meet a high standard. There are ten dining venues on QM2 including the five-star rated Queens Grill and Princess Grill. The person in charge of cooking for QM2's 2,500 guests is Executive Chef Klaus Kremer.

Kremer began his training in his native Germany where he did two apprenticeships, first as a pastry chef and then as a chef. From there, he worked in Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden before coming to Cunard. His 20 years with the line has included 12 years on Queen Elizabeth 2 as well as tours on Vistafjord, Sagafjord and Crown Dynasty.

Looking back over his career with Cunard, Kremer sees an evolution in the style of cooking at sea. "You need to go with what the public is going for. Food has become much lighter. So, we don't go for the roast with the sauce that you can actually put the spoon in and it stands right up. All this heavy cuisine with cream, a lot of butter, flour so you thicken the sauce is gone. You reduce your sauces. They are thinner but there are just more reductions. Everything has become the lighter way of preparation. Within the last couple of years, you see that coming in more and more. People want to have lighter food."

In addition to the popularity of healthier lighter cooking, the menu offerings on QM2 are affected by the ship's itinerary for a given cruise. "We have a set of menus [for voyages in the] Mediterranean, North Europe, Scandinavia, and for crossings. These are all sets that we have developed throughout the years. We have now Jean Marie Zimmerman who is the culinary ambassador. He does these menu sets and says this is what we have for the Mediterranean because in the Mediterranean obviously you don't need the heavy food like when you are up north when you are in the Atlantic or you go to Norway. People tend to eat heavier and more if they are up in the cold weather

than if they are in the south in the Mediterranean. So, when you make these menus you also consider which area you are in."

The mix of nationalities on board also affects what dishes are offered. "Last cruise we had 1,200 English and now we have 2,000 English. They have different eating habits than the Americans have. For me it is good that we print the menus here onboard so I have the ability if necessary to change to suit the nationalities that I have onboard. You have 2,000 Americans, the turkey is the runner. You have 2,000 English and the turkey is not the runner. They'll eat the beef and fish. If you have more English, you can say: 'Okay instead of the Chateau Briand use the Wellington.' When you have Americans, they prefer Chateau Briand than the Wellington. So, you need to consider: 'What is my nationality breakdown. That is how I arrange the menus and I might change a few things more to the majority that we have onboard.'"

In addition to which dishes are offered, the mix of nationalities also affects how the dishes are prepared. "When I have a lot of Germans, they might sometimes say, there could be a touch more salt in there. Americans don't like a lot of salt so they say leave it on a lower amount of salt. I need to find the way in between my nationalities. I have salt and pepper [on the tables]. I can add, I can never take out salt. That is why sometimes I need to keep it at a lower grade of salt and if necessary they can season after whatever the nationality is. The best way is to find a way in the middle and you keep it on the lower level and you say you can add your own salt."

Another factor affecting the food operation is the mix of the ages of the passengers. "We get a list. We can say, this many kids, this many middle age, this many upper age. You say: the elder age, you don't eat that much, middle age you eat a little more, younger crowd, you eat much more. But sometimes you get completely opposite, just go in the opposite direction."

In addition to less food, older passengers prefer their food "a little blander. If I make a curry, I can't make a three pepperoni curry. They say, I tried the three pepperoni curry, it burns. So, with these guests, we need a little milder curry. If somebody wants, I can put something in or whatever. But I can't make for the majority, a strong curry."

With a few exceptions, everything is prepared onboard. "What we might get from shore is light dressings, the Canyon Ranch light dressing because what we prepare is all with the proper product. Of course, you have some people who say: 'I can't have that, I can only have the light version. Can I have the light version?' So, we have some light versions of different dressings we buy in. Other than that, most of the stuff, even bread, croissants, everything are done on board. Meat comes all raw and we prepare everything on board fresh."

Of course, the ingredients for the meals come from shore. "We send our information via e-mail to the office in L.A., then they get that to the buyers to buy all the stuff, to the vendors. Of course, we have somebody shoreside who goes around to these vendors to make some spot checks to ensure that they still have the product we require."

