

**Press release from The Hermitage Hotel, *Aoraki* Mount Cook
13 June 2012**

Hermitage Hotel team cooks up a storm at Salon Culinaire competition

The Hermitage Hotel at *Aoraki* Mt Cook is celebrating the success of its award-winning chef brigade following the Southern Light Salon Culinaire competition last weekend.

Guided by hotel Executive Chef Ken O'Connell, the kitchen team competed at the event held at the Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) in Invercargill.

The Hermitage team were amongst 128 entrants competing across a wide range of categories and Chef O'Connell's team took home a bounty of awards

Chef O'Connell said he was "extremely proud" of his team's performance.

"I've always competed in culinary events throughout my career and I think it's a great thing for any young chef to experience," he said.

"Competitions refine skills and discipline, and instil pride and work ethic in young chefs. The habits they get from competing become part of their training and they repeat this in the kitchen every day."

The Salon Culinaire competition was for students or chefs already working in the industry. Entrants competed in categories including preparation and cooking of food, barista skills, table setting and beverage services.

Taking out the overall Southern Light Training Chef award was The Hermitage's Chris Walker, who also won three individual events including salmon, dessert and 'hot main presented cold'.

Also from The Hermitage, Kane Bamberg won the title Southern Light Open Chef, winning three individual events including beef, seafood mystery box and hot main presented cold.

Ashley Baty won silver and two bronze awards in salmon, pastry and 'hot main presented cold'.

Chef O'Connell also won Gold for his hot main presented cold dish and two silvers in cold display desserts.

"I entered as a training exercise for myself, and to show the team how to do it and what it takes," said Chef O'Connell.

He said his team worked hard in the lead up to the competition and deserved their recognition.

"The event was held over one day, but we worked through the night for 14 hours to do all of our cold static plates," he said.

Chef O'Connell has previously competed in the Culinary Olympics in Germany and the Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg.

"I won New Zealand Chef of the Year in 2008 which personally gave me the drive and incentive to train and develop my young chefs," he said.

Chef O'Connell said he was working hard to get his team of chefs to the National Culinary Show in Auckland in August this year and would be sourcing sponsorship to help get them there.

"We wouldn't make it to any of these events without the support of sponsors and so we are hugely grateful to The Hermitage, Linton distribution, Bidvest, Aoraki Salmon, Alliance Meats, Southern Lakes Laundry, Kann's Fruit and Vegg and Mercato as their sponsorship was very important in getting us to the Invercargill event."

Visitors to The Hermitage Hotel Aoraki/Mt Cook can experience the culinary delights of Chef O'Connell's award-winning team at The Hermitage Panorama Room Restaurant.

For reservations and more information go to <http://www.hermitage.co.nz/en/dining>

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Picture captions:

1/ The award-winning team from The Hermitage Panorama Room culinary team (L to R) Kane Bambery, Christopher Walker, Ashley Baty and Executive Chef Ken O'Connell

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