

THE FOUR star Royal Lancaster Hotel in the centre of London is the City's most versatile venue for meetings and events.

With an established fine dining restaurant and a new concept – the Island Restaurant and Bar – the hotel is already a busy hive of activity.

However it's the hotel's banqueting facilities which have set an industry benchmark in the West End.

Based in Lancaster Terrace, a stone's throw from Hyde Park, the hotel turns over £8m a year alone on food.

Catering for up to 1500 covers a day means executive chef Nigel Boschetti has to make sure his immense kitchens are run like "a well oiled machine."

Boschetti has been at the Royal Lancaster for the past two years and has an impressive CV having worked his way up through London hotels including the Mayfair, the Carlton and the Britannia.

After 13 years in London he tried something completely different and went to work as head chef at the 12 bedroom Amberley Castle Hotel in West Sussex.

"It was almost like working in a restaurant and where I first got into the banqueting side of the industry," says Boschetti.

During his time at Amberley Castle Hotel it became an award winning establishment with Boschetti earning two rosettes.

After stints working for outside catering companies such as Payne and Gunter and gaining experience in the management of banqueting, his credentials have since been bolstered further by his time at the Lancaster.

"I came to the Royal Lancaster in December 2004 and it is the biggest team I have ever worked with, making the biggest number of covers and the most money," adds Boschetti.

The hotel's two main suites – The Nine Kings and the Westbourne – frequently hold an eclectic mix of guests from Princes William and Harry to blue chip companies and a large of contingency of regulars who have returned year after year, with some spanning more than a quarter of a century.

With a total of 28 chefs working in the banqueting kitchens, a number which is modest compared to banqueting kitchens of the past, new techniques mean the kitchens are more than up to the challenge..

Boschetti says system is the key to success when catering on such an enormous scale.

He said: "The operation is designed so that from the minute the food hits the back door there is an ease of passage through to service. We rely heavily on a solid team,

many of whom have been at the Royal Lancaster for years so it is this invaluable knowledge we depend upon when we have repeat functions, with guest history and food requirements.”

He added that one of the main differences between catering for such large numbers compared to a traditional restaurant kitchen is the challenge of an increasing number of customer needs.

“This can make our work more difficult as the simplest request can throw the system out of order. So we always try and cover our bases, which is why it’s important having chefs who know long term information about the guests,” says Boschetti.

“Vegetarians are now commonplace, but allergies relating to things such as nuts, celery, dairy, yeast, wheat and gluten, are now an everyday occurrence and we must be on the top of our game.

“If we are to serve their needs in the correct manner, lip service will simply not do, if someone were to have a severe allergic reaction we would be hauled over the coals and held to ransom. This does worry us at times but we do get to see trends in dietary demands far quicker than other people which is helpful in other sectors of the hotel.”

The Royal Lancaster invested £3m in its state of the art kitchen equipment 16 years ago and the investment continues to pay off today.

Boschetti’s kitchen boasts a unique stock cooking system which makes it stand out from the rest.

“All our stocks are cooked under pressure – we cook to 100 degrees but do not boil – it’s slower than a simmer and the power in the cooking extracts all the flavour from the bones. As it is an enclosed system we can leave it overnight and it keeps the stock at a steady temperature,” he explained.

“Due to the enormity of the catering scale at the Royal Lancaster we enhance our stocks and sauces with Essential Cuisine’s range of products. We need thousands of litres of veal jus to meet the demand and maintain consistency through reduction and enrichment is always difficult.”

Nigel Crane, director of Essential Cuisine, said: “Boschetti and I are old friends so after a consultation I was happy to help him out with products tailored to his needs running a busy banqueting kitchen.

Boschetti added: “We can make 10 gallons of great veal stock and simply add Essential Cuisine’s Premier Veal Jus. This means we don’t have to reduce the liquid anymore, saving time, and it means our jus is now standardized whilst maintaining the standard of the original sauce.”

“Meanwhile our range of stocks are ideal for banqueting facilities of this size as they can be added to freshly made soups to add bulk without compromising the original soup recipe,” says Nigel.

“This is a godsend when you can be serving over a thousand portions of soup a day from our kitchen,” adds Boschetti.

“Also another key product in our kitchen, aside from the stocks and jus which are used to extend our soups and sauces, is Essential Cuisine’s lobster glace.”

“Boschetti told me once that he believes that the end result you get from the Lobster glace is as close as you can get without making it yourself – a comment which I never let him forget and of course is a great compliment and what our products are all about,” says Nigel.

“We think each of our products can be tailor made to each individual kitchen and chef’s needs and our relationship with the Royal Lancaster is a great example of how our partnerships can work so effectively.”