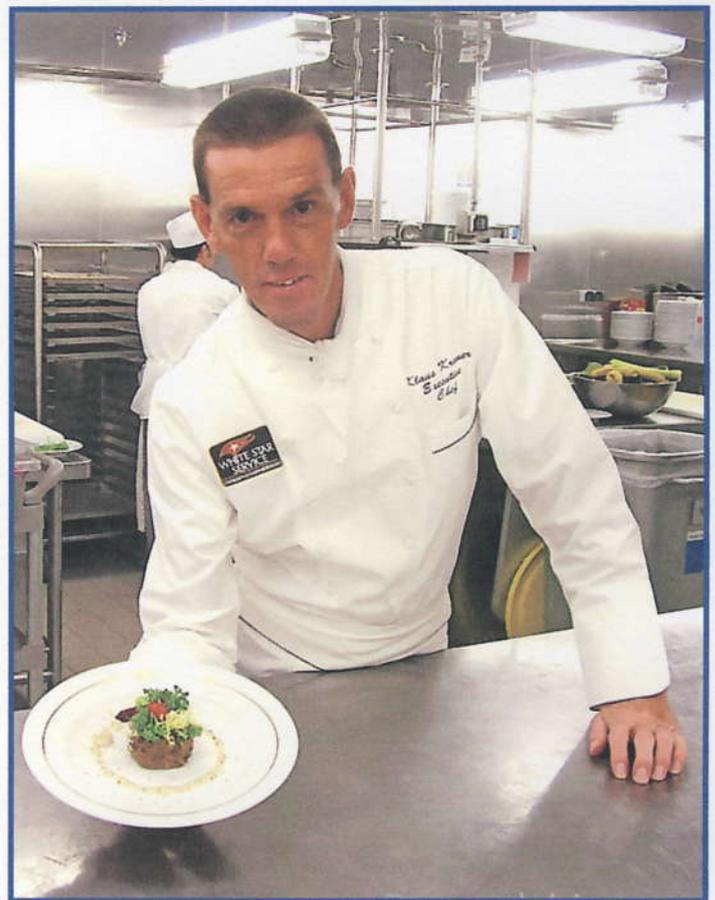
The Britannia Restaurant

On Queen Mary 2, each passenger is assigned a restaurant based upon his or her cabin category. Most passengers dine in the 1,350 seat Britannia Restaurant. This is a massive room two decks high with wood paneling a colored glass ceiling over the central atrium. There are two seatings for dinner. Breakfast and lunch are done on an open seating basis.

Almost as massive as the dining room itself is the galley for the Britannia. Stainless steel appliances, trolleys and preparation areas dominate the scene. Huge cauldrons, large ovens, and computer display screens punctuate the landscape.

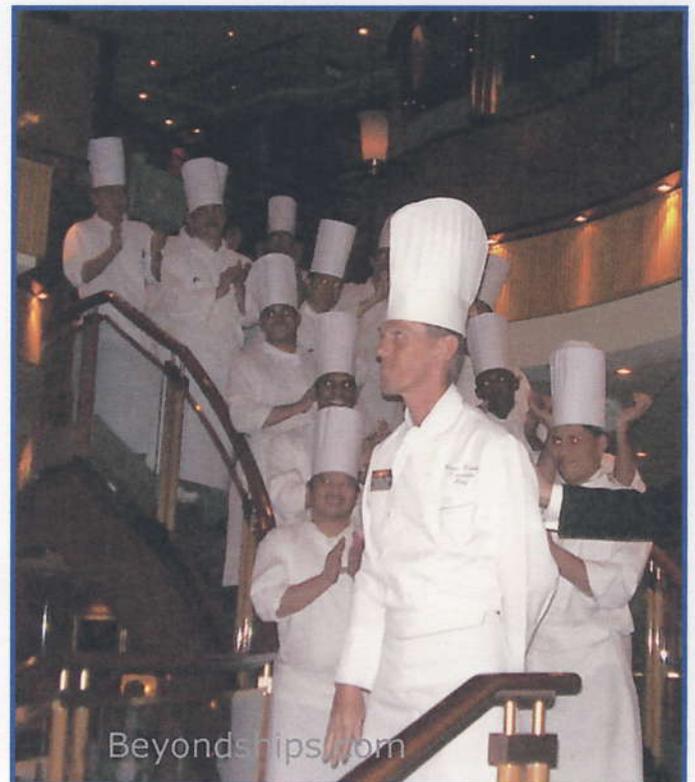
In certain ways the Britannia galley acts as the central control point for the galleys that serve the ships other restaurants. "If I cook a soup, I'll cook the soup in the Britannia for the entire ship. Why? Because I can control it from there. If I had soups cooked one in the Grills, one in the Todd English, one in the Kings Court, one in the Britannia, it is going to be taste all over different. If I cook it in the Britannia, I can control it and say: Here is the product, it is a good product, and it is in all restaurants the same good product. I don't want to have: 'Oh, the soup here is fine, the soup there, no, you need some more salt, you need this or that.' It wouldn't work. These things like soups and sauces, you need to control it from one place. You cook it perfectly in one place and everywhere it is the same quality."

