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In Conversation with Chef Hugo Attou | Private Chef at Purple Ski



French **Chef Hugo Attou** has been rising through the ranks after he fell in love with cooking during his first placement at a gourmet restaurant in his home town of Niort. After completing four years of rigorous training in 2018, his career really started to take off when Chef Hugo's passion for fine dining led him to work for two Michelin starred restaurants. Now in his first season as private chef for luxury chalet company **Purple Ski** in the French Alps, this young man is eager to please his guests during their luxury stay with fine dining tasting menus and service that is both personal and of the utmost professionalism. At just 24 years of age, Chef Hugo is more serious than ever about his career and he is embracing the chef life in the Alps cooking for up to 14 guests twice a day and there's one more thing - it's just him in the kitchen.

I caught up with **Chef Hugo** whilst his guests were hitting the slopes to find out more about his culinary adventures so far. Discreetly, he shows me around his compact chalet kitchen 'it's big enough for me but it gets pretty tight when I'm plating for 14 guests and the dishes are piling up' - but you wouldn't know it by the food he is serving. I think he feels a sense of freedom from having his own kitchen though, to be the only one in charge of the space and it's become the premises for a sleek operation. It's worth mentioning that Hugo doesn't do it all on his own; the chalet is fully staffed and he has a team of fantastic people who help with service but he is the only one cooking. 'We are a great team here at **Chalet Inoko** - I've been really lucky. I'm sure all the other Purple Ski chalets are just the same.'



Chalet Inoko, Val-d'Isère

But let's go back to how his career started. As a teenager, young Hugo began to feel disillusioned. He says:

'I was losing interest in school and I wasn't feeling productive at all. I was a good student but I just felt that I would be better suited to something else.'

Hugo got lucky when his work experience came up and he found himself working in a gourmet restaurant. When those three weeks were up, Hugo knew he wanted more. He comes from a family of foodies 'we're a family that love to eat', yet not one worked in the culinary industry. His first real taste of cooking was from his grandmothers, especially his Mamie Michelle. He started by taking the plates from the kitchen to the dining table before taking on more of an active role in the cooking. You could say he was tied to their apron strings in the literal sense of the phrase. Hugo started his formal training at the age of 15 and his first two year placement was at L'entracte, a brasserie in Niort where he was lucky enough to have the chef's ear. They were a team of three in the kitchen so the head chef had time to teach Hugo the foundations of cooking. He jumped straight into the following two years of culinary training, a combination of learning which suited him perfectly - three weeks at a gourmet restaurant called Le Plaisir des Sens in Niort and one week at college.



Mamie Michelle, Hugo and his sister Célia making tourtisseaux de Niort

This is France, a country that prides itself on education and 'formation' (training). It took Hugo four long years with few holidays to gain his professional qualifications - as long as a university degree, and in 2017 he was ready to enter the culinary world as a qualified chef. His first job saw Hugo cross the channel to land in London at the The Frog by Adam Handling. The Frenchman and The Frog - fitting right? Newly opened, he'd been put forward for a year abroad program and stepped into their kitchen as commis chef. 'I remember when I got the call, I was on the terrace of the Le Plaisir des Sens and I'd just been grilled by the chef.' An example of how a bad day can turn into a good one, 'Three months later, I handed in my notice and started packing my bags for London.'



Adam Handling Chef Patron of The Frog in Covent Garden, Photo Jason Alfred Palmer

'It was very very hard to learn English at the same time as working in a new restaurant striving for a Michelin star. During those seven months, I saw a lot of colleagues come and go because not everyone could handle the heat. One day, chef Adam noticed that I was actually running the Aperitif course.'

Hugo's efforts earned him a contract but he decided to take some time off and return to France. He didn't set foot in a kitchen, not once, during the entire summer. It was the first break Hugo had had in almost five years. But he'd promised Chef Adam he would be back and true to his word, he returned to the Frog as commis chef and after just two weeks on entrees, he ascended to demi chef de partie. Hugo was just 20 years old but he was ready, he knew what he was doing and wasn't going to stop until he got to the top. Some time later, during a team reshuffle, Hugo stepped up to demi chef de partie on garnishes.

