



# JANE URQUHART LIMITED

## *The Foodie Bugle*

*The online magazine that tells the whole story of good food and drink*



### Cooks Articles

#### **Cooks on the books.**

by Jane Urquhart • 16th May 2011

Have you ever thought you might like to work as a private cook or chef? Every year, many students from the top cookery schools in the world, Cordon Bleu, Leith's, Tante Marie and Westminster College to name a few, enter their fine world of the rich, the noble and the famous, to source, prepare, cook and serve everyday meals and party feasts in some of the world's most beautiful, and private, properties. The Foodie Bugle asked Jane Urquhart, the owner of one of London's most respected domestic staff agencies, to tell us all about this world. Who exactly are her clients, what sort of cooks are they looking for, and what are the terms and conditions on offer once that exclusive job contract has been signed? Here is what she told us.

#### **Cooks on the books - by Jane Urquhart**

At Jane Urquhart Limited we are always looking for capable cooks or chefs who are creative and who have an interest in healthy and organic recipes and ingredients.

Why are we looking for such elusive experts? Because out there is a world of wealth and prosperity that comes in the form of wonderful private houses, yachts, ski chalets and villas all over the world. In these wonderful places, live people whose privacy and personal space is protected and special. Their main anxiety in finding new staff is to find those who will be almost invisible in their ability to provide wonderful services, such as cooking, cleaning, butler and valeting, to name a few.

Security is often an issue and confidentiality agreements are sometimes completed even before the second interview.

There are four sorts of clients in this elite private world. The traditional employers have always had staff, have always had cooks and live in sometimes faded splendour. Their standards are often old fashioned and staff are always uniformed, working to routines and traditions built up over the years. As time has gone by, they too seek the multi-skilled member of staff but the salary levels in these jobs are not always of the highest and the bonus at Christmas might be more a Christmas pudding rather than a fat cheque. They are lovely to work for and a popular option. Many of these clients offer corporate events in their homes and for a cook or chef this can present quite a challenge. I have one lovely client with her Smallbone 6 door Aga to-die-for kitchen and then next door an industrial stainless steel all singing, all dancing kitchen for entertaining. I rather suspect the cook never gets any chance to put the meringues in the slow oven of the Aga!

People who have recently made money, won money or inherited money are a different type of employer. They pour money into making their homes and chalets the most spectacular in terms of comfort and luxury. They expect their homes to match the best hotels and look for support in giving them freedom to enjoy their wealth. Words such as "flexible working" are common and expectations of staff's energy levels are high which would match the equivalent rewards. They worked hard to make their money in lots of cases and they expect the same from those who work for them.

I remember one such client looking for a good chef, and he hired a different candidate each Friday afternoon and evening for six weeks. The challenge was to create a soup, make a wonderful chicken recipe and satisfy a chocoholic's fantasy. The one who cooked the best food got the job at £50,000 with the summer in the South of France.



