

## THE RICHNESS OF RESTAURANTS

**How identity is explored through eating out**

**The inspiring diversity of restaurants**

**How restaurants use stories to sell themselves**

**Innovation trends within restaurants:**

**Make and Grow**

**Health (of the consumer, of society, of the planet)**

**Fluidity, Creativity and Humour**

My name's Jenny Linford. I'm a freelance food writer, who's been writing about food for over 20 years. I'm here today in my capacity as General Editor of the book 1001 Restaurants You Must Experience Before You Die, part of a successful series published around the globe.

I wanted to explain to you the concept behind the book, as this is relevant to the themes I'll be discussing. This is a very different book from other food guides, such as say the Michelin guides, as it has a much broader base for inclusion. To begin with, it is an international book, with entries from countries from around the world, from Finland to New Zealand. I needed in-depth knowledge and gathered an expert team of contributors based around the globe. The phrase 'Restaurants You Must Experience' shaped the content of the book. My brief to the team of knowledgeable contributors around the world was to suggest restaurants which offered a special, particular experience, and often that was to do with national identity, with food a way of expressing that. One of the refreshing things about the guide, was that the restaurant didn't have to be grand to be included, so for Britain we have quintessential working man's caff E. Pellicci in Bethnal Green, founded in 1900 by Priamo Pellicci and still run by the same Italian family, listed by English Heritage because of its décor – a place where artists such as Gilbert and George sit side by side with workers fuelling up for a day on the

building site. The Indian entries, by Marryam Reshi, restaurant reviewer for the Times of India, included both the splendid AD 1135, in a Rajastani fort and Swati Sanacks, offering street food in no-frills surroundings in Mumbai.

## HOW IDENTITY IS EXPLORED THROUGH EATING OUT

The richness of national cuisines was something that struck me working on the book, how important they are to people in shaping identity.

Cuisines are shaped by elements including geography, climate, the ingredients which can be grown in that habitat. For example, oysters from the waters off Colchester, praised by the Romans, can still be eaten freshly harvested by the sea at the Company Shed on Mersea Island, run by a 7<sup>th</sup> generation oyster farmer. Restaurants offer an effective way of experiencing national identities – think back to holidays and the way in which meals eaten there form part of the memories. 'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are,' said the French epicure Brillat-Savarin. He could have said 'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you where you are.' There are foods which are indelibly associated with countries, which have become totemic – pasta with Italy, sushi with Japan, the hamburger with America. street food stalls in Singapore and Malaysia, where the warm tropical climate allowed a culture of eating outdoors to thrive;

At the high end level, there has been a rise of restaurants seeking to present a sense of place in a profound way:

Rene Redzepi of Noma is a key figure in this movement. When he was offered Noma by Claude Meyer, in North Atlantic House, a cultural centre, his brief was to express Nordic,

especially North Atlantic, cuisine. In Redzepi's words, 'My view was that we had the chance to create our own way of expressing ourselves, our own signature.' This took him on a quest to connect, in a new way, with the natural environment, with the place around him. 'I realized that we had to exploit the seasons in a better way, so that you could only get a particular dish here and now. We should explore the extremes of nature, seek out the thousand or more species of edible fungi, the many wild plants, roots and sea-shore plants. That became the embryo of an idea.' Instead of relying on default luxuries, many of them French or Mediterranean in origin, such as foie gras, truffles or traditional balsamic vinegar, Redzepi offered dishes such as Pork Neck and Bullrushes, Violets and Malt or Bird Wood Dessert, created with a poetic creativity from the Scandinavian landscape.

In Brazil, chef Alex Atala, with his acclaimed restaurant D.O.M. in Sao Paulo, has made a name for himself by exploring the riches of the Amazon, bringing wild ingredients to the table. Atala had trained and worked as a chef in Europe and when he returned to Brazil and set up his own restaurant he had to find a way of expressing his sense of Brazilian identity. He did this in a number of ways. A strand in his cooking is to take humble, everyday Brazilian ingredients such as manioc or tapioca and use them in elegant dishes, such as his Heart of Palm Fettuccine Carbonara. The headline grabbing aspect of his cooking has been his use of Amazonian foods, many of them barely known within Brazil itself, let alone outside it. To find them, Atala – a tall giant of a man – goes on expeditions to the Amazon, talking to the indigenous tribespeople, learning from them, bringing back extraordinary ingredients such as huge river fish, suava ants which taste of lemongrass, a

herb called jambu which produces a sensation in the mouth like electricity.

There is also much playing with identity in restaurants. Massimo Bottura, of L'Osteria Francese in Modena, Italy plays with the traditions of Italian cuisine, looking at it, in his own phrase 'through the eyes of a mischievous child', creating dishes such as Memory of a Mortadella Sandwich, a mortadella foam with a square of toasted bread laced with lard or Five Ages of Parmigiano Reggiano.

