
Jackie Needham

People

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Eating Out: Magazine Interview with Jackie Needham

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AS I was piloted past stainless steel equipment in the engine room I wondered what sort of man the skipper would be. Remembering a similar experience elsewhere I expected scenes of temperament and near panic.

In his tiny office, in the lower regions of Dublin's Russell Hotel, Chef Jackie Needham was calmly enjoying his morning cup of tea. This very pleasant Dubliner is neither a food snob, nor indeed a social one. In 1947, he proudly admits starting his professional life as a page boy in the Russell. He worked his way up through the intricate novitiate and sub-deaconship of the kitchen. Then Jack Needham looked back to the time when kitchen temperament made working conditions like a first night back stage at La Scala.

How when he was a junior a Frenchman told him that he'd be better off selling newspapers. He feels that Irish tastes have become more selective and sophisticated in the last decade. He pointed out for instance that the moules mariniere is enjoyed as much for its delicious sauce as for the mussel's themselves and customers mop it up like soup, which is both healthy and complimentary.

And he thought years ago of the time some misplaced ideas of gentility people left lots of, what another hotel man used to call goodness, to end up in the pig bin.

On the subject of soup Chef Needham emphasised that only 'real' soups are served in the Russell and even though it is possible to buy a very good imported lobster bisque, this delicious but troublesome soup is made by his staff.

Surprisingly, since Ireland was never really a fish loving country the Russell sell an "enormous amount" of fish. Unlike the tailor who is often the worst dressed man in the street, Jack Needham likes to eat well at home and does so without hav-

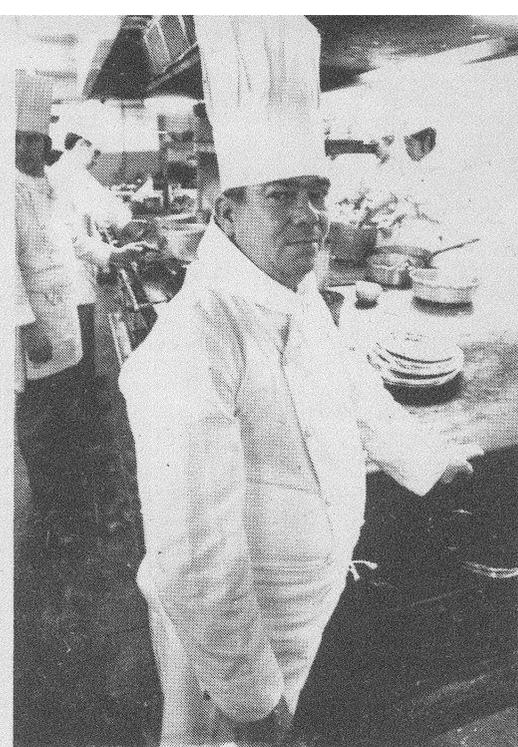
EATING OUT carlos kenny



Claude Spillane — hard to define quality?

ing to lift a finger because his wife, who is German, is a "terrific cook."

On the subject of eating out he admits



Chef Jackie Needham in the Russell Kitchen.

to rarely enough having the time or the occasion to do so, but he also says that he is never verbally critical about offerings that sometimes he feels are below standards.

The patience of a bank manager, the tact of an undertaker and the courage and energy of a soccer referee are just some of the requirements for the job of banqueting head waiter.

It also helps if you have presence." The Shelbourne's Claude Spillane possesses this hard-to-define quality to a remarkable degree. Thirty one years in the business, Cork born Claude has acted as toastmaster at External Affairs functions at Iveagh House and the Castle and greeted personalities such as Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. ●