

INSIDE VIEW:

INTRODUCTION TO THE TODD ENGLISH RESTAURANT

**A conversation with Executive Chef Mark Oldroyd
of Queen Mary 2**

by

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On most cruise ships, the specialty restaurant is at the top of the pyramid. Passengers pay an additional fee for a premium quality meal and a fine dining experience.

On Queen Mary 2, however, the usual model does not hold. QM2 is a ship that prides itself on its cuisine and the fine dining experience in its main dining rooms. "At Cunard Line, we are renown for actually sitting down, dining and enjoying the experience of having many courses. People who come here want to sit down, be waited upon and enjoy every course, savour the flavor and have nice wine with it," explains QM2 Executive Chef Mark Oldroyd, who has responsibility for all of the ship's dining venues. "I class all of our dining outlets as equal. The quality is the same everywhere. We use the same brand of meat in [all the]

restaurants. So, if you have a steak in the Grills or in the Britannia or the Todd English, it is the same quality."

Then what distinguishes the Todd English specialty restaurant from QM2's main dining rooms? "Todd English is our celebrity chef. [The restaurant] is another premium outlet that the guests can come and dine in. So it is just something else we offer the guests." Thus, the goal is not to provide an experience that is superior to that offered in the main dining rooms but rather one that is different than the main dining rooms.

Consistent with this goal, the dishes served in the Todd English restaurant are not simply premium versions of familiar traditional favorites but rather reflect Chef English's unique style of cooking. "We are just offering a twist from a celebrity's point of view. It is just a different culinary experience. We have our fine

Grills here which offer very traditional, contemporary and classical food. Then we have the main restaurant which is basically the same but without as much choice. When you come to the Todd English, it is a bit more contemporary, if we can say it like that."

"I would say that Todd English's style is very homey but he has the Mediterranean style influences in it. It is all olives and olive oils and it is all fresh, vibrant ingredients; flavorsome ingredients. It is a twist from the Mediterranean; I'm not just saying that, it is a bit of everything really. The Todd English food is really rich and so it is for diners who really enjoy strong flavors."

Despite Chef English's name and the fact that his sea-going restaurant is on a famous British ship, Todd English is an American with an Italian heritage. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, English apprenticed at New York's La Cote Basque at its height in the 1980s. He then re-located to Italy where he developed his own Mediterranean-influenced style.

Returning to the United States, he achieved notoriety in the Boston, Massachusetts area, first as executive chef at Michela's and then with his own restaurant Olives. Since then he has received numerous awards, written three cookbooks and appeared on American television. He now owns seventeen restaurants in places such as New York, Las Vegas, and Seattle.

Inasmuch as Chef English is better known in the United States than in Britain, Americans coming aboard QM2 are often more familiar with both his name and his style of cooking than their British shipmates. "Because he is a little bit more well known, we do find [the restaurant] is busier on the American cruises but the English do like it as well."

Chef English's style also has an impact on the age group that his restaurant attracts. "The Todd English is a little more contemporary. You will find that we get a bit more of the younger crowd in here as well."

Since Chef English is a celebrity chef whose responsibilities include other restaurants, he cannot be on Queen Mary 2 on each voyage cooking each meal that is served in his restaurant. "Our main connection with Todd is our Culinary Ambassador Jean Marie Zimmerman. They collaborate together and talk about the menu, what was popular, what was not and they will change that. Of course, Todd English is the main person who decides everything for here."

Although Chef English cannot be onboard all the time, he does visit QM2 regularly. "All Todd English food has Todd English recipes. We always follow the recipes and every time Todd English comes, he is very happy with what he sees. He tastes everything, which he has to because it is his name on the door."

In addition, Chef English's staff works with



Chef Mark Oldroyd

QM2's culinary team. "When a new menu comes out, Michael who is the chef from Olives and another sous chef will come here and we go through all of the dishes with them. They come on a regular basis."

To maintain Chef English's unique style, the Todd English Restaurant on QM2 is removed from the ship's other dining venues. "Todd English has its own independent galley. All food for Todd English is cooked in this galley only. They will prepare every single thing in this galley. There is nothing which is made anywhere else. Everything is made fresh. We have nothing pre-prepared. All the steaks, all the duck breasts - it is all cooked to order."

"The chefs that we have working in Todd English are dedicated to Todd English. They know the style, his way of cooking and things like that so we keep them here. Most of the chefs have interacted with Todd or have interacted with Michael or the other chefs who have been here to teach so they know their cooking style."

Along the same lines, the restaurant maintains a separate group of waiters and staff. "They are hand-picked on style and knowledge. We do a training pro-



The Todd English

gram with them - - we will cook the whole menu, they will taste the menu and then we will describe each dish to them. So everyone has been educated on the food all the time."

Similarly, "the sommeliers that are up here are experienced with the menu and they know which wines pair with the dishes that we have on the menu."

The menu in the Todd English Restaurant is not static. "We like to change it at least once a year. We always think about our guests and what their needs are. That is why we have things like the surf and turf on because we know that is what they like - - the salmon and the paella [as well]. A lot of the flavors are very vibrant and adventuresome. People do like it."

On sea days, the Todd English is open for both lunch and dinner. "The lunch menu is a bit more simple. We add a few more pasta dishes at lunch time and also Todd's pizza is on at lunch time as well. It differs quite a lot in the selection. Lunchtime is more homey. Dinner is a bit more contemporary."

"People come mainly for dinner. The Todd English at night is like a little get-away, especially if the [guests] are dining in the Britannia [QM2's large main dining room]. Some people like to get away from the vast dining experience and just come in here and have an intimate experience."

The restaurant can accommodate over 100 guests at full capacity. Unlike many restaurants, the Todd English does not seek to turn over the house during the course of an evening. "Once a guest books a table, it is his or hers for the night. You can really relax."