



Chef Q&A

# Grill THE Chef

After training in Michelin-starred restaurants in London, Luke Mills' culinary career has taken him all over the world. Now settled back in Yorkshire as Head Development Chef at Filmore & Union, we chatted to Luke about his 'Instagrammable' menu, his cauliflower obsession and his top advice for home cooks

**What's the concept behind Filmore and Union?**

Adele Ashley, founder and owner of Filmore and Union, is the driving force behind the business. We're firmly based in Yorkshire and we encourage a fresh, fun and vibrant work ethic. I think diners come to Filmore because they know that they're going to get great quality food that's good value. If you order smashed avocado on toast, you're going to get smashed avocado on toast, but it's going to be the best you'll get in the whole of Yorkshire. We use seasonal produce and put a spin on new food trends – we try to bring London's food trends up north. We produce quality, healthy food in a cool restaurant environment, and we also cater for people with dietary requirements, offering coeliac-approved and gluten-free dishes.

**What does a Head Development Chef do?**

I started at Filmore about six years ago, and I'm now based at the head office in Wetherby where I have my own kitchen. I work closely alongside Adele – she gives me a brief and then I use my creativity to source cool, new ingredients. I try to make sure the dishes aren't too complicated or too technical – people eat with their eyes, so we focus on presentation.

**How did you come to find yourself in Filmore and Union's kitchens?**

My background as a chef was working in Michelin-starred restaurants and I had two AA-Rosettes by the age of 29. Going straight from catering college to cooking in a Michelin-starred restaurant was an eye-opener. It was absolutely relentless – all the horror stories were true, but it made me into the chef that I am now. But I've always believed that you only need to get one good place on your CV and it'll boost your career. At Filmore they've taken me under their wing and I wouldn't want to do anything other than my best for them. I love using produce that I might not necessarily have used otherwise, like quinoa and dukkah spice, and what I do now is just so different from reading cheques and cooking dishes to order. I still have to work to guidelines, but I get to be really creative and try to make ingredients work together that perhaps shouldn't. I then make sure that my chefs in each restaurant can cope with cooking the dishes I've created for 120 people at lunchtime – at Harrogate we probably serve 150 for breakfast and 225 at lunchtime. The food must be just as good every time, that's the key part to being a chef – cook it well, make it look excellent, but you have to be able to do that perfectly 25 times within an hour.



in the oven for four minutes at 180C. When you present that to someone, they'll think 'Oh wow, that's really clever.' I also like surprising myself – I'm not a vegan, but I love cooking with vegan ingredients. I made a vegan Bolognese during my chef's demonstration at Living North's LIVE fair in York, and people were blown away by it. Miso is also an incredible ingredient – it has an amazing umami flavour and it adds depth and richness to almost any dish.

**Did you always know you wanted to be a chef?**

I remember standing in my kitchen as a child and making pancakes, creating a huge mess, but I can't remember exactly how it came about – one day I came home and just told my parents I was going to catering college. They were really supportive and cooking has allowed me to travel all over the world; Australia, Thailand, Denmark, London, Sheffield... I also opened four different styles of restaurant in Nottingham. Being a chef has taken me places – I was the type of kid at school that didn't pay any attention, so I'm really grateful that this career path now allows me to support my family.

**What is it about Filmore and Union that makes it so popular?**

Taste is always very important, but obviously if it looks good then people are going to say, 'Wow this is amazing.' I suppose it's 'Instagrammable' food – people want to share what they're eating and where, which in turn is free promotion for the business. The food speaks for itself; pure, fresh dining that's natural and wholesome. We also do special events and theme nights, such as our tapas and vegan nights which have all been extremely popular. Vegan food is really up and coming and has almost become a fundamental part of what we do at Filmore and Union.

**Where does the inspiration for your menus come from?**

All over the world really. We obviously follow food trends, looking at other people's recipes and trying to make them our own. It's important to know what people are eating and what they're enjoying. We also took a trip to America around a year and a half ago and we went all over New York, eating in some of the top restaurants there. The inspiration we got was incredible – we came back and worked out a menu within two weeks (usually it can take up to six weeks). I started using spices like Aleppo pepper, which I'd never used before but I brought some back from America with me.

**What are your favourite ingredients to cook with at the moment?**

Our burger mix is phenomenal, and our gluten-free sausages from Sykes House Farm in Wetherby are the best I've ever tasted. I love cooking with cauliflower too – it's just a great vehicle for flavour. It's also really versatile; you can make it into anything from purées to roasts. I like taking what people know and flipping it on its head a bit. Take a simple avocado, half it and take the stone out, then crack an egg into the middle and put it

**What advice would you give to home cooks looking to branch out in the kitchen?**

I do believe you have to mess up to get something perfect, and you can always manipulate something even more to get it just right. Nobody's perfect, just play around with ingredients and have fun. Enjoy it and relax. Don't try to do too much, just add a bit of flavour and a bit of fun and happiness into the dish – I know that sounds corny, but if you're enjoying what you're doing that's how you're going to master a skill.

**What exciting plans have you got in the pipeline at Filmore and Union?**

We've recently launched a campaign across our restaurants. Eat the Seasons is heavily focussed on what is produced seasonally within the UK. We've worked closely as a team, visiting local suppliers to create some great seasonal specials which showcase the best produce each month. This runs alongside our monthly supper clubs – we have our ever-popular vegan night in May and a gluten-free night in June. We haven't forgotten about our take-out delicatessens either. The team and I have been working on producing a new, fresh and exciting Health To Go range launching in May.

**What would be your dream meal?**

I love a good roast – just a proper, really traditional chicken roast with all the trimmings. I know that's not very 'Filmore', but we try and have a roast at home every Sunday.

**What's your foodie guilty pleasure?**

I love all food to be honest – I put Sriracha sauce on nearly everything.

**When you're not working, what are your favourite things to do in Yorkshire?**

I've got two kids who run me off my feet, so we go walking a lot. Living in Northallerton, we're in a great location for it. We also love going to the seaside, Robin Hood's Bay is great, and I like going into York to eat out or for drinks. There's just so much to do, and half of it doesn't cost a thing. Everything you'd ever want is right on your doorstep.

**For more information about Filmore & Union's restaurants, visit [www.filmoreandunion.com](http://www.filmoreandunion.com)**