More, more, more!

16 Feb 2010 by Nick Lander/FT

When I walked into More, a five-minute walk east from London Bridge station en route to Tower Bridge, chef Theodore Kyriakou was standing in almost the same position as I had seen him in for the past 15 years, albeit in several very different locations.

He was by an open range in a striking red and white interior, rocking back on his heels, concentrating on the ingredients in his frying pan and quietly explaining what he was doing to two cooks, two waiters and his long-time business partner, Paloma Campbell. Most surprisingly, he was wearing glasses, usually a major obstacle for a professional chef as they steam up so quickly.

This was not, however, one of the exciting fish dishes Kyriakou had created when he opened the first Livebait restaurant in 1995 near Waterloo station before introducing the capital to his highly authentic Greek dishes in 1999 by opening The Real Greek in Hoxton, an area then virtually off the map but now packed with bars, restaurants and art galleries. Both of these establishments grew into chains of restaurants but neither he nor Campbell have had any connection with them for some years.

Instead, Kyriakou was putting the finishing touches to a Roman dish of semolina gnocchi with brussel sprouts and a melted fontina cheese sauce that was going to be on his new menu the following week. Their new restaurant More is far more European than their previous two restaurants, reflecting his Greek and her Spanish backgrounds. More also provides many of those who work nearby with that quintessential English pick-me-up, a cooked breakfast.

His response to my question, 'What is More?' was engagingly simple, at least initially. 'It's a restaurant that's open from 7 am to 11 pm. But as I hope the name implies, what we are trying to combine are the 10 tables in the restaurant with a dozen seats at the bar and three windows at the front from which we serve a breakfast or take away lunch menu, all from this one kitchen. Although', he added with a smile, 'in the nine months we've been here, the weather hasn't yet been warm enough for all three windows to be open simultaneously.'

His cooking skills and Campbell's engaging manner have underpinned their distinctive record of establishing two original and very different restaurants before successfully selling them both. In each case Kyriakou spotted an inexpensive location in busy but neglected areas and then kept costs to a minimum. At the original Livebait, which cost £65,000 in total, he grouted the 8,500 tiles in the kitchen himself, thereby, he joked, at least learning another profession should the restaurant have failed.

Having consulted at The Aegean restaurant in Shanghai and sailed the Aegean to write the book *A Culinary Voyage round the Greek Islands*, Kyriakou returned to London a year ago to look for another inexpensive site at which they could compensate for what they had come to realise was any restaurant's financial black hole: the periods before lunch and between lunch and dinner when all the kitchen staff are on site but most restaurants take no money.

When Kyriakou spotted the bailiffs serving notice on what was formerly a café, he contacted the landlords, encouraged by the fact that 20,000 people work in the office buildings directly opposite, and More began to take shape.

And while they both hoped that they were developing an establishment that would meet the broader needs of their customers, they also realised that they would have to spend far more than they had done in the past to ensure that More's running costs remain reasonable. £300,000 was spent on a 52 sq metre site where as much as possible in the kitchen uses green energy: the fridges, the filters above the cooking range, and induction hobs, rather than gas, which only heat up when a pan is put on them. The consequences are utility bills down by 60% and a chef who can wear glasses to cook in.

The challenge of executing an all-day menu obviously excites Kyriakou, as he spoke enthusiastically of cooking 80 bacon sandwiches on busy Friday mornings; watching six pans on the go, each bubbling with porridge; and supplying nearby offices with their working lunches. But his indomitable style is still obvious in a complex risotto of prawns and sorrel; a slow-cooked lamb shoulder with almonds, saffron and cumin; and sea bass with Swiss chard and anchovy pesto (all main courses are under £15). His interpretation of a cherry, pistachio and almond strudel with pomegranate molasses and

cherry ice cream is, regrettably, not always on the menu but is exceptional.

Kyriakou and Campbell believe that More is well on its way but are also acutely aware of quite how much remains to be done. The proximity of a take away section to where customers are sitting down at smart tables with waiter service, for example, has not yet been accepted as easily as they had expected.

But in several respects, what the pair reported was that, regardless of their past experience and success, increased competition and the current economic climate make the restaurant business very different from what it used to be. Campbell has held a succession of early-evening events to introduce More to those who work nearby. Each trading week is unpredictable, even if Monday, traditionally quiet, happens to be busy. Customers are far more vocal and demanding, while the kitchen has to be more accommodating. And while Campbell quite enjoys the haggling over price that now seems to be a part of finalising an order to supply an office with a buffet lunch, it was not something she was anticipating. It makes a difference to their income that hardly anyone drinks wine at lunch while they make no charge for the filtered water they supply. And the stimulus to bookings that used to result from favourable reviews, in print or via the internet, does not last as long as it used to.

Older and wiser perhaps, but Campbell and Kyriakou are, however, no less committed.

www.moretooleystreet.com