

# A GASTRONOMIC SUCCESS

Jenny Conlon meets well-known chef and TV personality **Paul Merrett** and his business partner **Greg Bellamy** to chat about their growing gastropub ventures



**I** Just a stone's throw from Fulham Broadway is The Malt House, a gastropub renowned for its handsome building and award-winning food. Proprietors, Paul Merrett and Greg Bellamy, have established the holy grail – a gastropub with a delicious menu that retains its pub atmosphere and heritage. I met with Paul and Greg to find out how they did it.

Firstly, how Paul began his impressive career as a chef. “Well, to be honest, I failed everything at school and my mum said ‘You’re going to have to learn to cook otherwise you’re not going to get a job’. It was totally the right decision. It was one of those lucky things because she could have said go and be a builder and I would have been a rubbish builder,” laughs Paul.

Paul’s career saw him work his way up the ladder and he explained how the industry operated when he started out. “I went to college in Guilford and while I was there I wrote to several big hotels – that’s what you did in those days. Restaurants were not the place to be, it was hotels, and The Ritz came back and said they had a three-year apprenticeship. So I signed up and that’s probably where I started to think, ‘I really enjoy this and want to pursue it’. Like all other London chefs, I went around London working for as many of the great head chefs of the day as I could.”

Achieving Michelin-starred ratings at a young age, Paul reveals why he had a change of heart

and slowly gravitated away from fine dining. “When I decided to become a Head Chef, I ended up in a restaurant called Interlude, which was on Charlotte Street. I was about 28 or 29 at the time and we worked liked dogs for a year with the one intention – getting a Michelin star, and we got one.”

“Then when I left Interlude, I was approached by the Greenhouse in Mayfair, where I had previously worked, and I went back there as Head Chef. I was once I left the Greenhouse that I kind of fell out of love with fine dining. It wasn’t touching my soul very much and I needed more of a connection with food. I had young children at the time and I was beginning to think about food in a slightly different way and that’s why I decided to look at gastropubs.”

Paul met Greg, his business partner, when they were working together for the same group. “I worked for a group which owned three or four gastropubs and it was there that we met. We soon built up a synergy and rapport. We didn’t want to work for other people and we spent about a year searching for the right place. It was The Victoria in Sheen that was our first place. We ran that together for about eight years but after a while you get cabin fever – you know it’s not big enough for two big personalities and you’re never going to earn enough money out of one restaurant. We knew we had to go bigger and that’s when we started to look at The Malt House and the Fox & Grapes in Wimbledon.”

Greg explains why they work so well together. “There is a mixture of fire fighting and concentrating on certain sites depending on what’s going on there. I look after the business side and the front of house and Paul looks after the kitchens. We just want to create a really good local for people to come and eat.”

I was intrigued to find out what was on the menu at The Malt House, “The menu is ever changing, there are signature dishes but it’s a blend of the obvious and slightly more quirky, more imaginative dishes, some of which are quite spicy. I always describe it to the team as a New York brunch-style menu, where the plating is quite simple and the ingredients are on-trend. We try to reflect that here; simple, clean and a nod to healthy.”

“We have a big bar menu and a more formal dinner à la carte menu, I think we have the food right here – and that’s reflected in the awards we’ve won.” Most recently, they won Independent Casual Dining Pub of the Year 2017. Paul and Greg also share the news that they’re revamping the interior of the restaurant. “We are doing a full refurb – making it a little bit edgy and a bit cool, which will match our quite funky style of food.” [READ](#)

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