

Michael Caines has brought the Abode hotel chain – and his keep-it-local style of cooking – to Manchester. Executive chef Ian Matfin and his brigade are getting used to some unfamiliar pieces of kit. *Diane Lane* reports

My new kitchen

There was a time when Brand Beckham was the leading brand in Manchester. These days there's a new kid on the block. He arrived in Britain's second city this spring, after building an empire in the South-west and establishing outposts in the South-east and in Scotland. Continuing his joint venture with Abode hotels, Michael Caines has set up shop on Manchester's Piccadilly.

Wherever it might be, and whether we're talking fine dining or informal, brand Michael Caines is about fresh, locally sourced foods prepared to order by talented chefs. And the North-west has plenty of excellent produce to offer.

In the kitchen, Caines has installed Ian Matfin as executive chef. Matfin spent six years as sous chef at Gidleigh Park and relished the challenge of opening the Manchester property. The hotel offers two different eating experiences. A 55-seat fine-dining restaurant and Champagne bar occupies the lower ground floor, while the ground floor has an 80-seat café and bar, which spills out on to the pavement to attract passing trade. There are also two private dining rooms seating a total of 24 between them.

The restaurant itself offers three dining choices. There's an eight-course tasting menu for a very reasonable £55, an à la carte section with five each of starters, mains and desserts, and a selection of 15 grazing dishes such as pan-fried scallops with caramelised cauliflower purée, sweet raisin vinaigrette and a cauliflower and cumin velouté. "We didn't want to make it too formal so decided to have a slightly different take on the tapas style," Caines says. It's proving to be a popular choice with the Manchester crowd.

As with many city-centre restaurants where space is at a premium, back-of-house operations are a tight fit. The



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Michael Caines (above), food and beverage director and operating partner at Abode Hotels, has brought in Ian Matfin (left) to run the kitchen at the Manchester property

oblong kitchen serving the fine-dining restaurant has no little areas off to the side that might helpfully house the pastry section or a separate prep area, so everything has been fitted into the one space, arranged parallel with the pass. There is, however, a stills area, which houses all the beverage-making equipment, an upright fridge and two freezers, a Winterhalter dishwasher, and a Meiko glasswasher. It also provides storage for plates. ▶



1 The starting point of the kitchen design was the existing extraction canopy, which dictated the position of the Bonnet suite. A central plancha facilitates fast cooking of items such as foie gras and scallops, while two solid tops provide plenty of room for pots and pans. Two radiant hobs are used for tasks such as confiting because they provide a more constant temperature than the solid tops.

2 The cold pass benefits from Foster under-counter refrigeration, providing plenty of drawer space for mise en place on starters.

3 A Bonnet induction hob provides a heating surface for the pastry section, so the chefs have no need to venture further up the kitchen. Desserts are sent from the rear of the kitchen rather than from the pass at the front.

4 and 5 A prover and a two-tier deck oven, both by Mono, take care of bread-making needs. Three types of bread are made daily and these are common to all of Caines's Abode restaurants.



With such a small space to work in, Caines has introduced Clifton water baths for slow cooking and 60% of the menu is now prepared this way. Items such as ravioli of goats' cheese and basil, and lobster tortellini are blanched for 30 seconds then reheated at 80°C in the bath. Goosenagh duckling and Herdwick lamb are prepped, bagged and cooked at 45°C for 50 minutes, ready for searing during service. "They're already at 45°C and just need searing in a pan to 90°C for service, whereas it would take much longer straight from the fridge," Matfin says.

The water baths sit on a prep station sited just behind the Bonnet suite and split into meat and fish, and garnish sections. Under-counter refrigeration here is by Bonnet and consists of a mix of cabinets and drawers.

Towards the rear of the kitchen is the compact pastry section, consisting of a marble worktop with a Foster freezer and Bonnet refrigeration underneath. A gantry sits on top of the work surface to provide extra storage. The pastry chefs have their own Bonnet induction hob for sauces, purées and chocolate. This hob shares the top of a Bonnet blast chiller with a Carpigiani ice-cream machine. Squeezed in at the back is a two-tier Mono deck oven for breads – French country white, tomato and olive, and pain de morvan, among others, are all made in house. A Mono prover and Hobart mixer complete the bread-making operation and there's a Bonnet bratt pan for stocks and sauces.

◀ The kitchen equipment was installed by Shine, based in Newport, Gwent. There are two sections to the pass: to the left-hand side is the cold half, with Foster refrigerated drawers for starters' mise en place, while the hot pass with lamps and hot cupboards is to the right.

Just a couple of steps back from the pass is the main firepower, in the form of a bespoke Bonnet suite. Caines has long been a Bonnet fan. "I like the innovations that can be incorporated into the suite, such as induction and planchas," he says. "It's great for Ian and the brigade to work on."

The siting of the suite was determined by the existing extraction canopy, the only item to be retained from the area's previous incarnation as a satellite kitchen when the building was the Alias Hotel

Rossetti. It incorporates several cooking elements, including two radiant hobs, two gas solid tops, a plancha, a salamander and an oven either side.

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The compact kitchen that services the restaurant (above) includes a Bonnet suite with radiant hobs and solid top (right) and a Bonnet bratt pan (below)

