



Success is the reward for Marcus Wareing's hard work and high standards. Jackie Mitchell talks to him about his plans for the future

TRUE BRIT

Marcus Wareing has been running his own restaurant at London's Berkeley hotel in Knightsbridge since 2008 and this is where you will find him most days.

We meet at the Chef's Table, which I'm told is where Wareing likes to talk to visitors so he can keep an eye on what's going on in the extensive open kitchen. Customers can book this table for eight people. "It's very popular," says Wareing. "We bring out the dishes and explain how they're produced. Customers in the restaurant are intrigued seeing others come into the kitchen and want to come here too."

This morning, head chef Mark Froydenlund and his colleagues are busy expertly butchering meat and poultry.

Since starting his career at 18, Wareing, now 42, has worked with many of the

world's acclaimed chefs including Anton Edelman, Albert Roux, Pierre Koffmann and Gordon Ramsay. So which one has had the greatest influence?

"They've all had some kind of influence at different stages of my career," replies Wareing. "Without a doubt, Gordon (Ramsay) was the biggest. His adrenaline was extraordinary. He looked at your total personality rather than just the cooking."

Making a name

Wareing worked with Ramsay for several years before they launched Petrus in London, which won critical acclaim. He was Chef Patron there for nine years, earning a second star when it was relocated to The Berkeley Hotel. They parted company in 2008 when Wareing took on Petrus's lease, relaunching it as Marcus Wareing at The Berkeley. "The contract was coming to an end so it was up to the hotel to make a choice and they chose me," he says.

Opening a new restaurant during a severe recession wasn't easy. "The biggest challenge was to keep my head above water," says Wareing. "I came in determined, but also scared, not knowing whether I could pay the staff without the machinery of Gordon Ramsay behind me.

My ethos in 2008 was to keep going and keep my head down. It wasn't difficult, just hard work."

In the last five years, Wareing says the restaurant hasn't changed. "The vehicle is the same – it's how Petrus was."

Although Marcus Wareing At The Berkeley is now well established, there are still challenges. Last year was one of the toughest, Wareing says. "It showed the reality of people having less money in their pockets. It's not only rich people – everyone eats in restaurants. The competition in this area (Knightsbridge) is fierce – Daniel Boulud, Heston Blumenthal, Pierre Koffmann, Wolfgang Puck – they're all on my doorstep, but I love the fight."

Working the conversation

In tough times Wareing believes in talking to customers. "If you're full for lunch and dinner, that's fantastic. If there's only 15 or 30 for lunch and 30 or 40 for dinner, then make it one of the best experiences for customers. Go and talk to your customers – it's the basic ethos of hospitality. Keep the team focused at quiet times and keep the standards high."

Customer feedback is important to him and, on his website, he invites customers to say 'hello' or to share their thoughts with him.

During service periods, Wareing will come in and see the team around him, but doesn't feel the need to be there at every service time.

"For example, I know the meat butchered behind me will be done how I like it to be done. There are 22 people in the kitchen – I've trained them to the right standard. I have the confidence that my team know exactly what to do. The food will be just as good in my absence," he says.

He is still remembered for cooking his custard tart dessert for the Queen's 80th birthday celebration on BBC2's *The Great British Menu*. "The Queen thanked me and ate some of it. It's been on the menu >

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for several years – we produce mini versions of it now,” he adds.

Running the company means Wareing has to plan his time effectively, hiring outside experts to provide legal and accountancy services. When not in the kitchen or the office at The Berkeley, he is at his other restaurant The Gilbert Scott – part of the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel in London, a restored Victorian architectural masterpiece, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott. Managed by his protégée Chantelle Nicholson, this is an elegant British brasserie and bar, which opened in 2011. He was impressed by the building when he was invited to look at the site “I fell in love with it. My vision is to make it The Wolseley of north London.”

Solid foundations

Wareing launched a book in July, co-authored with Nicholson – *The Gilbert Scott Book of British Food*, which he describes as more than just a recipe book. “It’s a story about the history of the building, which has been here since 1862 – so in 100 years people will be able to look at my book and find out about the history of the restaurant.”

Currently Wareing is looking for a third site in London, but is in no rush. “The

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location reflects the type of restaurant you create. Gilbert Scott is British because of where it is,” he says. “I’m happy as a company with the status quo – we’re not ready to go overseas.”

When I ask him what is left for him to achieve, he starts talking about his team. “My goals are to see people who work for me and who manage my teams to succeed with me. I want to expand my group with people who want to move forward in life, prepared to work hard. I haven’t got time for laziness and I’m not interested in dreamers either. I need people who commit; if they demonstrate this, they will have my full support.”

Training and mentoring is important to him and his advice to aspiring chefs is: “Work in good restaurants, work hard, communicate well and believe what mentors tell you. There’s no point in working hard if you don’t believe what people tell you.” ■

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Wareing’s worldview

Did you always want to be a chef?

“My father was a fruit and vegetable merchant, selling fresh ingredients for school meals. Then school meals changed into canteens that served burgers and chips rather than meat and two veg, so my father’s business disintegrated. He retired at 52. I worked there in school holidays and at weekends from age 11 to 15 so I was in touch with food. My brother Brian inspired me to go into the kitchen as he was a chef in a local Stockport restaurant. I delivered fresh produce.”

Do you enjoy TV work and would you like to do more?

“I get recognised for being on TV, which is odd as I spend, on average, eight days a year doing it. I love *Masterchef* and what it does. I’d love my own show, maybe not at the moment. I’m patient.”

Why does the Michelin star system matter?

“With reviewers on websites, bloggers and Twitter – everyone’s a critic. What I like about Michelin is its history. It has been around longer than anything else. You can’t put a value on that experience.”

How much attention do you pay to critics?

“Food critics are experts who eat out everywhere. They have a better view because they eat out regularly. It’s their job to write their experience on the page. They are important. What also matters is the blogger, people on Twitter – they are customers. Anyone who pays the bill is important. Every client should be treated the same and with the same food standards.”

How do you relax?

“In my spare time I’m at home with the door closed. Or I’ll go running for an hour and a half. I learned to ski this year with my son Jake. He’d done well at school so we went away on a dad and son trip to Italy. We had fun, laughed, skied, talked. I’d rather do it now when I can afford to enjoy it. All the things I should have done growing up, I’m doing them now. From 16, when I went to college, to 40 it was all about work. I had no time for a social life. I’d spend any time off sleeping. Now, I can start to change my lifestyle. I don’t want to make my Dad’s mistake – he missed seeing his kids growing up. I’m not going to do that.”