

Family values

From divorce to succession nightmares, keeping a restaurant business in the family is not without its pitfalls - but those relatives that get it right can achieve extraordinary things

Bast and Sylvi, the Mitchell family at The Queen Vic, The Supreme's illustrated chef-entrepreneur Arte Bacco, TV would have us believe that hospitality businesses operated by loved ones are doomed to fail. Yet in the real world there are some shining examples of what families can achieve together in the business.

Skilled chefs and restaurants are naturally inclined to pass down their skills to their offspring. Often the next generation will be pleased to translate into an extraordinary dedication to the craft that allows them to replicate and, in some cases, surpass the achievements of their parents.

Fine-dining dynasties such as the Roux and the Troigros family in France have managed to maintain their Michelin ratings for decades.

Great artists are easily prone to creative collaboration. As such, cutting-edge kitchens are often run collaboratively by two people at equal seniority, unless they're related. Two of the kitchens – and perhaps more importantly the development kitchens – of restaurants in the top 10 on our World's 50 Best Restaurants list are overseen by close relatives. Brothers Joan and Jordi Roca head up the kitchen at El Celler de Can Roca in Girona, Spain, currently ranked at number two, and father-and-daughter team Juan Mari Arzak and Elena Arzak Espina cook and develop dishes side-by-side at Arzak in San Sebastián, Spain.

Further down the list, father and son Michel and Sébastien Bras cook together at their eponymous

restaurant in Laguiole, France. Closer to home, the kitchen at Bristol's Casamia restaurant is run by two young brothers, Jonny and Peter Sanchez Iglesias. "When we work together there's a connection, we understand what each other is doing," says Jonny, the eldest of the two. "It's like a sixth sense. In the development kitchen we tend to come up with our own ideas but after that it's a collaborative process, our bond as siblings allows us to give each other frank feedback."

It's hardly surprising they're on the same wavelength. Having grown up together, they possess the same frames of reference for flavour and texture. In fact many of the dishes at Casamia are inspired by the siblings' early food experiences. Familial situations tend to bring out honesty, which makes it easier to give a fair evaluation of ideas.

The service kitchen at Casamia is divided by a large central table where the dishes are plated. Each brother runs a team of chefs at each side of the table and the calling out and management of order tickets is shared; an unusual system of kitchen organisation designed to dispel any perception of hierarchy between them. In the heat of service, the brothers believe their connection allows them to anticipate their movement and thoughts.

"You could draw a parallel with live music. It's often said that a long-standing drummer and

bassist partnership will develop a sixth sense; they know what the other is about to do," says Professor Craig Jackson, head of psychology at Birmingham City University, with a specialism in workplace issues.

"When you're working in a chaotic and potentially hazardous environment, it's extremely useful to be able to sense what the other is about to do. To be able to communicate with only looks and gestures is a magical thing. It's easy to see why such relationships make for successful businesses."

While par for the course in France, Italy and Spain, the husband-and-wife-operated restaurant model is less common on these shores. There are, however, high-profile examples such as David and Helen Esposito-Matthias at Le Chaponignon Sauvage in Chichester, Gloucestershire; Mary-Ellen McElroy and Laurence Trottington at Aubrey in Poole, Greater Manchester; and Russell and Elena Brown at Sienna in Dorchester, Dorset.

The model is more prevalent within the pub sector where couples are more likely to reside in their place of work.

One such couple is James and Kara Mackenzie, joint proprietors of The Pipe and Glass Inn near Beverley in East Yorkshire. City-based chefs will likely experience a swing of jealousy when told of the Mackenzies' country lifestyle and idyllic surrounds but the reality of running a top-flight gastropub is a little different. As The Pipe and Glass remains, in James's words, a 'proper pub', opening hours are grueling. With a hard-won Michelin star

FAMILIES IN RESTAURANTS



Blood ties

Brothers in Bristol, two of the capital's most influential family-run groups and the beginnings of a pub dynasty in East Yorkshire

Jonny and Peter Sanchez-Iglesias
Casamia, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol

The Sanchez-Iglesias brothers would be the first to admit that they owe much of their considerable success to the unwavering faith their parents have placed in their abilities. Back in 2006, Paco and Susan allowed their sons to transform their simple but busy trattoria into an ambitious fine-dining restaurant with half the covers and triple the prices.

While blessed with rare culinary talent and a relentless work ethic, the brothers had closed a short-lived and similarly upscale restaurant in Cheltenham a year or two before, making their parents' decision all the more extraordinary.

Happily, their parents' confidence was well-placed. In 2009 Jonny and Peter, then aged 25 and 23 respectively, became two of the youngest chefs ever to win a Michelin star and shortly afterwards competed in – and won – Gordon Ramsay's TV search for the country's best independent restaurant. "We've been through some difficult times but being brothers has

helped us ride it out," says Jonny. "When Fratelli (the pair's independent venture in Cheltenham) closed, we were in debt and there were people chasing us for money. Things are much better now but we still feel a huge sense of responsibility. Our parents placed a huge amount of trust in us."

The older generation has stepped back a little from the business but remain involved, with Paco being Casamia's principal master and greeter and Susan keeping a close eye on the accounts.

James and Kate Mackenzie

The Pipe and Glass Inn, nr Beverley, East Yorkshire

Living a mere beer mat's throw from their idyllic countryside pub, James and Kate Mackenzie simply don't have any option but to live and breathe their business. It's impossible to separate your work and personal life, our lifestyle is inextricably linked to the business. You've just got to embrace it," says Kate. The children – Toby, three, and more recent arrival Molly, one – are regularly seen in the pub and are the inspiration for the pub's 'Little People' menu.

James and Kate met while working at The Nethers Arms in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, leaving as a couple to work at Andrew Potts The Star Inn at Harome, North Yorkshire. The Pipe and Glass Inn was opened on a shoestring in early 2006 and the couple tied the knot shortly afterwards. The gastropub was awarded a Michelin star in 2010 and a year later earned

to protect, the pair are on-site throughout the day. "It's a double-edged sword. We live next door to the pub, so it can get a bit 'cabin feverish' at times. We have two young children and childcare can obviously be an issue," says James. "But on the flip side it's a great place for them to grow up. And living nearby helps. I cook my eldest breakfast in the pub kitchen most days while I'm setting up."

Having a spouse or partner that has experienced the pressures and demands of the hospitality industry first hand can be a boon too. Someone with no experience of the business is likely to be less understanding about late nights, early mornings and days off cancelled at the last minute. But working in confined, stressful situations can often sour the death knell for relationships too.

"It will always lead to a constant re-evaluation, not just as your spouse or partner or lover, but as the person who does or doesn't manage the books well, or as the person who bullies or is bullied in the workplace," says Professor Jackson.

"Working together day in day out brings a whole new level of scrutiny to the relationship and the result of that tends to be black and white: it either blossoms or disintegrates."

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