Turning to the food operation in the Britannia itself, Kremer views it as "definitely four star. We consider also the ratings which you get on each ship. For



Above: Executive Chef Klaus Kremer.

Below: Kremer receiving a round of applause from guests and colleagues in the Britannia Restaurant.





Above: Chefs preparing for lunch in the Britannia Restaurant
 Below: A Caribbean barbeque.



us this is very well with the Britannia getting rated 92 percent. I think that just 8 percent off is quite good. 92 percent out of 100, I think that it is very upper standard."

"Everyday you get something different - - three different main courses. So, it is not like a restaurant where everyday you open the menu and the menu is for four days the same. You get twelve different meals everyday."

"I think it is a very good product that is served in the Britannia especially considering that you have 1,200 person seating. [In answer to those who question why all of the restaurants on a luxury liner are not five star] I say you just need to be realistic. Where shoreside will you find a restaurant that serves 1,200 meals in half an hour or in an hour with their appetizers or 2,400 throughout the evening considered five

star? We have five star restaurants but in a 1,200 passenger operation I can't [put food] on the plate like I do it for 200 [in the Queens Grill]. That is different. But, it is also what you pay for. I would say the Britannia is a little lower but it is still a luxury product."

The size of the dining room and of the galley poses a challenge for the chef. A meal, "has to go a couple of hundred meters out to the passengers. It is quite a distance. We have these trolleys where we keep the plates. I put them in at 100 degrees so they are really, really hot. The waiters need to have a towel to even take them. Nothing goes cold faster than if you have a cold plate and you put hot food on top of it. It is hard to keep it on this very, very hot temperature on this long distance anyway. So, if you would have a cold plate, forget it, it is gone. Until you're there, all the meat is going to be cold, all the vegetables are going to be cold. So, my plates are so hot that when you touch them, you are going to need a towel. This solves a big problem."

While as will be discussed later passengers in the Grills have considerable discretion in ordering their meals, the staff will also try to accommodate certain types of passenger requests in the Britannia. "When we have the curry night, people often want to have a side dish of the curry with their main course. So, when the waiter comes into the galley, he also takes a regular main course curry plate with him. He then puts the main plate down and says 'Would you like some curry?' Then, he scoops it from the plate to

the main course plate. Or, the guest says 'I'd like it as a side dish, so just leave it there beside the other one.'

Along the same lines, suppose a guest wants mashed potato that is listed on the menu as coming with one of the other entrees instead of the new potato that comes with her desired main course. When the waiter comes into the kitchen "he orders a fish with no new potato. Then he goes over to the next main course station and just lifts up the lid and scoops the mashed onto the fish plate. Sometimes they order without potato and then go over to the special order place where there is always mashed potatoes or a baked potato."

In addition to the items prepared according to Cunard recipes, the menu in the Britannia also carries items selected by the Canyon Ranch Spa. "We have their recipes. I made a visit. I was seven days at Canyon Ranch in Tucson. I went into the kitchen, looked at the whole product. It was nice. Then, we got the recipes and just cook everything up to their recipes so all the things are correct - - the nutrition, the fiber."

