

Chef Masters League, the First Culinary Competition by Minor Hotels



▲ Minor Hotels' inaugural Chef Masters League, hosted at NH Collection Real Casino de Madrid

July 7, 2026: Minor Hotels celebrated the grand finale of its inaugural Chef Masters League on July 2, bringing together culinary professionals from across the company's global portfolio for its first internal, international culinary competition.

Created by the Food & Beverage Department of Minor Hotels Europe & Americas, the initiative was designed to showcase the company's culinary talent while fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a shared sense of pride among its culinary teams.

The inaugural competition attracted nearly 100 culinary professionals representing 97 hotels across six Minor Hotels brands: NH Hotels, NH Collection, nhow, Anantara, Tivoli, and Avani.

Reflecting the competition's international reach, participants represented 20 nationalities across Europe, the Americas, and Asia, including Spain, Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, India, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, the

Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Portugal, Venezuela, and Austria. Participants also brought significant expertise, averaging nearly 20 years of professional experience.



An Internationally Renowned Judging Panel

Chef Masters League featured a judging panel made up of three leading figures in the international culinary world.

Paco Roncero, the two-Michelin-starred chef behind Paco Roncero Restaurante, located within NH Collection Real Casino de Madrid itself, is one of Spain's foremost representatives of haute cuisine and multisensory gastronomy.

Joining him was Chris Naylor, Director of Food & Beverage Innovation Americas and former Executive Chef of Vermeer restaurant in Amsterdam, who contributed his international expertise and deep understanding of the group's culinary vision. The panel was completed by Roberto Ruiz Vélez, the first Mexican chef to earn a Michelin star in Spain with his Madrid restaurant Punto MX and now consulting chef at Jaiba MX.

A Three-Stage Competition

The competition unfolded in three different stages. During the first phase, called Registration and Original Recipe, nearly 100 candidates submitted an original recipe together with a cost sheet and a detailed step-by-step preparation process. The dishes had to reflect each chef's local identity by incorporating ingredients, techniques, and distinctive characteristics of their regional cuisine.

In the second stage, the semifinals, only nine chefs were selected. They came from Spain, Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Colombia, Finland, and the Netherlands, representing four of the group's brands. At this stage, semifinalists were required to create a new recipe using a limited market list common to all contestants. Their proposals were evaluated live during a Culinary Meet-up by an international jury, which assessed visual appeal, creativity, cost accuracy, scalability across other hotels, and each chef's presentation skills.

The third stage culminated in the grand finale, held on July 2 at NH Collection Real Casino de Madrid, where the three highest-ranked chefs competed for the Chef Masters League title.



Three Finalists, Three Culinary Perspectives

The three finalists represented the diversity, experience, and culinary talent found throughout Minor Hotels.

Gabriele Barrale of Italy, chef at NH Collection Palermo Palazzo Sitano, reached the final with 10 years of culinary experience. The youngest of the three finalists stood out by adapting the ingredients from the market list to pay tribute to traditional Sicilian cooking techniques. Juan Sebastián Rojas Galindo of Colombia, Executive Chef at NH Collection Bogotá WTC Royal, has 15 years of professional experience. His proposal excelled through its use of local ingredients, promotion of traditional Colombian cuisine, and his vision for the culinary industry. Marco Van Rutten of the Netherlands, Executive Chef at Anantara Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky Amsterdam, brought 32 years of experience. He distinguished himself by highlighting local

ingredients and whole-product utilization, demonstrating a high level of skill and mastery of modern culinary techniques.

The Grand Finale: Technique, Creativity, and Pressure

The finale took place live in the Grand Ballroom of NH Collection Real Casino de Madrid, a building constructed at the beginning of the 20th century, designated a Cultural Heritage Site, and regarded as a masterpiece of eclectic architecture.

The challenge was designed to test the technical ability, creativity, and capacity to perform under pressure of the three finalists, who competed individually without assistants.

The task consisted of presenting and elevating three Hotel Classics into culinary works of art: a salad, a sandwich, and a hamburger. Each chef had to reinterpret these dishes from their own perspective while preserving their recognizable essence and demonstrating the ability to transform familiar hotel dining staples into high-end gastronomic creations.

The format required strict presentations at 30-minute intervals, with one dish served every half hour. Each finalist prepared and presented five identical portions of each creation to the judging panel of Paco Roncero, Chris Naylor, and Roberto Ruiz Vélez.

With Chef Masters League, Minor Hotels reinforced its commitment to gastronomy as a strategic pillar of the hotel experience and as a space for innovation, talent, and excellence. The competition highlighted the culinary richness of its teams, the diversity of its brands and destinations, and the ability of its chefs to reinterpret hotel cuisine through a contemporary, international approach deeply connected to local ingredients.

Following an intense day of competition, the judges declared Marco Van Rutten, chef at Anantara Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky Amsterdam, the winner of the first Chef Masters League. His victory recognizes an outstanding performance and a culinary vision capable of combining technical excellence, innovation, and respect for ingredients. A key strength of his concept was its versatility, making it executable at any Minor Hotels property around the world. For all these reasons, Van Rutten becomes the first winner of a competition destined to establish itself as one of the hotel's flagship talent development initiatives.



About Minor Hotels

Minor Hotels is a global leader in the hospitality industry with more than 640 hotels, resorts and branded residences in operation and committed development across 66 countries. The group crafts innovative and insightful experiences through its hotel brands including Anantara, Elewana Collection, The Wolseley Hotels, Tivoli, Minor Reserve Collection, NH Collection, nhow, Avani, Colbert Collection, NH, Oaks, and iStay, as well as a diverse portfolio of restaurants and bars, travel experiences, and spa and wellness brands. With over four decades of expertise, Minor Hotels builds stronger brands, fosters lasting partnerships, and drives business success by always focusing on what matters most to our guests, team members and partners.

Minor Hotels is a proud member of the [Global Hotel Alliance \(GHA\)](#) and recognizes its guests through one unified loyalty program, [Minor DISCOVERY](#), part of GHA DISCOVERY.

Discover our world at [minorhotels.com](https://www.minorhotels.com) and connect with Minor Hotels on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [TikTok](#) and [YouTube](#).

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