

175

YEARS
TOGETHER

EST · 1847

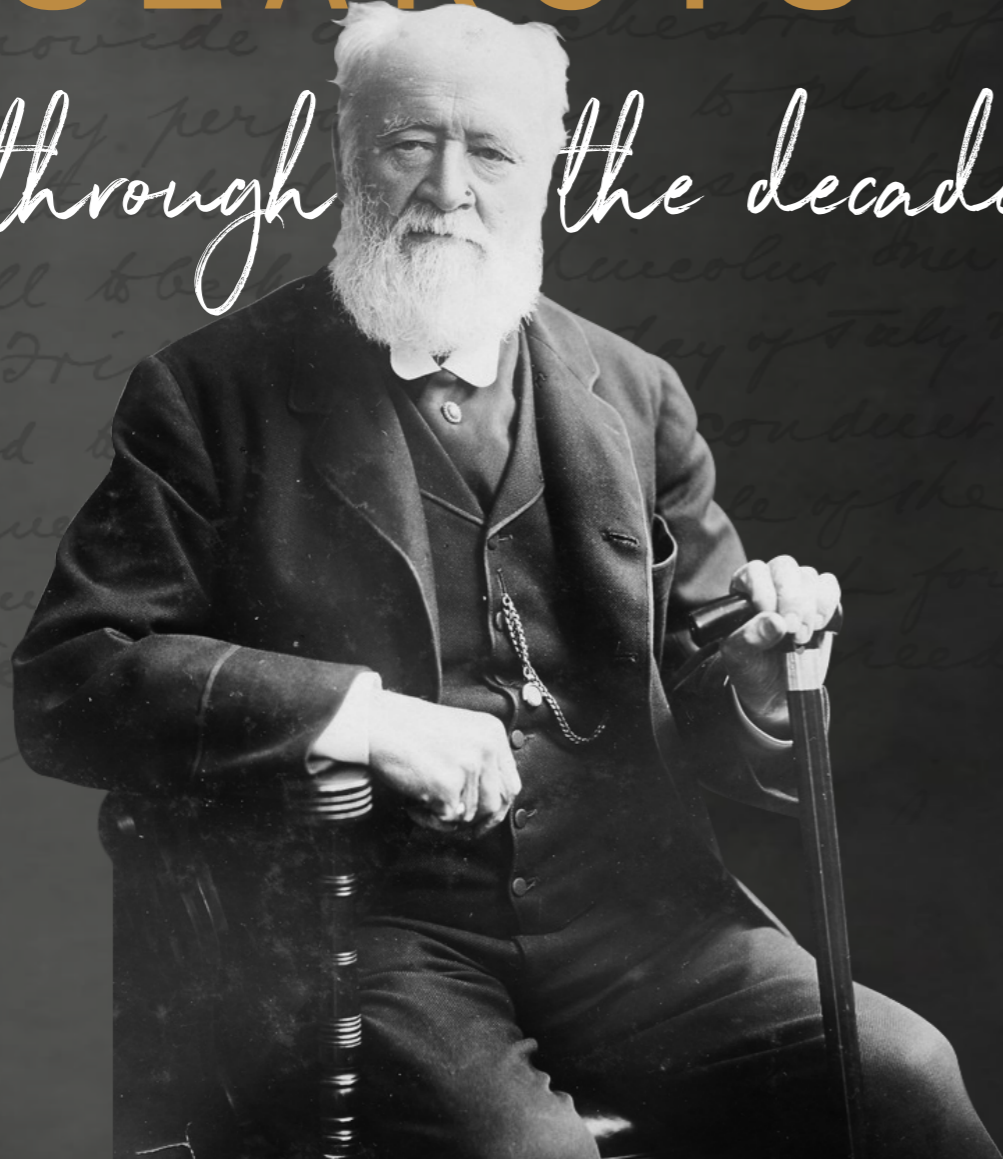
SEARCYS

LONDON

SEARCYS THROUGH THE DECADES

EST · 1847

SEARCYS

through the decades

THE SEARCYS LEGACY

Our founder, John Searcy was described in his time as 'gentle, courteous and masterful', traits which inspired undying loyalty in his household, business staff and all who crossed his path, repaying his confidence with lifelong service.

This legacy lives on at Searcys today, and these traits are all still fundamental to each of us. We're enormously proud of every step of the Searcys story and alongside the flawless quality we deliver, our heritage is what continues to inspire us as we create and deliver special moments for our guests.

'With the advance of the Nation's prosperity and culture, entertaining has not only become more general, but almost one of the necessities of social life' – Introduction to Searcys catalogue, 1896.