The Grills

Queen Mary 2's Grill restaurants are located on Seven Deck aft. The 180 seat Princess Grill is for guests staying in the junior suites and is on the port side while the 206 seat Queens Grill is for guests in the duplex apartments and more lavish suites. It is on starboard side of the ship. Both have reserved seating and are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"What you have in the Grills is much more time to prepare the plates themselves so the presentation is definitely different. The decoration on the plate and the display is much more intensive. Of course, with the smaller amount, you go much more into details."

The meals are prepared individually "because there you have the time. The Grill guests are not coming in like in the Britannia Restaurant where you have 1,200 coming at one peak time so that, within one half hour, you go with 1,200 appetizers. The next half hour, you go through 1,200 main courses. You don't have that in the Grills. The passengers come in at their leisure. They come in from six thirty until nine. So, if I were to cook in two big bouts, I would have it all staying there because we don't know when the guests are coming. It is more like an ala carte restaurant so you need to do cooking to ala minute."

Most of the cooking is done in the Grills own galley adjacent to the dining rooms. "The bulky things, the roast, the prime ribs, all those things, are cooked downstairs [in the Britannia galley] because you don't have the capacity up here. They take it up. Then up here it will be freshly plated. Other than that, appetizers and all that stuff is all done up here separately."

The Grills also differ from the Britannia in the variety of selections offered. "You have an ala carte menu which in the Queens Grill is two separate pages. In the Princess Grill, you have a smaller one, not as large as in

the Queens Grill. Of course, in the Britannia you have a very limited ala carte. It is only steak and shrimps and such. But that extra makes the difference. You have a huge ala carte menu so if you don't have anything that you like on the regular menu, you can choose from the ala carte. If there is something nice on the menu, you choose from the menu, so you have the options."

Traditionally on Cunard ships, guests in the Grills could order anything that they could think of and the staff would try to fulfill the guest's wish. "That continues here as long as we have it on board. Whatever we have on board, they can have. [The galley also needs] notice, long enough for us to prepare [the dish]. 12 hours or 24 hours and then I'll prepare something with the products which are on board. Of course, if they want something which that is exotic, they have to give us time to order it from shoreside. We don't have everything on board. Sea frog, kangaroo, antelope whatever - - we need to order it before the guest actually arrives. So, we need enough notice to order it from shoreside. But anything that is on board, there is no question asked, we always accommodate their requests."

The Kings Court

A more casual alternative to the main restaurants is the self-serve Kings Court. While Kremer admits that it is a buffet, "I don't have a buffet like on other ships where it is one buffet with one direction of food, which they daily might change frequently. But here, you have everyday three different food ideas, food tastes, which you can eat. You say: 'Today, I'll go Asian, tomorrow Italian, and the next day maybe a little traditional British. There are different galleys. You have La Piazza, which is Italian, you have the Carvery, which is mainly English, and you have the Lotus which is light Asian cuisine. They are all nice cuisines. The variety is nice."

A problem with buffets is that the food is often left for long periods in warming trays. "If you leave it in for a while, it does not look appealing. Green beans looking more like gray beans, the green peas are not green anymore. In Britannia, [there is no such issue] because you know the peak time when everything has to be ready and within half an hour it is gone. It can't actually dry out because this half hour peak time, it is gone within half an hour."

"In the Kings Court, the buffets are going throughout the whole day. But, they have their galleys right behind the buffets. So, on the Asian side they are toasting all the time, they are toasting the fresh stuff. Fresh noodles, fresh rice, will all be toasted freshly right behind the buffet. The same with the Piazza. Right in the back there, they have the ovens, the stoves - - everything is there. So, it is going to be refilled more often and not standing in there for a long time. You need to frequently refill and that is the philosophy of getting the best product out."

"It is a massive operation there. You have a thousand people going through - - a massive thing."

Todd English

The Todd English Restaurant is QM2's extra-tariff alternative dining venue. Located on Eight Deck overlooking the stern pool area, this venue holds 156 passengers in a contemporary styled décor. It bears the name of the American celebrity chef and offers dishes similar to those served in his restaurants in Boston, New York, Las Vegas Aspen and Washington D.C. There is a \$20 charge for lunch and a \$30 charge for dinner.

