

Savoy va voi

It's a tough job working in the kitchens of one of London's top hotels, as **Simon Round** finds out when he grills a Savoy chef

If you value your free time and look forward to leaving work at 5.30pm each evening, then being a chef at the Savoy Hotel will not be your first career choice.

But Lawrence Goldberg, the only Jew in the hotel's kosher banqueting kitchen, gets as much satisfaction from the long hours, the intricate preparations and the intense atmosphere as from, well, the perfect hollandaise sauce.

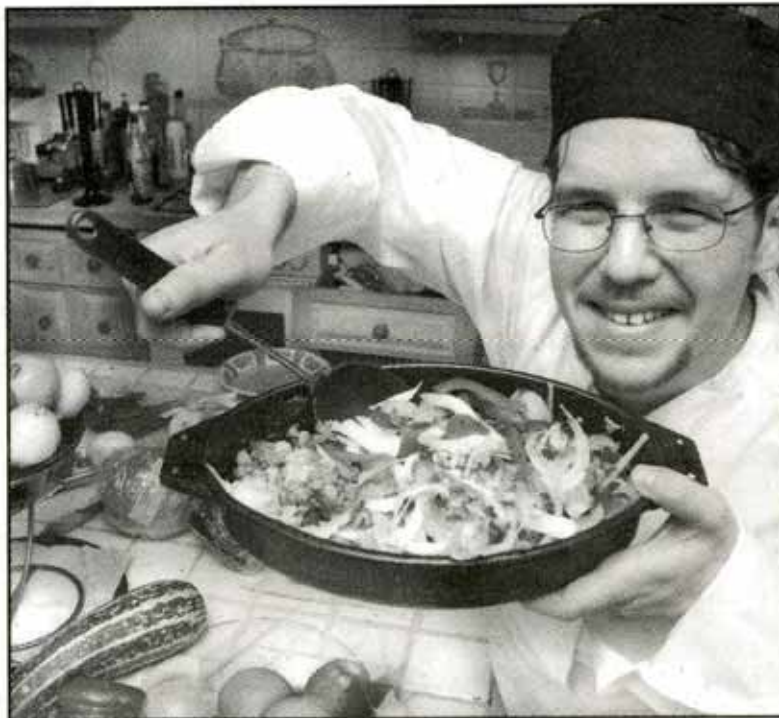
"On a busy day I can work from nine in the morning until 11 at night. I don't feel it because when I'm busy, I'm enjoying it. I don't even mind the heat that much, although non-chefs find they can't take it."

A typical day in the busy dairy kitchen actually starts the night before when Lawrence attempts to get a head start on the next day's lunchtime banquet.

"There are things which might need to be prepared well in advance — we can't leave everything until the last minute. That's why we have a meeting at the start of the week with the head chef to discuss the functions coming up and decide what we need to do and when."

Although Lawrence loves the creativity of his profession, he is also more than happy to do the more routine jobs.

"Even if it's peeling garlic for an hour, I don't look upon it as a chore. It's important to work really fast to



Lawrence Goldberg: early start PHOTO: PETER FISHER

make a deadline, and try not to cut yourself, of course," he laughs.

As the one Jew in the kitchen it is occasionally up to him to explain the intricacies of kashrut to bemused newcomers who don't know their latkes from their lockshen.

"Nothing happens without a *shomer* on site, but of course it is useful to have someone like me who knows about kosher cuisine to advise those less familiar with it."

Lawrence is certainly more than knowledgeable in this respect. Born in South Africa, he moved to Israel as a child and perfected his culinary skills at the country's top hotels, including the Hyatt in Jerusalem.

After the lunchtime banquet Lawrence may only have enough time to sharpen his knives before

launching himself into the evening function. For a large affair there will be up to eight chefs working on the cold section, and eight more on the hot food — and that doesn't take into account specialists like the pastry chefs who cook only desserts, and the Japanese sushi chef who has trained for years in the arcane arts of slicing raw fish.

Lawrence is happiest when he is stationed on salads and starters. "For me, presentation is really important. I love to play around with the dishes to make them look more special. But

it's also vital to concentrate on perfecting the flavours."

The evening finishes long after the guests have been served their petit fours and coffee, as Lawrence and his team turn their attention to the next day's canapes.

Long-term, Lawrence sees himself running his own kosher catering business, giving himself the chance to use the valuable experience he has gained from working in one of London's premier kitchens.

But there is one simchah he won't be catering — his own wedding, which takes place this summer.

"I'm taking the day off for that one. Although I'll be having a good look at the menu, I doubt I'll have much time to eat."

Just like a normal day then.