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Front of House Team of the Year – Public Site

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SHORTLIST

Searcys at the Gherkin

Green & Fortune at Kings Place

Searcys at 30 Euston Square

PAST WINNERS

This award was split into two categories in 2016 to reflect the advance of private and public sites



2018 WINNER

Searcys at the Gherkin

2017 Restaurant Associates at Roux at Parliament Square

2016 Levy Restaurants at Leicester City FC

2015 BaxterStorey at Clyde & Co

2014 Rapport at Tower 42

2013 Rapport at KPMG

30 St Mary Axe, affectionately known as the Gherkin, was built by British architect Norman Foster and opened its doors in 2004. Searcys' offering at the Gherkin was revamped in early 2018 as the Helix restaurant and Iris bar. The site is now open to the public for the first time, having been originally for private members only.

The relaunch has re-established the space as a destination restaurant and bar in an iconic building and addresses the growing trend of more casual entertaining and smaller, targeted events. Bookings have doubled compared to the previous year, with more than 21,000 bookings across the restaurant and bar, while the launch of Sunday brunch generated more than 700 covers in the first three months.

The shift towards opening the top two floors to the public has been a considerable challenge, and under the excellent training of the head of customer services, Persiana Ivanova, the front of house team has risen to meet it. Whether for an exclusive event for 260 guests or a dinner for two, staff have met the need for versatility, depending on the guest and the occasion, as well as the 20% growth in weekly enquiries.

An incredible example of the team's excellence and willingness to go the extra mile concern a bride and groom arriving at reception under the mistaken impression that booking a registrar at the Gherkin meant that a private room was included – and all the spaces were fully booked. The team averted disaster by getting the sign-off from building management to host a wedding on the plaza, borrowing 50 chairs from another venue and a table and cloth from upstairs. In just a few minutes they had created an aisle and turned on the fairy lights on the plaza, so the couple were

able to get married with the Gherkin behind them. One judge said this "showed real empathy and a customer-focused team".

As well as the team's creativity and quick-thinking, the training Searcys provides its staff ensure their readiness to deal with difficult conversations and scenarios, and recruitment is integral. Searcys says that, "finding the best staff is key to a successful hospitality business", which is why it hosts recruitment open days, hosting multiple candidates in a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere with the aim of them understanding the brand and ethos prior to an interview. This ensures that future employees really understand what the company is looking for, and Searcys can handpick the very best staff.

Similarly, the company prioritises career development – the venue's head of reception started as a cloakroom attendant three years ago, the assistant manager and acting head of beverage also joined just three years ago as a commis waiter, and the general manager started as a Searcys restaurant manager seven years ago – leading to the Searcys Gherkin front of house team winning this year's front of house team (public site) of the year.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

"The Gherkin team are constantly reinventing themselves, maintaining standards and turnover and generating great customer feedback. How they pulled off a wedding (that wasn't booked) was miraculous!"

Bill Toner, chief executive, CH&Co

"The example of dealing with an unexpected bride and groom showed real empathy and a customer-focused team."

Michael Clark, operations director, the Ivy Collection