Searcys started with humble beginnings. Founder, John Searcy, began his journey as an apprentice pastry chef where he honed the craftsmanship that Searcys is so well known for today.

*Let's take you back to the 19th century
where our story begins...*





1813

THE START

John was born on January 13, 1813 in Middlesex St George's, which is part of present-day London.

The story can be traced back to the vision of one man, John Searcy.

1834

THE FIRST JOB

At the age of 21, John became an apprentice as a baker and confectioner under his uncle Robert in Northumberland, where he spent three years building up his expertise.



1837

EMPLOYED AS THE PRIVATE CONFECTIONER

By the time John was 24, his skill, artistry and exceptional talent became well known to the Duchess of Northumberland. Impatiently, she soon employed him as their private confectioner at the Alnwick Castle where she and the third Duke of Northumberland lived, the same year Queen Victoria ascended to the throne.

1847

SETTING UP FOR LONDON

Ten years later, the Duke of Northumberland passed away. The 34-year-old John was saddened by this, as he had not only lost his first patron, but also a great friend.

Soon after, the Duke was succeeded by his brother, Lord Algernon Percy. During John's service at Alnwick Castle, he realised how sought-after he really was for his flair for confections. John spoke with the new Duke and Duchess about starting his very own catering company. After 10 years of service, he wanted his skills and confections to be enjoyed by others outside of Alnwick.

The Duke and Duchess both agreed, and even loaned him money to help start his venture. John packed up his mixing bowls and whisks and left for London in December 1847.



1848

GAINING ESTEEMED CLIENTELE

September 12, 1848, the 35-year-old master confectioner set up his business in Tyburnia, now known as Paddington.

It wasn't long until he gained esteemed clientele, all eager to savour his confections.

1863

THE BEST ROUT FURNISHER IN LONDON

By the 1860s, John Searcy's reputation had spread beyond London. Aristocrats and nobles would flock to the capital to host lavish balls and parties that were catered specifically by John. Searcy was particularly famed for his elaborately decorated wedding cakes that delighted brides and wedding guests alike with his exceptional artistry.

London Society and the county families always had an excuse for celebrations – coming of age, christening, first return home after marriage, etc. When occasions ran out, there was always the church fête, garden party, picnic, school treat, flower show and so on.

With the help of ball furnishers such as George Tansley to erect temporary rooms



and marquees, John Searcy's service expanded until it was limited by the number of waiters he could employ, the extent of his stock of cutlery and glassware and the health of his stable of horses which pulled cumbersome furniture removal vans to high society households in London and to nobility throughout the country.

Through these operations, John Searcy also became officially recognised as a 'rout furnisher' - the first term coined for an events caterer, meaning he supplied equipment as well as his confections.

1870

CONFECTIONER TO HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES

John Searcy received a Royal Warrant and the title 'John Searcy, confectioner to HRH the Prince of Wales and wine merchant' making him the top caterer, or rout furnisher, in his industry.



A ROYAL APPROVAL

When his sons became of age, John adopted a new name for his business and traded as John Searcy & Sons. As Royal Warrant holders to the Prince of Wales, John Searcy & Sons' position as leading caterers to the elite was now undisputed. By the 1880s, John's services were increasingly in high demand. The amount of equipment Searcys had to transport was enormous. The entries for it all were over 74 pages-worth and included: pots, jugs, kettles, lamps, bowls, candelabras, small and large plates, cutlery, tea pots and so on.

John Searcy retired and entrusted the business to his General Manager and good friend Henry Hobbs who had worked alongside Searcy as a pastry chef for over 30 years.

1885

SWEET SUCCESS

A Searcys catalogue from the early 1890s gave details of 'dinner and dessert ices in 'latest artistic shapes', 'cream ices' and 'water ices'. There were almost-forgotten dishes such as melon en surprise, peaches a la melba and mousse aux abricots, as well as pink mille fruit, ratafia, muscat, crème de vina. Finally

there was 'green tea and brown bread ice cream', which is thought to be an invention of the Winchester College School shop. There were 22 flavours to pick from in the water ice list, including bigarade, cedratti, frontignac, whose flavours were presumably only known to cognoscenti.



INTRODUCTION TO SEARCYS CATALOGUE

'With the advance of the Nation's prosperity and culture, entertaining has not only become more general, but almost one of the necessities of social life'

1885

A copy of the Searcys catalogue from around this time sets out seven pages of menus and event prices. The first three were for refreshments for wedding receptions, garden parties, at homes, etc. The first category was the least expensive: for 2s a head (around £8 in today's money) for a minimum of 100 guests customers received a selection of five types of sandwiches, gateaux francois and glaces, tea, coffee and lemonade. At the other end of the scale the charge was 12s 6d a head for 30 guests for hot luncheon starting with délices de caviar.