The cuisine served in the Todd English has been called "interpretative Mediterranean." "He has nice dishes. I go through a lot of those dishes. They are not as light as some Americans might expect, thinking they are going to have a light cuisine. It is a Mediterranean but still it is a little heavier than we might be used to."

"What you get on the plate is not always what you expect from reading about it on the menu. Nudi, which is a pasta dish with lobster, has a flake of lobster within the ravioli. Reading 'lobster' on the menu, some passengers expect a lobster. 'Where is my lobster?' 'Well, that's in the nudi, in the dish itself there is a flake of lobster in the nudis.'" "Ahh, I didn't know that."

Since Todd English is an entity outside of Cunard, the chefs on board QM2 cannot simply do what they want in the Todd English Restaurant but rather must maintain the style that is featured in Mr. English's shoreside restaurants. "They make two visits in a year. We just recently had him on board. My chefs work with him. They go through the recipes and the standards are kept."

The Todd English has proven quite popular and on some voyages it is very difficult to get a reservation but on others the venue is much less crowded. "It is the Americans who know Todd English because of his restaurant in Boston, New York, and everywhere. For Europeans and English, it is 'Who is Todd English?' That is why you see also the bookings when we have a cruise with 2,000 English bookings are low, they don't know him. When there are 2,000 Americans, we are full everyday."

Other Venues

The popularity of the other alternative venues fluctuates with the mix of nationalities on board. Traditional pub fare is available at lunchtime in the Golden Lion Pub while the outdoor Boardwalk Café offers hamburgers. "With 2,000 English, the Golden Lion is not a small venue anymore, it becomes really busy. They are used to their pubs and they say: 'We go into the pub, we don't need to change.' You come from shoreside, you don't need to put something on, you just

go into the pub and have your fish and chips or your cottage pie, or your mushroom and steak pie. The British feel really comfortable with that. Of course, if you 1,500 Americans, the Boardwalk is then busier. 'I'll have my hamburger, hot dog, a little cake slice.' Then, you get more there. So, with these venues, you can adjust to what is going to be busy. Americans, Boardwalk; Golden Lion, the majority is English."

The mix of nationalities also affects how busy the larger venues will be at lunch time. "Americans like to go to the buffet. The English like to be served. So, when we are having more English, the Britannia Restaurant is almost as busy at lunch as it is for dinner."

Another factor affecting how busy the restaurants will be is whether the ship is in port or at sea. "Port days are going to be lower in the amount of meals served at lunchtime. On a sea day, we are easily going to have four or five hundred people in the Britannia where we have on port days, 150."

On top of this, the ship's speed on a sea day affects how many people come to the restaurants for lunch. On a day cruising in fine weather, "it might not be that much, people just lie out on deck." But, on a crossing where the ship is going at full speed, 'it is full in the restaurants all six days. You don't expect when a ship is going 26 or 27 knots, 'well, I'll lie now on Deck 13 on the open deck' - - you'll be blown away."

"If you are hitting storms, there is no need to prepare that much. Honestly, I have done a lot of crossings and I never had a day where it was so rough that we had to restrict people to cabin or whatever. This ship, with four stabilizers, two on each side, going 28 knots through the ocean, no problems with it, is so stable. You see water splashing all over the place but you don't see the ship moving. It moves a little but not really what you would expect when you see the windows washing. You see the water splashing but you don't see the ship moving."

Whatever the weather, the galleys operate "24 hours. We have shifts, so there are people starting at night. It is nice because it is quiet, you don't have the service to interfere. In each department, in the in the pastry, the production in the Britannia, we have night chefs working. Even in the Todd English, I have a night chef working. He makes the raviolis because they are made fresh. So, we do all the raviolis, tortellinis - - all the things are done fresh. So, there is one night chef up there all night long. It is actually 24 hour operation. It is the same in the Kings Court. Those three buffets all work different hours so it is a 24 hour operation. One station is closed to get re-set for lunch then the other two are still open. When this one is finished, the other one gets re-set for lunch so you have actually a 24 hour operation throughout the night. Whenever you look [on Queen Mary 2], you can have food. You need to have these people working all through the night."