

Simon Ulph appointed head chef of the Twenty Six

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The I'll Be Mother group has appointed Simon Ulph as head chef of the Twenty Six in Southborough, Tunbridge Wells.

Ulph joins the group from Robert Thompson's restaurant Thompson's in Newport on the Isle of Wight, where he held the role of head chef for 18 months.

Ulph started his career as a commis chef at the Swan in West Malling, which was co-owned by Pete Cornwell founder of I'll Be Mother, where he worked alongside Andrew Clarke and Scott Goss.



In 2012, during a pop-up at the London Olympics, Ulph met the 'Iron Chef' Masaharu Morimoto who invited him to work at his restaurant Morimoto Napa in California. It was here that he developed passion for Japanese and Asian flavours, especially sake and miso, which influences his dishes today.

On his return to the UK Ulph began working for Robert Thompson, first at the Hambrough in Ventnor and the George Hotel, Yarmouth, before he took on the role of head chef at Thompson's.

Speaking to The Caterer, Ulph said: "I think it was my time to leave the island and spread my wings. Rob taught me so much, not just about cooking but also the management side of things and he showed me how to be a better person. He's amazing, one of the best bosses I ever had.

"I'm really happy and excited to be back in Kent. I've been away for seven years now on and off but I haven't lived here for so long and it's nice to be back living where I grew up. Scott originally was my sous chef. I worked with him and Pete for three years. It's nice to work with them again; it's like coming back to family. It feels so natural."

Working seasonally, the menu at Twenty Six – also known as the Test Kitchen – will stay true to the name and offer a constantly changing and evolving menu. "In the kitchen we have a robata grill, and we love cooking over wood and coals. We don't have a lot of water baths. It's nice to go back to classical cooking with a cast iron pan and a knob of butter." Ulph said.

The chef will be introducing a new tasting menu, with dishes in the pipeline such as: braised pig's head with radish, smoked eel emulsion, diced blowtorched eel and pickled apple; plaice, seasoned with sumac, served with courgette tagliatelle with harissa and yogurt; mackerel ceviche with tomato jelly; and a muscovado panna cotta with pineapple, lime sorbet and dark rum mousse.

A series of guest chef nights have also been planned, scheduled to take place on Sunday afternoons.

They will kick off with Tony Parkin from the West House. Other confirmed guests include Gareth Ward from Ynyshir Restaurant near Machynlleth, Wales; Nathan Eades from Simpsons, Birmingham; Michael Bremner from 64 degrees in Brighton; and the Sticky Walnut team, Chester.

Guest chefs are being encouraged to serve what they want, ranging from tasting menus and three-course meals to BBQs and meat-feasts. Chefs from the Beacon and Chapel Down will also be invited to cook in the kitchen alongside the guests.

Ulph added: "There are only 26 seats which makes it more personal. Once everyone is sat down we can lock the door behind us and just have a great time. Also the chefs can really get involved, talk to customers and make it a homely experience."

Scott Goss, previously head chef of the Twenty Six, will be taking on the role of creative director and executive chef at I'll Be Mother.

The I'll Be Mother portfolio includes: the Twenty Six; the Beacon in Tunbridge Wells; and the Swan at the Chapel Down Vineyard.

Doug Sanham, recently promoted to head chef at the Beacon, was awarded an Acorn Award this year.