'That's when I really started to love my job. Garnish is considered one of the hardest jobs in a professional kitchen because it's the job that nobody wants. There's so much prep and attention to detail and you have to work as a pair with the chef on meat and fish. What makes it hard is that you've got to stay focused during the whole service, always on time, and it's long. It was really tough at the start, I think it must have broken me at least once but it was worth it because the quality of my work started to take off.'





Baking & pasta making at [La Pomme D'Api](#), Squid Ink Agnolotti making at [The Frog](#)

The story of how Hugo got his next job is in two parts. Luck struck one evening when he greeted a diner and his wife at the Frog. Hugo and his colleagues could tell there was something different about this gentleman - he was giving off an air of *connaissance* with his astute questions and clever observations.

'When the man sussed out I was French, he turned to me for explanations of the menu. Meanwhile, then sous-chef Cleverson Cordeiro was on a mission to uncover this mysterious diner's identity. He discovered it was Michelin star chef Jérémie Le Calvez from [La Pomme d'Api](#) in Brittany. Jérémie loved the restaurant so much he came back the same week.'

A year later in 2019, Hugo received a follow on Instagram from Chef Jérémie followed by a personal message asking Hugo if he could make a reservation for him to which he said yes but that he wouldn't see them as he was leaving. And that's when Hugo's next stroke of luck came into play. As the conversation continued, Jeremie told him one of his chefs had quit and he offered Hugo the position. Hugo was stunned, 'I couldn't believe a Michelin star chef was in my DMs offering me a job'. To seal the deal, he drove to St-Pol-de-Léon in Brittany with his mother and had lunch at [La Pomme d'Api](#) followed by an interview with the chef. 'It went really well, we got on straight away - it was perfect. I met the team and a month later I started the job as chef de partie.' The first few months were a real adjustment. Going from the hustle and bustle of London to a little seaside town with a population of 6000 people was a big shock to the system but Hugo didn't have too much time to think about it as he had a job to do; a job which he held onto for two years.



Chef Jérémie Le Calvez Photographer Ives Quéré

In 2021, Hugo set his sights on London again and this time two Michelin star restaurant Da Terra. Instagram had served him well up until now so he summoned its powers one more time and bravely slid into chef Rafael Cagali's DMs. He offered him a trial at the restaurant for three days and Hugo loved it. Another instagram success. But luck wasn't on his side this time as recent Brexit agreements took away his right to work in the UK. It was a long wait to reach this conclusion but Hugo hated to waste time so he started to host private dinners, cooking for family and friends and he got a real kick out of it. The vibe and the conviviality of this style of cooking where there is an emphasis on hosting and creating an experience for guests really played to his strengths. So he decided to look into private chef opportunities on french soil and this is how his journey with Purple Ski Chalets started. Almost at the end of his first season as Chalet Inoko's private chef, Chef Hugo says he made the right decision. 'It's going really well so far, I've really got into a groove now. I know what works and what doesn't and the guests are loving the food.'



Chalet Inoko dining room

I was curious to know more about his food and what he serves his lucky guests at Chalet Inoko after a long day of skiing.

Q. What is your style of cooking?

I cook classic European food in a Fine dining style which I like to serve as tasting menus. I enjoy using complex techniques with minimal presentation using simple ingredients - just three or four on the plate. I work a lot with purées, gels and jus. And beautiful plates - the plating is almost as important as the food because it's part of the art and drama of the service. I enjoy the challenge of adapting my cooking depending on the guests and their requirements too. Our guests at Purple Ski are served a luxury breakfast, afternoon tea and canapés with three-course dinners in the evening. The menu varies from fine dining to sharing food & local dishes, and I serve a six course tasting menu once a week.



