



Dylan McGrath – Mint

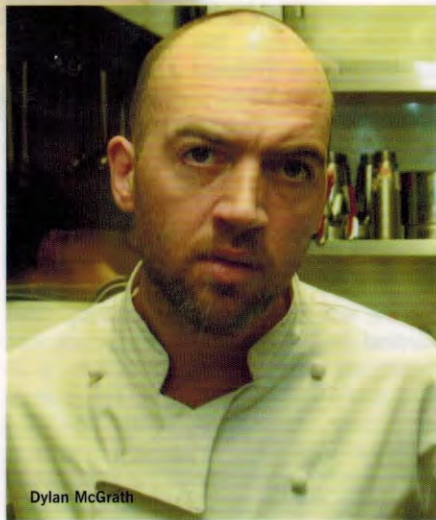
Let's get the aggression out of the way first. Yes, he told me, reiterating what he said on last month's *Tubridy Tonight* show, he does shout and scream and curse at his kitchen staff. He likes to run his kitchen on nervous energy.

Sitting at a table in Mint just before the service gets underway, he is calmness and pleasantness personified. He politely thanks the waitress for bringing us coffee. His comes in a chipped mug with no handle. He's not allowed touch the good china for obvious reasons. Occasionally, when the kitchen door swings open, even though he can't actually see into the kitchen, he roars "Let's get a move on, lads, let's get a move on." It's called remote control.

In his first 18 years of life, Dylan McGrath did a lot of moving. When he was just a year or so his family moved from Gardiner Street in Dublin to Carlow, where he still has a lot of relations. Seven years later they moved to Northern Ireland, and Dylan now speaks with a slight Falls Road accent. He really didn't have an idea what he wanted to do when he left school, so took a catering course. It was, he admits, an unmitigated disaster at first. He was, he says, headstrong, utterly undisciplined, and had serious problems with authority.

After finishing college, he took a job in Jury's hotel, Belfast as a Chef de Partie, the lowest form of kitchen life. Within two weeks he was promoted to Sous Chef and a week after that he took over as Head Chef, doing 450 breakfasts, 150 lunches and 150 dinners a day.

"I had ten chefs under me, I had an office, a phone, all the trappings of authority," he recalls. He was all of 18 years of age.



"It was very strange. People would do what I told them when I told them, but when I look back on it, I realise I couldn't cook at all. Hadn't a clue. I'd put a piece of cold cod on a cold dish, put it in the oven and when it flaked it was done. But they did what I told them to do the correct way, so it worked out alright. I got things done, I was a very quick learner, and even though I still had problems with authority I ended up staying for a year-and-a-half."

He later moved to Roscoff's – then the only Michelin-starred restaurant in Northern Ireland – and it was under Head Chef Aiden Byrne that Dylan began to realise he could become not just a good chef, but a great chef.

"I never made a mistake a second time, and I became a sponge, soaking up everything that others told me. I loved the tension, I loved the hours."

From Roscoff's, he went to Conrad Gallagher's Dublin Michelin-starred Peacock Alley, and spent some time in Guilbauds. Then it was off to London and John Burton-Race's two-star L'Ortolan.

"This was eye-opening. It was the first time I'd seen thousands of pounds worth of truffles, fantastic langoustines and other hugely expensive ingredients, and what you could create with them."

After three years, he came back to Dublin for a stint in The Commons with Aiden Byrne. But London called again, in the shape of a chef whose legendary temper was even more volcanic than Dylan, Tom Aikens. This is a man who actually walked out of his own two-star restaurant after a blazing row with one of his brigade. From Aikens, Dylan learned the art of the pastry chef and the importance of great bread. This was the final stage of a long and hard journey to running his own kitchen. In May 2006, Mint opened its doors with him at the helm, and the rest is history. The core of his style of cuisine, he says, is the use of the finest and freshest of seasonal ingredients. With great imagination he builds layers of unusual but complimentary tastes around a core ingredient. How about wild salmon poached in seasoned beetroot juice, with orange and avocado mousse, with pickled golden beetroot and baby cucumber?

• For Dylan's [strawberry dessert recipe](http://www.socialandpersonal.ie), go to: www.socialandpersonal.ie