





At your service

Modern butlers are highly trained service professionals who are expected to fulfil a variety of household roles. Crème de la Crème pays a visit to the Australian Butler School.

By Gabriel Knowles
Photos: Matt Reed

Batman relied on his faithful manservant, Alfred. Captain Haddock in *The Adventures of Tintin* maintained Nestor to keep Marlinspike Hall in check. And Bertie Wooster would have been utterly lost without Jeeves, the most famous “gentleman’s gentleman” of them all. But these days the role of the butler has changed so much that they are no longer confined to the pages of fiction or the castles of the super-wealthy. Forget the black tails and white gloves - the humble butler has evolved.

Pamela Spruce, the principal of the Australian Butler School in Braidwood, NSW, claims that an increasing number of people rely on highly skilled service professionals to manage their daily lives. “Running a house is like running a small business so we believe they have to be multi-skilled professionals.” Spruce says. “The modern butler has to do whatever it takes to get the job done.” It’s not uncommon for today’s butler to be pressing trousers in the morning, sailing a yacht in the afternoon before whipping up a three-course dinner.

Effectively therefore the contemporary butler is a multi-functional professional. He or she is expected to do the job of security expert, nanny, valet, chef and personal assistant all in one. Indeed, it’s little wonder that demand for good butlers is rising. There are only 50,000 professional butlers in the

world and a skilled one can take care of numerous responsibilities for less money than it would cost to outsource each individual job.

Rookie butlers earn upwards of \$60,000 a year before rising well into six figures by the time they become a senior butler. As a result it’s a competitive industry. Being accepted into the \$5000, four-week course at the Australian Butler School is more than a matter of simply stumping up the cash. Prospective students must also pass a rigorous interview process to ensure they’re up to the task. Out of the hundreds of candidates who apply to do the course each year only 24 are accepted. “There must be a genuine desire and the disposition to help others,” says Spruce. “They must have management skills and an eye for detail while a sense of humour is absolutely essential.”

Gerhard Engleitner fits the bill perfectly. Impeccably attired and easy-going he’s come all the way from Austria to study at Braidwood after a decade spent as an in-flight chef. He was attracted to the line of work after talking to a butler for a royal family from the Middle East. What appealed to him in particular was the prospect of providing a specifically tailored service. “In a hotel or a restaurant you have different people (to serve) all the time so you can’t settle into a routine and focus on one person.” Engleitner explains.

“The school teaches you the formal way to do things, but ultimately if the boss says he wants to eat his steak with a spoon and chopsticks then that goes. Whatever the boss says is the correct way. If the boss wants to drink his Penfolds Grange out of a paper cup then he can. Personally I would cringe, but it’s his money so he can drink it out of the bottle for all I care!”

Engleitner already has potential employers circling. “There are a few options but I can’t say anything about them. Everything is very hush-hush because some of the people looking for staff are very high profile.”

Indeed the levels of discretion employed by butlers seem akin to that of a secret agent. Despite *Crème de la Crème*’s enquiries most students at the school were unwilling to divulge too many details lest a future employer think they are loose-lipped. “What happens inside the house stays inside the house,” Engleitner says. “I’m sure we’ll see things that would boggle your mind but you’ll never know.”

The Australian Butler School is located in Braidwood, around three hours’ drive south of Sydney.

www.australianbutlers.com.



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