Q. What are your favourite ingredients?

My favourite ingredient is the humble mushroom, there are so many varieties and they're all so different. I love working with all the varieties but my favourites are champignon de Paris and of course, truffles. I'm a fan of vegetables in general, particularly because I don't have a sweet tooth, I'm not such a pâtissier. I also love Timut pepper - it's a peppercorn from Nepal which has a 'grapefruit' flavour which pairs particularly well with coquilles St.Jacques. To be honest, I use it almost always to season my food.



Q. What do you love about your profession?

I have to admit I'm a self-confessed adrenaline junkie - I live for 'good stress', always fully charged. Cooking and a busy service makes me feel like I am flying. I love the fast pace and change of gear required to succeed as a chef. It comes from managing others in the kitchen too. I really believe as chefs, we acquire skills that a lot of people don't have. It teaches you to have a thick skin, deal with almost any stress, keep a cool head and solve any problem. It's always great to get good feedback from guests and nothing puts a smile on my face more than a happy diner who is truly enjoying their food. It might surprise you but I don't tend to work with recipes, I like to cook intuitively. Obviously I don't just throw ingredients onto a plate, I do carefully weigh everything, but my recipes are created organically. I just follow my instinct. Unless it's patisserie. Then I follow the recipe very precisely.

Q. What are your favourite cuisines?

I love Italian, Japanese and French food. Currently, fine dining in Scandinavia is where it's at - they are at the forefront of modern cooking and innovation. On my next trip to Copenhagen, Jordnær is first on my list in the world's 50 best. As a chef, the key and maybe best part of my job is eating out. It's a great way to keep up with the latest trends and get inspiration for new dishes. Food is the most important part of a meal but I also want guests to feel my food is an experience and this is what the best restaurants do.



Husband and wife team Eric & Tina Vildgaard owners of Jordnær, signature dish Rosset Waffle

Q. What are your signature dishes?

My signature dishes are the agnolotti, a pasta dish native to the Savoie region and Piedmont in Italy which I've modernised by adding squid ink and a brown butter. Here are my other dishes so you can feast your eyes on them.

Pictured, 1. Courgette, Basil, Mozzarella 2. Beetroot, Tofu, Cranberry 3. Cod, Pak Choi, Brittany Crab 4. Porcini Tortellini, Truffle, en brodo 5. Prawn Tortellini, Curry, Cockles 6. Sardine, Passion Fruit, Marigold 7. Rhubarb, Beetroot, Timut



Q. Do you source your ingredients locally? I imagine meats and cheese are abundant in Haute Savoie.

So I source my food from Cache 2000, they have been supplying Val-d'Isère's restaurants for over 30 years and have the best ingredients even if it comes at a price. They have fantastic butchers who are very passionate about their produce. La Ferme de l'Adroit is an amazing local farm that produces quality dairy products. Fish can be tricky to get hold of which is why I serve it just once or twice a week to reflect the availability and proximity of the ingredients at my disposal. It's sourced from the local fishmonger who comes to town once a week with the freshest fish.



La Ferme de l'Adroit, Val-d'Isère

Q. Who inspires you?

At the start of my career, I was inspired by three Michelin star chef Alain Passard and his restaurant Arpège in Paris. At the time, he was at the forefront of the vegetarian food movement in fine dining and removed red meat from his menu in favour of the organic vegetables he was growing himself. Fast forward to today and my favourite chefs and the ones I look up to are Jérémie le Calvez & Adam Handling and chef and mentor Paul Lobban who was sous chef and colleague at The Frog. Paul really shaped my mentality around cooking. At The Frog, we really hit it off and he taught me how to be a team player and keep my head down. I wouldn't be where I am now if it wasn't for his mentorship. The chefs with three michelin stars I look up to are Chef Björn Frantzén (owner of Frantzén in Sweden and Zen in Singapore & London) and Chef Clare Smyth of Core by Clare Smyth in London.



Chef Björn Frantzén and Chef Clare Smyth

Q. I noticed you cook a lot with plant-based ingredients. Is this something that is important to you?

I love cooking with vegetables. When I'm preparing for new guests to check in to the chalet, I always feel challenged when there are vegetarians and vegans on the guest list. In fact, the first course I serve to guests is 'La Soupe de Mamie Michelle' - my grandmother's soup which is made with leeks, carrots and potatoes and the guests love it. Another simple element I like to serve is charred vegetables. Score the courgette and cook it on the grill, barbecue or in the pan until it's charred. Then season with salt and olive oil. It's full of flavour and juice.

