

Core by Clare Smyth, London, UK

Classically trained chef pushes boundaries with British produce
<https://www.theworlds50best.com/awards/best-female-chef>

Clare Smyth describes herself – all too modestly – as a “traditional, boring chef”. Granted, there is no tale of hardship or of a life-changing moment that led her from a different career to cooking – hers is a story of pure, hard graft. But as an ambitious teenager who left home in Northern Ireland at the age of 16 to pursue a cooking career in England, Smyth worked her way up the ladder, eventually spending 15 years in three-Michelin-star restaurants under some of the world’s best chefs. That toil culminated last year in the opening of her debut restaurant, Core by Clare Smyth, where she is now recognised as one of the finest cooks in the world.

Smyth is best known as a protégée of British chef Gordon Ramsay, with whom she worked for more than 13 years, earning the title of head chef at age 28 and becoming chef-patron of Restaurant Gordon Ramsay four years later. She began at Ramsay’s London flagship, then known as Royal Hospital Road, in 2002, working her way up to senior sous chef before leaving in 2005 to work at Alain Ducasse’s renowned Le Louis XV in Monte Carlo. On her return to Gordon Ramsay in 2008, she became the first and only female chef in the UK to run a three-Michelin-star restaurant.

Smyth has since stepped out of Ramsay’s shadow, developing her own restaurant in London’s Notting Hill neighbourhood and combining her background in French cooking with her passion for UK produce to create a uniquely British cuisine. While Ramsay is 100% supportive of Smyth’s new venture, she says he has given her space to develop her own style and to experiment with “humble” ingredients that she could never have served in his restaurants, such as the protagonist of her signature dish, Potato and Roe.



Potato and Roe

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Inspired by her childhood in County Antrim, where her aunt and uncle owned a potato farm on the coast, the dish uses dulse, seaweed and fermented potato chips to provoke nostalgia and recreate the saltiness and minerality of the soil and the ocean. A single potato is topped with trout and herring roe, making it a “poor man’s version of potato and caviar” and a firm favourite among all her customers because of its comforting qualities.

That desire to bring comfort is one of the key tenets of Core, where Smyth aims to strip away any pretension from the fine dining experience and make everyone feel welcome and included. She achieves it through a simply structured menu, ingredients that everyone will recognise and a bright, warm dining room where customers can see straight into the glass-fronted kitchen and have the chance to meet different chefs over the course of the meal.

While striving to create haute cuisine without barriers, Smyth is also educating diners with dishes such as Lamb Carrot, where a vegetable becomes the centrepiece and meat its accompaniment. Just as she believes in food sustainability and reducing meat and fish consumption to protect the planet, she also believes in sustainable staffing, and is training her own protégées with the same set of rigorous work ethics she learned as a young chef.

With her new title of elit Vodka World’s Best Female Chef, Smyth hopes to use the platform to help bring more women into top positions in kitchens, supporting them through all of the issues that might hold them back. Hers may be a traditional approach, but it is anything but boring.

Graft = innesto

Flagship = ammiraglia

Dulse = palmaria palmate (tipo di alga)

Roe = uova di pesce