

ENTREPRENEURS

Foodie who hit the ground running

Annabel Palmer talks to David Moore, the restaurateur behind London's Pied a Terre

THE GLOBAL restaurant industry is forecast to increase in size by 7.2 per cent over the next three years, rising from total revenues of \$2.45 trillion (£1.53 trillion) in 2011 to \$3.48 trillion by the end of 2016. And in the UK, the industry has seen a dramatic transition over the past two decades, defined by the rise of the now-ubiquitous gastro pub and growing number of Michelin-starred restaurants.

A prominent figure on this thriving scene is David Moore. In case you have yet to visit his restaurants, thought "Pied a Terre" was either a turn of phrase or designer shoe brand, or missed his appearances on the BBC's *The Restaurant*, Moore is founder of Pied a Terre – one of only a handful of restaurants in London to hold two Michelin stars.

FROM SEASIDE TO SOHO

There are a number of reasons why the BBC may have approached Moore. The first is Pied a Terre's long-standing history – founded 22 years ago, it has survived fire and financial crisis to retain its home at 34 Charlotte Street. But Moore himself has also come a long way since his childhood in Monaghan, Ireland, where his mother built a small guest house into a hotel with over 30 rooms.

The family left Ireland in 1977 and landed in Blackpool, where Moore went to catering college (twice). But having grown up wanting to be a chef, he quickly grew disillusioned with the Blackpool hospitality scene – having found himself "making orange juice from powder at a seaside hotel". Fortunately, he soon landed a job at Raymond Blanc's *Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons*, by "somewhat cheeky" means.

"I had been told by my former boss (at Michelin-starred Yorkshire restaurant *The Box Tree*) that to get anywhere in the catering industry, I had to get to *Le Manoir*. So I applied for a job there as a waiter. My interview was to take place at 3pm, so I went earlier, had lunch, and at ten to three, asked the manager to join me. I said how fine the meal was, and how I would fit in there nicely. I walked into the job."

Moore has had this bullish attitude throughout his career. At 24, he realised he could progress no further at *Le Manoir* and decided to open a restaurant of his own. But back in 1991, did he think there was a market for it? He admits that, at the time, London restaurants lacked sophistication, and the environment wasn't as restaurant-friendly as it is now. "Restaurants today are the new theatre. They offer status; people will often boast of 'doing a Michelin star last week'. As for the quality of dining experience, London today is bettered only by New York."

GETTING CREATIVE

So how did the 24-year old assistant restaurant manager convince investors to support his venture? "If there were London telephone numbers on book-



David Moore thinks restaurants are a "sexy investment"

ings at *Le Manoir*, I would get to know those customers, and tell them about my restaurant idea." With his business partner and Pied a Terre's original chef Richard Neat, he raised £189,000 from 46 investors. Moore thinks they came on board because "restaurants are a sexy investment. Investors didn't have to put in a lot – each investment ranged in value from £2,000 to £20,000 – and they have now helped build one of London's longest-standing Michelin-starred restaurants."

And so, Pied a Terre opened in 1991 on the site of a former Indian restaurant. But while Moore and Neat cracked fundraising, they struggled with the marketing, with none of the social media channels available today. Instead, the duo wrote letters, printed postcards, and relied on positive broadsheet reviews. It seemed to work: business poured in during the first year.

BUMPY ROAD

Nonetheless, the industry is a tough one, and Pied a Terre was far from immune. The shoestring budget meant Moore had just one waiter helping him during the first three months; today Pied a Terre has 38 members of staff. Six days a week, Moore and Neat were up at dawn to receive deliveries, into bed at 2am at the end of a busy shift, and spent their Sundays doing the books. The pair were the "best of friends – until we first turned the key in the door of the restaurant."

And despite Pied a Terre's roaring suc-

cess initially (it was awarded its first Michelin star after just 13 months), it has had its ups and downs. By year three, it hadn't received the second star it was expecting, and "it was starting to look like the business hadn't grown, or done anything new". In 2004, a fire broke out, forcing the restaurant to close for ten months. But Moore says the tragedy came with a silver lining. "It led me to pivot the business. After, I delegated running the restaurant to my assistant manager, which allowed me to open *L'Autre Pied*, be part of *The Restaurant*, and become involved in the London Cocktail Club. You never normally have time to sit back and completely rethink how you run your

I have never been afraid to hire talented people. And when I do, I let them get on with it

business."

But just months after *L'Autre Pied* opened, recession struck. In 2010, business slid by 9 per cent; the following year, by 12 per cent. With the number of restaurant visits in Britain falling from 62.7bn in 2008 to 60.6bn in 2011, how did Pied a Terre survive? Not a single expense was spared, Moore says. The kitchen was given a target of saving 10 per cent on its gas bill, cleaners were

cancelled, waiters became the handy-men. Since April this year, however, his business has seen positive trading.

NEW BEGINNINGS

But others have not been so lucky. Moore heard stories of restaurateurs struggling, and a close friend was forced to close his establishment in North Finchley after losing all his mid-week business. Moore thinks the BBC stint helped, along with the mailing list – now with 22,000 addresses – that he has spent months growing. And he is diversifying: his latest venture, *Pieds Nus* – a pop-up restaurant centred around food that requires little or no cooking – is opening in London on 9 October.

Moore thinks his businesses have been successful for two reasons. First, "I work bloody hard to make sure everything we do is good". Secondly, "I employ people who are better than me. And then I let them do their jobs – I don't micro-manage". So would he don the chef whites himself? "I loved helping out in the kitchen, but I lack the discipline to be a chef," he says. Perhaps he isn't cut out for it. Unlike some of the chefs who grace our television screens, Moore is polite, charming, and our conversation is expletive-free.

I have one final question for the man who could dine on Michelin-starred cuisine every night if he wished: what is his guilty pleasure? "After a few drinks, I have been known to enjoy Chicken McNuggets. With curry sauce."

CV DAVID MOORE

Company name: Pied a Terre and L'Autre Pied

Company turnover: Joint turnover £4.5m

Founded: 1991 (Pied a Terre) and 2007 (L'Autre Pied)

Number of staff: 38 at Pied a Terre; 24 at L'Autre Pied

Job title: Boss

Age: 49

Born: Monaghan, Eire

Lives: Central London

Studied: Hotel and Catering

Management in Blackpool

Drinking: White Burgundy

Eating: I love all things raw. Steak

tartare with smoked eel on the

menu at *Pieds Nus* is my all-time

favourite dish

Reading: John Saturnall's *Feast*,

by Lawrence Norfolk

Favourite business book: I like

Malcolm Gladwell's books

Talents: Ability to spot talent.

Tenacious and hard-working

Motto: Do our best every day

First ambition: To be a millionaire

by 30

Heroes: Margaret Thatcher,

Richard Branson

Awards: More Michelin stars than

you could shake a stick at. Four

rosettes with AA