Three specimen menu de diner ranged from 15s a head for 30 guests to 25s. For 15s Searcys provided a ten-course dinner plus coffee – consommé soup, turbot, sweetbreads, foie gras mousse, saddle of lamb, chicken, pears Chantilly, devilled mushrooms savouries, ice-cream, and dessert. Twelve courses were served for 25s: caviar, turtle soup, salmon, trout or whitebait, sweetbreads or supreme de volaille, saddle of lamb, sorbets, quail, asparagus, ice soufflé, bonnes bouches, corbeilles, dessert and coffee.

1893

WINES LIKE NO OTHER

The first mention of Searcys own cuvée, something we're proud to still offer today, dates back to 1893. That year's catalogue called attention to the champagne specially prepared for and shipped by Searcys, the De Garnier et Cie 1893 vintage at 66s a dozen bottles.



Searcys Wine and Spirit Department let it be known that they bought directly from distillers and growers in very large quantities. A separate 'Price List of Champagnes' gave 36 brands of which five were printed in heavy gold type. There was the De Garnier; George Goulet, speciality shipped at 74s a dozen; Ernst Irroy 1898 at 78s a dozen.

The Leroux was the cheapest at 4s a bottle; and the Charles Heidsieck Dry Monopole 1893 at 132s a dozen was the most expensive. The general wine list included Australian and Californian wines.

1896

WEDDING OF PRINCESS MAUD



As Royal Warrant holders to the Prince of Wales, John Searcys & Sons had naturally been commissioned to make Princess Maud's (the youngest daughter of Edward VII) wedding cake on July 22, 1896, Princess Maud married Prince Carl of Denmark in the private chapel at Buckingham Palace.

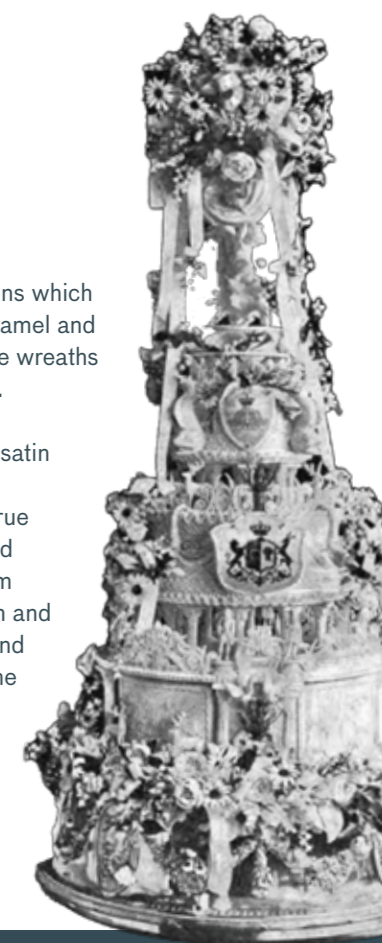
Not long before the royal wedding, the business's Chief Confectioner fell ill. John's sons had planned to send a sincere note of apology to the palace that they could not fulfil their duties. When this news reached John, he told his sons to 'dismiss all idea of cancellation' and came out of retirement to make the wedding cake himself at his own home. Within days, John had created a magnificent five-tiered cake 'fit for a princess'. The evening before the wedding, he delivered the masterpiece personally to his royal client.



A new fashion in wedding cakes

Instead of the pure white decorations which were traditional, almond paste, caramel and other delicate tints were used in the wreaths and monograms adorning the cake.

Each tier was encircled with white satin ribbons, bordered with pearls, and ornamented with bridal buds and true lovers' knots, and topped with a god of love holding a nautilus shell, from which fell in long lines silver bullion and sea mosses. The shell held roses and starry bridal flowers; and around the base, richly embellished with the Royal Arms, was a wreath of the same flowers.



1898

A LEGACY CONTINUED

On June 12, 1898, John Searcy passed away at 85 years old, just within a few months of his business's Golden Jubilee. John Searcy & Sons soon amalgamated with George Tansley, 'Ball and Concert Furnishers', to become Searcy, Tansley and Company. This merger made us the largest catering company of our kind in Britain.



1900

SOCIETY'S GOLD MEDAL

By the end of the 19th century, Searcys was 'by appointment contractor and wine merchants to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Regents Park' in what was known as the Inner Circle, to which entrance was available only to members of the Royal Botanical Society. This was a prestigious appointment for Searcys as these gardens were the setting of many of London's favourite parties.

