



How I Got Here: Matt Thomas

By James McAllister

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Matt Thomas is managing director of Searcys, whose restaurant and catering portfolio includes the Champagne bar at London's St Pancras station and Helix on the 39th floor of the Gherkin.



Why restaurants?

For as long as I can remember I wanted to work in and around food. I learnt really early on that food made people happy, and it also made occasions extra special. I then realised that providing brilliant hospitality was pleasurable and rewarding.

Tell us something you wish you had been told at the start of your career?

Not to ever under play the importance that an organisation's culture has on yourself worth, confidence at work and ability to make a difference.

What do you do in your spare time?

I used to run quite a lot, but more recently I have reconnected to swimming. I love it, but it is horrible being bad at something again, hopefully I can turn that around soon.

What's your favourite restaurant or group of restaurants (besides your current one)?

I have a thing for Ottolenghi. I love Yotam's clear vision around what good food looks like, which is particularly present at his Nopi brassiere. Fresh, simple, relevant, interesting and delicious; what could be better? I know there are different or newer concepts out there, but Ottolenghi has been a long-time favourite.

What would you be doing if you weren't in restaurants?

Well, if I didn't need to work then I would be riding my bike in and around Cape Town. If I did then perhaps I would be a PT to the stars or a psychiatrist... what is the difference I hear you ask!

What motivates you?

My team, the feeling of a new business win or perhaps warranted recognition, through a critic's review or a

happy customer. I remember being in my early teens and winning a swimming race. When I got out of the pool my Dad looked at me, not nearly as excited as I was. When I asked what was wrong he said that I had swum quicker the day before. At the time I didn't get it, but I do now. Be demanding of yourself, but keep it measured if you can.

Where was your last holiday?

Recently we went to our house on the beach in the beautiful, and now incredibly foodie north Norfolk. I set the alarm for 7am, run the dogs along the beach, shower and then go for a dressed crab lunch. A simple pleasure.

Which colleague, mentor or employer has had the biggest influence on your approach to the restaurant business?

Wow, I have been lucky enough to have so many. I really enjoy working with Mark Hix. His non-nonsense approach and his pursuit for local sourcing, brilliantly fresh food and honest menus is without question timeless. I am also privileged to have Monica Galetti as a friend, her persistence to food excellence and attention to detail is uncompromising but also refreshing. Both of these individuals, whilst very different teach you to have the confidence to be true to yourself. It is brilliant to have them both on hand to us here at Searcys.

What keeps you up at night?

The usual; not being good enough and making the wrong decisions.

Worst business decision?

To wait for others to do the right thing when their objectives aren't aligned with yours.

Best business decision?

To trust my gut and be more confident in its ability.

What are you reading at the moment?

I recently finished *The Firm*, by John Grisham.

What piece of advice would you give to those looking to climb the rungs in the business?

Never lose sight of greatness. Be focused, demanding of yourself and never forget that the decisions you make should be for the good of your customers.

If you could change one thing about the restaurant industry today, what would it be?

I love the sector and have always viewed it as a profession but more needs to be done to change the overall perception of our industry. We need to focus on encouraging more brilliant and hugely creative individuals to join us.

[CV to date](#)

Studied: Bachelor of Science in Hospitality, New Hampshire University, NH, USA | Post grad in Personnel management, University of Portsmouth, UK

Employment

2002-2004 – Sales manager, BaxterStorey

2004-2008 – Operations Director, BaxterStorey

2008-2017 – Managing Director London, BaxterStorey

2017-present – Managing Director, Searcys

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