



# PRESS RELEASE

Press contact : Jacky G. Lesellier, CMA

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## **MORE THAN A MERE BAGATELLE**

**Retail and foodservice company Bagatelle prides itself on a genuinely French approach and a passion for crafting good bread at a realistic price. Lucia Cockcroft meets MD Jacky Lesellier at his newly-re-opened South Kensington, London shop.**

The French tradition of baking underlines the philosophy of retail and foodservice company Bagatelle, from the bakers it employs to the flour it sources.

The Continental theme is so strong that of Bagatelle's retail customers in its one South Kensington branch, 45% are French. The rest are students and ex-pats of the Middle East, together, of course, with the English contingent. "We chose South Kensington as a base partly because it's known as a "Frog Valley" of London", says Bagatelle's charismatic managing director Jacky Lesellier. "All our chefs are French – the training for bakers in France tends to be more thorough. It's a different approach – France has a tradition where small bakers are protected. There are 37,000 independent bakers in the country and by law you can only be called baker if you make bread on-site".

### **A new lease of life**

At Bagatelle's retail base in South Kensington, 50 types of bread are on offer, from Continental and traditional French (wholemeal and wheat) to rye and Pain au Levain. The branch re-opened this summer after a 16-month period of closure (courtesy of a London bus ramming into the shop front). Now it boasts a roomy new interior and polished floors. "Yes, before the design was a bit "yesteryear". But we employed a French designer and now it looks much bigger", says Jacky.

However, Bagatelle's retail branch is only a small part of the bigger picture: 92% of the business comprises foodservice and the company supplies to an impressive roll-call of London hotels, chefs and restaurants: The Connaught; The Sheraton; Albert Roux; Raymond Blanc; the Capital Hotel; L'Escargot. Concorde ("We were very sad when the last flight landed", laments Jacky). British Airways, Eurostar and several major banks are also on the list. "We supply to outfits where chefs pay attention to the quality of bread they use", says Jacky.

Bagatelle was formed in 1989 and started supplying foodservice outlets in 1990, on a 365-day-a-year basis. Its production centre is based at Park Royal, London, in premises the current area of 1,700 sq m. All bread baked is scratch-baked at Park Royal by the company's 60 bakers, with anything from two to 16 hours' proving time.

Despite growing up in a family of bakers, Jacky is not a baker by trade; before setting up Bagatelle he served in the French Navy and then worked for Le Notre French Culinary Institute in Singapore and the US. But the absence of technical training aside, it's clear that the bread and food are Jacky's great passion and it is something of a vocation to supply the best bread possible, made from scratch, to British restaurants.

### **High Standards bring the right price**

"I would have loved to have been a chef and to bring new ideas to bread, flour, ingredients", he says wistfully. "In this country bread is always the first thing you are served in a restaurant – so it's incredibly important. It's about educating the customer. Although we do supply rolls to foodservice outlets we try to encourage restaurants to take large loaves of bread and slice it. This means that slicing the bread can be like theatre. Also, the bigger the loaf is the better it tastes, as the taste

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is developed in the baking process”.

Jacky’s main premise is not to cut corners in his company’s bread baking – and that includes its price.

“People don’t realise that bread is not expensive, considering the time it takes to bake and prove a loaf. People do not buy bread, they buy a treat. Bread is a wonderful product. With Bagatelle I want to bring the authenticity back – to have the right ingredients and to revive the idea that bread is the best and cheapest product you can buy. Take Raymond Blanc. He bakes his own bread and its totally in love with what he does. When you have a job you love, half the day is already OK”. And what better way to do this than to follow the French love of food? “In France, food brings conviviality; it brings people together. We love to spend four hours over a good lunch. But education about food has to start young – children need to know where their food comes from”. This aim is particularly close to Jacky’s heart; he sits on the board of the Academy of Culinary Arts, created 25 years ago by top French chefs in London to improve the training and apprentice-ship system across restaurants and patisseries.

## **Foodservice will be key**

Jacky’s plans for the future are, first and foremost to retain control of and quality over the products on offer. Does this preclude opening more shop? “We may open other shops, possibly outside London”, he declares, with a theatrical flourish of the hands. “Foodservice will also be a big focus in the future – I think more and more people will rely on outside suppliers”.

But for now, Jacky is pleased to have his South Kensington shop up and running again and the company is busy doing what it does best baking fine bread, the French way.

## **Fact Box**

### **Bagatelle in a nutshell**

Ø The company was launched in 1989, with a retail branch opening in South Kensington in 1990.

Ø Bagatelle supplies Danish, bread, pastry and catering products to clients in pastry and catering products to clients in London and within the M25. These include airlines, restaurants, hotels, shops and boutiques.

Ø The pastry range is made with raw materials including Bourbon vanilla beans, Normandy butter and fresh English cream. Pastries are free of artificial colouring and flavours, with sugar content restricted to a minimum. The selection includes: Etoile truffe; caramelised vanilla chocolate; Tarte a L’orange; Tarte au Citron; caramelised Millefeuille; and Mandarine & Chocolate dome.

Ø The breads are created following old French traditions and are kneaded and hand-shaped every night. The variety includes: Baguette Provencale; Baguette Dauphinoise; Baguette Rustique; white bread (fat free); white bread (with butter or virgin olive oil); Petit Benoitton; and Petit Provence.

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