

Press Release

Talent, creativity, taste: Katharina Aichhorn from Brenners Park Hotel in Baden-Baden wins the NEXT CHEF AWARD 2026

Hamburg, 16 March 2026 – Speed, technique, taste and, above all, a genuine passion for cooking once again made the NEXT CHEF AWARD at INTERNORGA 2026 the place to be. For two days, the stage belonged to the talents of tomorrow: 18 international chefs demonstrated just how diverse, creative and future-oriented the cooking profession is. In the grand final Katharina Aichhorn from Brenners Park Hotel in Baden-Baden ultimately prevailed and secured the title of NEXT CHEF 2026. To mark the tenth anniversary of the award, her victory is rewarded with extraordinary opportunities: her own cookbook published by the renowned ZS Verlag (Edel Verlagsgruppe GmbH) publishing house and the chance to develop a menu as a guest chef for Lufthansa Airlines' Business Class.

Six contestants qualified for the final in three thrilling preliminary rounds on 15 and 16 March. On Monday afternoon, they faced off in Hall B6, the venue for **Kitchen Technology & Equipment** at INTERNORGA, for the showdown. It was all about high pressure, thrills and absolute concentration, as every move counted.

The high-calibre jury, chaired by top chef **Johann Lafer** and including **Cornelia Poletto (Restaurant Cornelia Poletto)**, **Marco Müller (Rutz)**, **Thomas Martin (Jacobs Restaurant)**, **Christoph Rüffer (Restaurant Haerlin)**, **Christoph Kunz (KOMU)** and **Tim Bälzer (Restaurant Bullerei)**, were impressed by the high standard of the contestants. 'The NEXT CHEF AWARD demonstrates just how much creativity, passion and courage there is in the up-and-coming generation of chefs. It is precisely these talents that bring fresh impetus to the sector and will shape the restaurant industry of tomorrow,' said **Johann Lafer** in summary.

The path to the title

Things really got underway in the final on 16 March. From the very first slice to the final tasting, precision, intuition and technical skill were key. The task: to recreate Salmon fillet with pistachio-herb crust, Letchó vegetables, arancini filled with pesto, and beurre blanc with pearl onions by **Johann Lafer** as accurately as possible and entirely without a recipe. **Katharina Aichhorn** impressed with a particularly successful execution of the dish and secured the victory. That means they not only receive the title of **NEXT CHEF 2026**, but also the top prize. First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, **Dr Peter Tschentscher**, also attended the event to witness the gripping final, praised the outstanding achievements of the finalists, and congratulated the winner.

Katharina Aichhorn: 'Cooking in front of a jury that has inspired me for years and competing against so many talented chefs at this level was incredibly motivating. I'm really looking forward to publishing my own cookbook and developing a menu for Lufthansa Business Class.' The runners-up also made a strong impression and delivered impressive performances. **Arez Raza** from **Finsterwirt** in Brixen (Italien) receives a high-tech kitchen appliance from **Pacojet**, which opens up new possibilities in haute cuisine. **Sean Paul Blau** from **The Ritz-Carlton** in Wolfsburg won a high-quality **knife set** from **KAI**, which stands for quality and true culinary artisanship.

For ten years now, the **NEXT CHEF AWARD** at INTERNORGA has been a real springboard for young culinary talent. The competition puts the next generation of chefs in the spotlight, offering them a stage to showcase their skills, establish valuable contacts and lay the foundations for their future careers.

About INTERNORGA

INTERNORGA is the leading international trade fair for Hospitality and Foodservice. As an annual meeting place for those industries, it will take place from 13 to 17 March 2026 on the grounds of Hamburg Messe und Congress GmbH. National and international exhibitors will present their products, trends and innovations for the entire foodservice and hospitality market to trade visitors. The trade show is accompanied by international conferences, an extensive supporting programme, and innovative industry competitions.

Further information can be found on the website www.internorga.com and on the INTERNORGA [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#) social media channels.



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