A number of American restaurants, reflecting the immigrant history of a comparatively young nation, play with the idea of mixed heritage. David Chang of Momofuku, New York, drew on his own Korean American heritage to create dishes such as his trademark Bacon Dashi, using a salty, smoky ingredient widely available at a good quality in America rather than the traditional dried, smoked bonito used to make dashi in Japan. At Benu in San Francisco, Corey Lee is also exploring his Korean heritage, fusing Asian and French cooking with modern techniques in masterly style, creating dishes such as Thousand-Year-Old Quail Egg, his take on a traditional Chinese delicacy, regarded as hard for Westerners to enjoy because of its strong ammonia flavour.

## **THE INSPIRING DIVERSITY OF RESTAURANTS**

Having written about food for over 20 years, one of the reasons why I continue to be fascinated by it is that, in a globally connected

world of international brands - where so much is becoming increasingly homogenous - food offers diversity. The simple concept of making money by selling food to customers has so many expressions. I've already touched on the range of national restaurants within 1001 Restaurants.

## **REGIONALITY**

Within national cuisines, regionality remains a powerful force – the traditional, Mediterranean dishes of Provence, focussed on olive oil, are very different from the dairy-based dishes of Brittany in the north. Italy offers a prime example of regionality. In order to represent this one country I had numerous contributors, experts on Emilia Romagna, the Veneto, Sicily, Puglia.

America, as befits a continent, has huge regional differences – the splendidly named, much-loved Dotty's Dumpling Dowry in Madison, Wisconsin, reflecting the state's dairy and agricultural roots in down-to-earth fashion with its famous burgers made from beef sourced from local farmers. Chef Sean Brock at Husk in Charleston has made his name by exploring local food in great depth, highlighting the richness of Southern cuisine.

## **SPECIALISATION**

In Japanese culture, where the concept of the 'master' is revered, where having depth of knowledge and experience is valued, one finds restaurants specialising in one type of dish – such as baby turtle or glazed barbecued eel. In South-East Asia, the hawker stall tradition of street food vendors each specialising in a dish continues to thrive. In a food-obsessed nation like Singapore, everyone will have their own favourites, devoting much time to discussing where to go to find the best laksa or the best chicken rice.

## **RANGE OF EXPERIENCE**

Restaurants range from down-to-earth, cheap places to the luxurious and eye-wateringly expensive, such as French chef Alain Ducasse's signature restaurant Le Louis XIV in Monaco, where diners eat in lavish surroundings.

One of the refreshing aspects to 1001 Restaurants, was that the restaurant didn't have to be grand to be included, so for Britain we have quintessential working man's caff E. Pellicci in Bethnal Green, founded in 1900 by Primo Pellicci and still run by the same Italian family, listed by English Heritage because of its décor – a place where artists such as Gilbert and George sit side by side with workers fuelling up for a day on the building site. The Indian entries, by Marryam Reshi, restaurant reviewer for the Times of India, included both the splendid AD 1135, in a Rajastani fort and Swati Sanacks, offering street food in no-frills surroundings in Mumbai.

## **HOW RESTAURANTS USE STORIES TO SELL THEMSELVES**

Restaurants are about so much more than the food they serve – the service, the welcome, the surroundings or setting, the ambience. Memorable restaurants often have a story attached to them – it might be cosy, comforting one of a family business, welcoming back generations of customers or cutting-edge sci-fi experience offered by Paul Pairet at Shanghai's multi-sensory Ultraviolet. Fifteen in Clerkenwell in London gains interest by the fact that it was set up by young chef Jamie Oliver, in the early days of his career, to offer an opportunity to disadvantaged youngsters.

The rise of the chef as hero or (more rarely) heroine of the story has been a striking one. Chefs have come out from the kitchen – with television series such as Masterchef bringing them into people’s homes and social media amplifying that process.

We have the cult of the personality chef. Marco Pierre White achieved 3 Michelin stars at the age of 33 – at the time the youngest chef ever to do so. Long after Harvey’s, the London restaurant with which he made his name has closed, has been able to trade not just on his culinary talent but on his reputation as a formidable, hard-to-please person, the man who made Gordon Ramsay cry. Gordon Ramsay, of course, in his turn, has developed a public persona as a hard swearing, perfection obsessed alpha male.

We have also seen the character of the obsessed chef-geek – Ferran Adria of elBulli, Heston Blumenthal of the Fat Duck and Adoni Aduriz of Mugaritz being prime examples. Intelligent, thoughtful chefs – genuinely fascinated by exploring and pushing the boundaries of cooking and the restaurant experience.

We also have the Chef as Artist – the sushi master in the film Jiro Dreams of Sushi obsessed with perfection. Restaurants such as Sojiki Nakagashi in Kyoto in Japan, where the food is an expression of his personality, craft and skill.

Rarity adds to the allure – those chefs who rather than expand their business, roll out chains, offer just a handful of diners the chance to experience something special achieve a cult status. elBULLi was the famous example of this, opening just six months in a year, with over 2 million people chasing 8,000 places and the chance to taste Adria’s creations.

