



The Countess of Cool

PEOPLE

The Entourage Groups' CEO Stephanie Pearson tells *The Cheshire Magazine's* Laura Garner about her recipe for superstar success

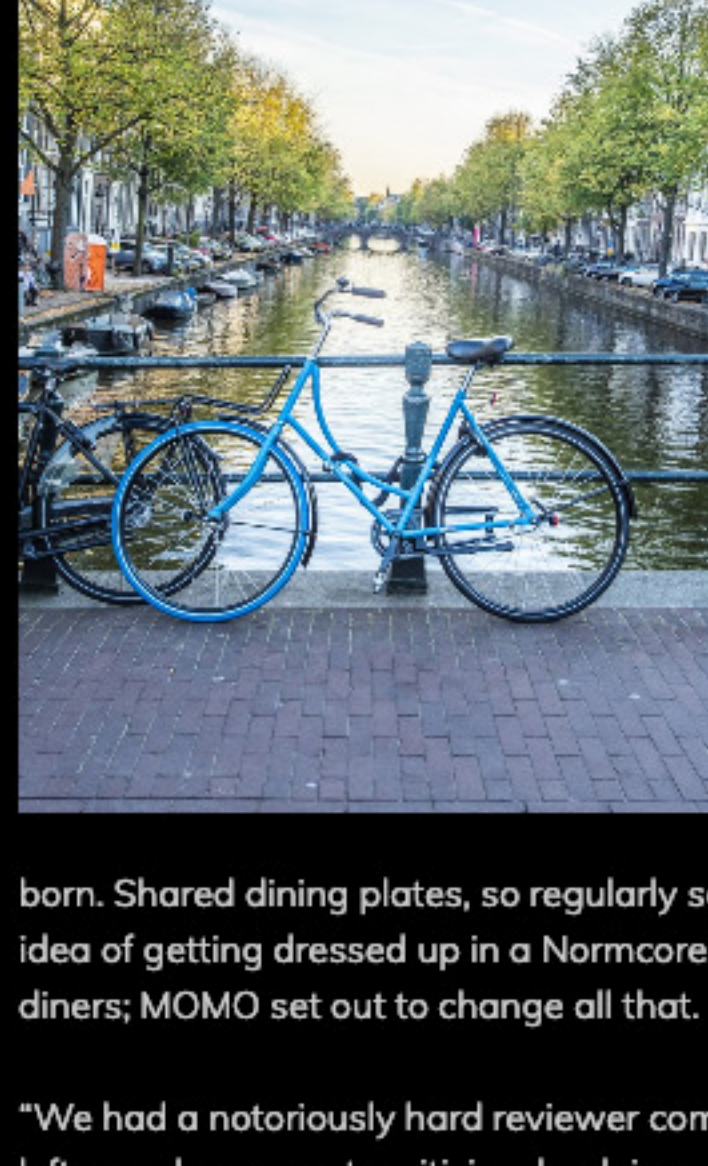
From humble beginnings as the daughter of teachers in Cheshire to owning some of the most coveted dining concepts in Europe's most stylish cities, The Entourage Groups' CEO Stephanie Pearson has certainly come a long way. Arriving in Amsterdam on the dawn of ADE (Amsterdam Dance Event) could not sum up her world more perfectly.

After being whisked from the airport by a private chauffeur, we are transcended onto the sixth floor of the beautiful W Hotel Amsterdam and transported into new culinary heights during a heavenly lunch at The Entourage Groups' steakhouse-come-chic lounge, MR PORTER. Sat amongst the elite on the sun-drenched terrace, sipping cocktails delivered by deity, we find out later that we'd been warming the seats for non-other than 'Hot Right Now' star Rita Ora and the world's number one DJ, Martin Garrix and his crew - regulars and friends of the vibe-driven fine dining concept du jour. Later we see both hot-stars sharing MR PORTER's gastronomic delights (dry ice and all) with their combination of 28million Instagram followers.



It's a snapshot into the life of Stephanie Pearson. The 30-something CEO of the standard-setting hospitality brand, The Entourage Group. Stephanie along with her entrepreneurial husband, Yossi Elyahoo, has caused quite a storm since they came onto the scene in 2008. Since the birth of their first concept MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge, they have gone onto creating some of the most challenging and innovatively-restaurant Europe has to offer and they count dozens of celebrities, DJ's, artists and even the notoriously-hard-to-please Michelin judges as fans.

"It's never been contrived and I think that is why it works," says Stephanie, who helps to realise, elevate and manage her husbands' concepts. "Yossi and I love to travel and we've always had a passion for Asian cuisine. When we arrived here 10 years ago Amsterdam fine-dining didn't really exist. The part of town we scoped for our first opening was a place where no one was opening restaurants or even really doing business (The Pipe) and there was no restaurant where Asian cuisine was being taken seriously enough."



The couple arrived into the city, post the 2008 crash. In the UK people were losing their houses, businesses and the restaurant scene felt one of the biggest hits in modern hospitality history. Having spearheaded the success of pan-Asian rosette-winning Chino Latino's after meeting at university in Nottingham and later moving to London, it was in the capital they met hotel entrepreneur Liran Wizman.

"Liran saw something in us and he asked us to come and see what we thought of Amsterdam as a place to start a new concept alongside him opening a hotel. We instantly fell in love but we travelled back and forward to the city each weekend; we wanted to understand how this beautiful city worked and what made the people really tick."

