

How to name a restaurant

9 Sep 2012 by Nick Lander

Each profile in [The Art of the Restaurateur](#) is followed by a relevant rumination on one aspect of the restaurant business. In the book, [Maguy Le Coze's profile](#) is followed by this consideration of 'Restaurants and their names'.

Gilbert and Maguy Le Coze (pictured here by Nigel Parry) may have been young and naïve when they first opened for business 40 years ago but their restaurant began life with one great advantage – its unforgettable name, Le Bernardin.

This is a name that fits all the criteria any restaurateur could possibly want. It is short; easy to pronounce in either French or English; it has an intriguing air to it; it is rooted in something more than just a restaurant, the monastic order in this case, as well as having the very personal overtone of the connection to a song their father sang to them as children. As a result, this name has worked equally successfully on both sides of the Atlantic, a phenomenon that does not necessarily always apply to French names.

And in two respects, the name Le Bernardin is even more fashionable today than it was originally. Names incorporating the definite article, such as The Modern in New York or The Wolseley in London, have become increasingly common after a couple of decades during which this style has been neglected. And secondly, over the past decade the use of the word restaurant in the title has tended to disappear as it tends to convey expense.

Restaurateurs, I know, spend a great deal of time thinking about the names for the businesses to which they intend to devote so much time, energy and care.

The restaurant I took over had been called L'Escargot Bienvenu since it first opened in 1927 and I knew I had to change this name. It was too much of a mouthful. As 'the welcome snail' meant nothing to me, I reckoned it would mean even less to my customers; and I wanted something that would convey that this long-established restaurant was now under new, and much younger management. A great deal of thought was put into lists of possible names, all of which were unsatisfactory.

Then, as so often, my mother came good. I had gone home for Friday night dinner during which she suddenly said, "Why don't you just shorten it to L'Escargot?"

It took a few months for the brilliance of what she said to become obvious. Not just was this word much shorter and easier to pronounce but I also realised that by reopening an establishment with a history I was tapping into an enormous well of goodwill that still existed in London for L'Escargot Bienvenu.

Equally important was the fact that the snail symbol was such a striking motif for my designer, Tom Brent, to make a feature of. Not just on the carpets but also on the bills; the match boxes (no longer an issue for restaurateurs, but I do recall having to order 10,000 at a time as they were manufactured in Japan); the business cards; and even on the neck and main labels of our bottles of house red, white and champagne.

But the importance of my mother's advice only really struck home once we opened for business. L'Escargot was short; easy to pronounce even for anyone without any knowledge of French; and followed a rule that I have since learnt is incredibly important for anyone answering the phone. A restaurant's name must not sound ridiculous or make the person answering the phone self-conscious as they do so.

The right name has to be snappy, relatively easy to remember and distinctive, and a name, of course that is not used by anyone else.

Many of the restaurateurs in this book have managed to find such names: the words Blue Smoke definitely convey barbecue; Eataly could only be about one particular country's food and wine; the capital letter, M, has proved the unmissable, striking and successful logo for restaurants in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing; Nobu is the equally memorable abbreviation of the chef's name as well as, subsequently, coming to represent a country's style of cooking;

St John is a street with its historic association to a nearby Smithfield Market renowned for its meat; while Zuni, once originally an Amerindian tribe, is today a corner building into which the bright California sun always seems to shine.

The other increasingly important factor for the most successful names is that they stand alone, that they don't need the addition of words such as bar, café or restaurant to explain what they are. This is partly because to manage increasingly high fixed costs, most notably rents and business rates, these different roles are being absorbed within the same building, as breakfast gives way to a café, on either side of lunch, then a bar and finally a place for dinner.

But it is also because today's customers want so much more from their favourite restaurants: a place to rest, to work and to play as well as to eat and drink well and to be recognised and to be made welcome.

One short, easy-to-remember name that will do all this will never be that easy to find. But while choosing a restaurant name it is definitely well worth listening to what your mother has to say as well, perhaps, as trying to recall some of the songs your father sang to you as a child.