## **INNOVATION TRENDS WITHIN RESTAURANTS**

### **Make and Grow**

#### **Make**

In an age when mass-produced goods are widely available and often remarkably affordable, when technology allows access to so much – whether images or music or words – so easily, we have the rise in appeal of the hand-made, the allure of crafted things. This is very apparent in the world of food, the word ‘artisan’ is widely seen. While with the Modernist movement in restaurants we have seen a fascination with the science of cooking – the use of cutting-edge techniques and ingredients – we are also seeing a huge interest in craft of food. Many chefs have embraced previously forgotten or vanishing food skills, from making sourdough bread and butter to taking up charcuterie or smoking foods. At Faviken in Sweden, in a notoriously remote location, chef Magnus Nilsson exemplifies this craft of food approach, hunting, fishing and foraging, then butchering, hanging, curing and preserving. The cooking is done over direct heat and he doesn’t use thermometers, expecting instead that he and his staff should know by touch, sight and smell when the food is ready.

#### **Grow**

This quest for connectivity to the environment has also seen the rise of ‘chef as farmer’: Dan Barber of Blue Hill at Stone Barns in New York state. In the UK, British chef Simon Rogan of L’Enclume in Cumbria, frustrated by the difficulty of sourcing decent radishes, began growing his own vegetables and has set up a farm near his famous restaurant, proud

of the flavour of his carrots. This is not just a rural phenomenon. Chefs in London, such as Robin Gill of The Dairy in Clapham, have set up rooftop gardens allowing them to harvest herbs and salad leaves and keep their own bees. Rene Redzepi has announced recently that he is re-inventing Noma, creating a farm.

#### **Health:**

##### **Of the consumer**

##### **Of the society**

##### **Of the planet**

##### **Of the consumer**

There is a growing realisation that what we eat affects our health. One can see the shift by looking at the history of Britain's Institute of Food Research at the Norwich Research Park, which traces its origins to research institutes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In its early days, spanning two world wars and issues of food shortages, it did key research into preserving staple foods such as bananas. From the 1960s onwards as the UK saw the industrialisation of farming and the rise of food processing, the Institute did important work into food safety, so that despite the lengthening of the food chain from raw ingredient through many stages to a cooked chill meat, food was safe to eat. Significantly, the Institute's recent remit is to focus on food and health, with ambitious programs to chart, for example, the human gut in all its complexity and gain a better understanding of the 'healthy' bacteria within it. The rise of allergies is seeing the market for 'free from' foods rise – gluten-free cakes, nut-free meals. As we learn more about foods which are beneficial

for health, that will influence the foods which are offered in restaurants.

#### **Of the society**

##### **LOCAL:**

The idea of buying locally, supporting local food producers and cutting down on food miles continues to have traction.

##### **WASTE:**

There is a sense of unease in continuing to consume the way we do, at the amount of waste in our food system. Silo, a zero-waste restaurant in Brighton, opened last year, sourcing whole foods directly from local producers, using recycled materials and complete with a compost machine, to transform food scraps from the restaurant into compost with which to grow more food.

##### **Of the planet**

#### **HOW DO WE FEED A GROWING POPULATION?**

Insects as an important source of nutrition, already eaten in many parts of the world, is something which is gaining traction, with restaurant chains such as Wahaca offering insects on their menus.

##### **VEG-CENTRIC**

There is also unease over the amount of energy and grain taken to produce meat - reflected in the rise of the veg-centric menu. French chef Alain Passard at L'Arpege in Paris was an early pioneer of this, offering exquisite – and expensive – vegetarian meals and more and more chefs are offering imaginative dishes, among them Bruno Loubet at Grain Store in London.

##### **Fluidity,**

##### **Creativity,**

##### **Humour**

## **Fluidity**

There is a noticeable blurring of boundaries on many fronts when it comes to eating out. The rigidity of French haute cuisine – that three Michelin-starred model which so many chefs have aspired to achieve for so many decades – is being challenged. Formality, pomp and circumstance are being replaced by informality and hospitality even at the highest levels - New York's Eleven Madison Park very influential in this respect. In London at the Berkeley Hotel, Marcus Wareing re-branded his restaurant to Marcus, to be on emblematic 'first name terms' with his customers. The nomadic spirit of street food, the energy of pop ups and supper clubs – chefs are looking at these. The Fat Duck Restaurant did a 'pop-up' in Australia, Noma went to Japan and is off to Australia.

'beach' of white sand and seaweed while listening to the sounds of the sea on an ipod.

## **Creativity**

Great chefs are creative and we live in an age when their creativity is allowed to flourish. The traditional rigid canon of great dishes has been exchanged for an adventurousness.

## **Humour**

Good food is pleasurable and enjoyable. There is a sense of fun in restaurants now . At Joe Beef in Montreal, Canada, the chefs Frederic Morin and David McMillan offer a fusion of American and French food, noted for dishes such as Double Down, based on a Kentucky Fried Chicken classic, sandwiching smoked cheddar and bacon between deep-fried foie gras rather than chicken breasts. At the Fat Duck, in Bray, Heston Blumenthal , delights in teasing diners by offering dishes such as savoury ice lollies, looking like beloved childhood favourites. His famous dish Sounds of the Sea requires the diner to eat a