Q. What have you learnt going from Michelin restaurants to private chef?

You have to know how to adapt because you don't know what style of cooking is going to be the right fit for each guest. Ensuring allergies and dietary requirements are taken into account is also really important to ensure guest satisfaction. You've got to be able to anticipate this so the delivery of fresh food arrives in time. I've really got to think about what to cook for a vegetarian or a vegan so they feel the offering is as special as the meat eaters. What's good is there's less pressure than a restaurant kitchen, no chef shouting or insanely long hours. The downside is you don't learn as much because there isn't a chef above you to teach you new skills so I've got to keep my motivation high and keep on learning. I use my spare time to cook new dishes and practice techniques with the team as my discerning critics.



'My two Michelin stars' Beth Morgan Chalet Manager & Jazmin Fa'ale Assistant Manager

Q. In your experience as a chef, what makes the Purple Ski guest experience so unique?

The team is amazing, we are very tight knit and work amazingly together - I am really lucky to have such a strong start to my first season at Purple Ski. The management at Purple Ski have put a lot of trust in me and they've given me the freedom to run the kitchen my way and serve the food I want to serve as long as guests' appetite for Savoyard food is satisfied. Cheese is very much on the menu. To sum it up, The Purple Ski experience brings luxury hospitality and the feeling of being at home together; a balance which I think we as a team have got down to a T. It's all about making the guests happy. The chalets are incredible for the guests and when they come to stay, we promise them an amazing food offering.

Can you picture waking up to the chef's breakfast every morning, and then feeling like you are dining out every night all from the comfort of your own chalet? I can't say no to that. Not to mention that every chalet is home to its very own wellness space (jacuzzi, swimming pool and sauna) and there's a fleet of chauffeur driven vehicles to take you from your chalet to the pistes. Nothing is too much trouble for Purple Ski and they are really redefining what a luxury ski holiday is. From the food to the service, the experiences and the people, they really do go the extra mile to make their guests stay unforgettable. As for Chef Hugo, he has a bright future ahead of him. I've heard Purple Summer are looking for a chef this season and Hugo Attou might just be the perfect man for the job.

www.purpleski.com

[@purpleski](https://www.instagram.com/purpleski)

[@hugoattou](https://www.instagram.com/hugoattou)



Discover Purple Ski Holidays

Since 1991 Purple Ski has been offering the finest luxury catered ski chalets in Méribel and has recently extended its boutique collection to Courchevel and Val-d'Isère. Known for five-star cuisine and service, the team at Purple Ski ensures their guests have the perfect luxury skiing holiday on and off the slopes.

Each chalet within the bespoke collection – which sleeps from eight up to 15 people – has been carefully hand-picked and offers first-class facilities and a distinctive personality.

All chalets have access to a full team of staff, daily housekeeping, an in-chalet ski and boot fitting service and a private chauffeured minibus, as well as a dedicated concierge service to cater to every guest's wish. From organising private airport and helicopter transfers to restaurant reservations, ski lessons, spa treatments, childcare and the unique experiences which make a holiday extra special, the Purple Ski concierge is always on hand to provide the alpine adventure of a lifetime.

Discover Purple Summer Holidays

Purple Summer offers the same service and cuisine as Purple Ski but in some of the finest luxury villas across the Côte d'Azur and Mallorca.

Our aim is to ensure our guests have the most spectacular holiday, whether they be a family looking for a fun escape around the pool, a group of friends going away for a relaxing retreat, or anything in between.

What makes us special is the emphasis we have always placed on our staff – industry professionals who are all passionate about delivering the very best service possible. Undoubtedly our greatest asset, we believe in the importance of rewarding and looking after them, so in turn they really look after you. The core essence of your Purple Summer holiday, it is our staff who will make your holiday truly remarkable.