It was after several weeks that the pair started to work on their contemporary, yet settled, clean, yet fashionable concept and so MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge was born. Shared dining plates, so regularly seen on menus now, were a brand new idea back then, and the idea of getting dressed up in a Normcore city like Amsterdam, was almost too much to digest for some diners; MOMO set out to change all that.

"We had a notoriously hard reviewer come and dine with us when we opened MOMO and whilst we had left ourselves open to criticism by doing something no one else was doing, we knew that this was going to be important; when he wrote, people read and listened and it was usually the make or break of a restaurant in Amsterdam.

"Needless to say he slammed us - literally wiped the floor with us. But instead of breaking us, it made us! There was a queue around the block, everyone wanted to dine at MOMO. They realised that things were changing and that old minds were out - the new creative difference (with a glam edge) was in."

It's that new creative difference that has made the couple's company The Entourage Group the talk of the hospitality world. Whilst the likes of leaders Gaucho closes up shop in several locations, Stephanie and Yossi, along with their 900 staff and trusted leadership team, continue to thrive.

Following from MOMO's success, their extravagant Japanese-come-South American IZAKAYA Asian Kitchen & Bar concept opened just a few blocks away and became an instant hit. "We knew there was a hunger for Asian cuisine in Amsterdam and whilst IZAKAYA is Eastern to its core we switched it up with new flavours and inventive sushi to take the gastronomy to a new level again," explained Stephanie. "Again people thought we were mad - opening something similar just around the corner, but it just worked so well and it became an instant hit."



As with most of The Entourage Group's offerings, IZAKAYA and its latest haute fast food offering, THE BUTCHER, feature the 360degree bar, something of a style note in all of their offerings. Even in 2008, Stephanie and Yossi knew that FOMO was important before the hashtag was even invented.



"You never feel like you're missing out and there's always something and someone to look at," said Stephanie. "You make eye contact, you see the DJ on the decks, you make connections and the bartenders can always be in your eye-line. We call it the pick-me-up bar. We love these bars so that people can dine casually too. Our layouts are very important to building a vibe, as is the soundtrack and the lighting, and it's the consistency of this design that helps to make the concepts really buzz wherever they may be."



Locations have been key to building the admirable following The Entourage Group now has globally. Millennial and jet-setter destinations such as Ibiza and Berlin as well as emerging hotspots of Munich and Hamburg, and not forgetting Amsterdam, have helped them with the all-important buzz-build.

"The concepts translate really well," added Stephanie. "We are looking at creating our first UK restaurants very soon, as we are contacted so often to ask when we will be coming and we're currently looking at a new opening in the UAE, and a Mexican concept too."

With a growing team and an even faster growing worldwide portfolio, how does a mum-of-one do it all? "When we started and up until about three years ago, Yossi! I did everything along with our general managers. Social media, PR, marketing, finances - everything! It was so important to protect our brand. We realised that to grow we had to get assistance and now I understand that booking over 70 flights a year is a job in itself

"Our core team have been very loyal to us and we still have more than 70% of the original staff at MOMO's with us. Many of our management have risen through the ranks organically and we pay fair wages and look after the team like they are our family.



"Every year we close every single concept for a whole week - we fly everyone in, meet and party and re-group. It's done of course to say thanks, but also to give us that time to reflect on the year before and make positive steps into the next 12 months. It's what keeps us grounded as a company and as a team."

Tytherington-born Stephanie is still very hands on. Since her days at 16 as a Saturday worker whilst a student working at Arghi Bianchi's in Macclesfield, this determined and driven young woman thrived off leading a team, building rapport with customers and learning what truly makes an experience, an experience when it comes to working in the tough and unforgiving world of hospitality.

Her tenacity and drive are inspiring to watch play-out as she mindfully keeps an eye on every exacting detail, as we are served our exquisite lunch at the artful, Belle Epoque-inspired THE DUCHESS. On plush velvet panelled seating, we dine off emerald marble tables, beneath bespoke chandeliers and with walls covered by work from renowned Dutch artist, Suzanne Jongmans.

She and Yossi have curated every single detail and unlike emerging dining concepts winning applause amongst influencers and bloggers alike, it's clear that social media hasn't played its part (like so many) in creating this concept (you won't find a flower wall in any of these restaurants). Thought, research, time and a good amount of passion are what have been brought together to get Nouveau-Nicoise cuisine-led, THE DUCHESS, its new one-star stature and its acclaim amongst the true style-setters in Amsterdam and beyond.

As we finish lunch, the ever-understated and stylishly cool Stephanie shares another glimpse into her realms of glam, this time to the Martin Garrix exhibition as part of ADE that is taking place in the hotel lobby at The W. We glide past the creme de la creme of the electronic dance music world - prolific producers, A&R and industry names whilst sipping the finest champagne and trying to absorb every single moment.

After our 48 hours in Amsterdam, we are back on a flight to Cheshire, leaving Stephanie and her enviable life behind. A few hours later whilst she is at dinner with The Jonas Brothers and David Guetta, a text comes through. It's Stephanie, thanking the team for our 'fun interview', and that's when it becomes very apparent that although Cheshire-born Stephanie may be living and shaping the high life, her feet are still very firmly on the ground.

Laura Garner, Fashion Editor

the-entouragegroup.com



THE ENTOURAGE GROUP BRANDS :

- MOMO
- MR PORTER
- IZAKAYA
- TONI LOCO
- MAD FOX
- SHIRKHAN
- THE DUCHESS
- THE BUTCHER