Some years after this, Searcys was awarded the Society's Gold Medal for Table Decorations. At our office in 18 Sloane Street, we stocked palm ferns and choice of flowering plants always to hand for wedding balls and receptions that can be used 'for the festooning of doors, mirrors, partiers etc'. Wreaths, floral favours, bridal and coachmen's bouquets and gentlemen's coat flowers were made up. There was also a landscape and general gardening service for laying out plantations, shrubberies and rockeries.

1920

REGINA

We have been making a name for ourselves in the cake department since the late 19th century, when a party hostess could order teacakes including Russians red, Russians brown, Venetians, royal hearts, queen cakes, zephyrs, dice cakes, Belgravies, rout cakes, reims, savoy's – all of which were kinds of sponge cake – Bath buns, Shrewsbury biscuits, ratafia biscuits, macaroons and rusks, as well as 14 kinds of biscuits Francais, 12 gateaux Francais and four plain cakes.

Over the coming decades, our fame as cake-makers continued. In 1920, the Queen magazine wrote that 'the company of Messrs Searcy, Tansley and Co is a godsend to the housekeeper. Should she be desirous of giving a party... all that is necessary is to ring up Victoria 2186 and discuss the matter with these experienced caterers. The cakes of Messrs Searcy have won a great reputation. A speciality of the firm is a biscuit called "Regina," made with 24 egg whites, 2 lb sugar and 2 lb ground sweet almonds.



1930

A CUVÉE OF SUCCESS

Throughout the 20s and 30s, more champagne was consumed than regular wine at the kind of special events Searcys ran. Dozens and dozens of cases of Mumm, Cordon Rouge and Bollinger passed through Searcys hands every night during the Season, and large stocks were held in the cellars underneath 19 Sloane Street.

There was one year in the 1930s when Searcys had our own label 'Jean Francois' – a non-vintage the company bought up from one of the French vineyards. In the 1930s it was not the custom at dances to serve champagne at the running buffet in the 'sitting out' rooms,

but only at the sit-down supper which took place half-way through the dance and was served at the small tables in the supper room. There were always long queues for supper and it needed a considerable amount of tact and a degree of firmness on the part of the caterer in charge to prevent the situation getting out of control. One of the company directors, John Searcy Physick, approached each occasion with 'the enthusiasm of a producer and the shrewdness of a psychologist.' Following this long legacy, our own Searcys brut and rosé cuvées are enjoying phenomenal success and are very popular with guests across all our venues.

1939

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

On the eve of the Second World War, one of Searcys directors wrote to the Ministry of Works and asked whether he should stop catering for events in view of the 'luxury' nature of the trade. But he was told to do nothing of the sort, there was a place for outdoor catering on the home front even in a war. Searcys was also asked to open a restaurant for war workers on the first floor of 19 Sloane Street.

Most of Searcys staff went to join the forces. One of the managers, H.G. Knill, went into the Royal Air Force to become a squadron leader. The company directors joined the Air Raid Precautions Service from

its formation and remained until the end of the war. As the war got underway, Searcys stocks of Champagne were all but depleted. Instead, party-goers used their rations of gin and Searcys supplied bottles of cider. The mixture of the two became a heady 'champagne substitute'.

Weddings were celebrated in the most modest ways, as the times demanded. Brides spent their rations on currants and brought them to Searcys to decorate their wedding cake. Sugar was in even shorter supply. There was never enough to put on the sides as well as the top, so fancy paper was wrapped around the sides for decoration.



National Service concerts

It is a little-known fact that Searcys also took part in morale-boosting daily lunch concerts held at the National Gallery throughout the war. These were the idea of the pianist Myra Hess who launched the scheme with a recital and planned all the programmes. Myra Hess was an accomplished pianist of international fame. She referred to the National Gallery

concerts as her 'national service'. She believed passionately in their symbolic importance, seeing them as a way of satisfying the 'hunger of the spirit' she sensed all around her in the early months of the war. Admission was a low flat price – a shilling, and an equally cheap packed lunch was available – supplied by Searcys.





1953

LONDONDERRY HOUSE

Coronations were something Searcys were accustomed to – we had been in business for three of them, Edward VII, George V and George VI, to say nothing of Queen Victoria's two jubilees – but the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 was one of the busiest periods in our history.

For three nights and two days leading up to the day of the coronation, Searcys lorries were making the rounds of houses on the procession route delivering lunches, teas and cocktails for the numerous parties held to watch the

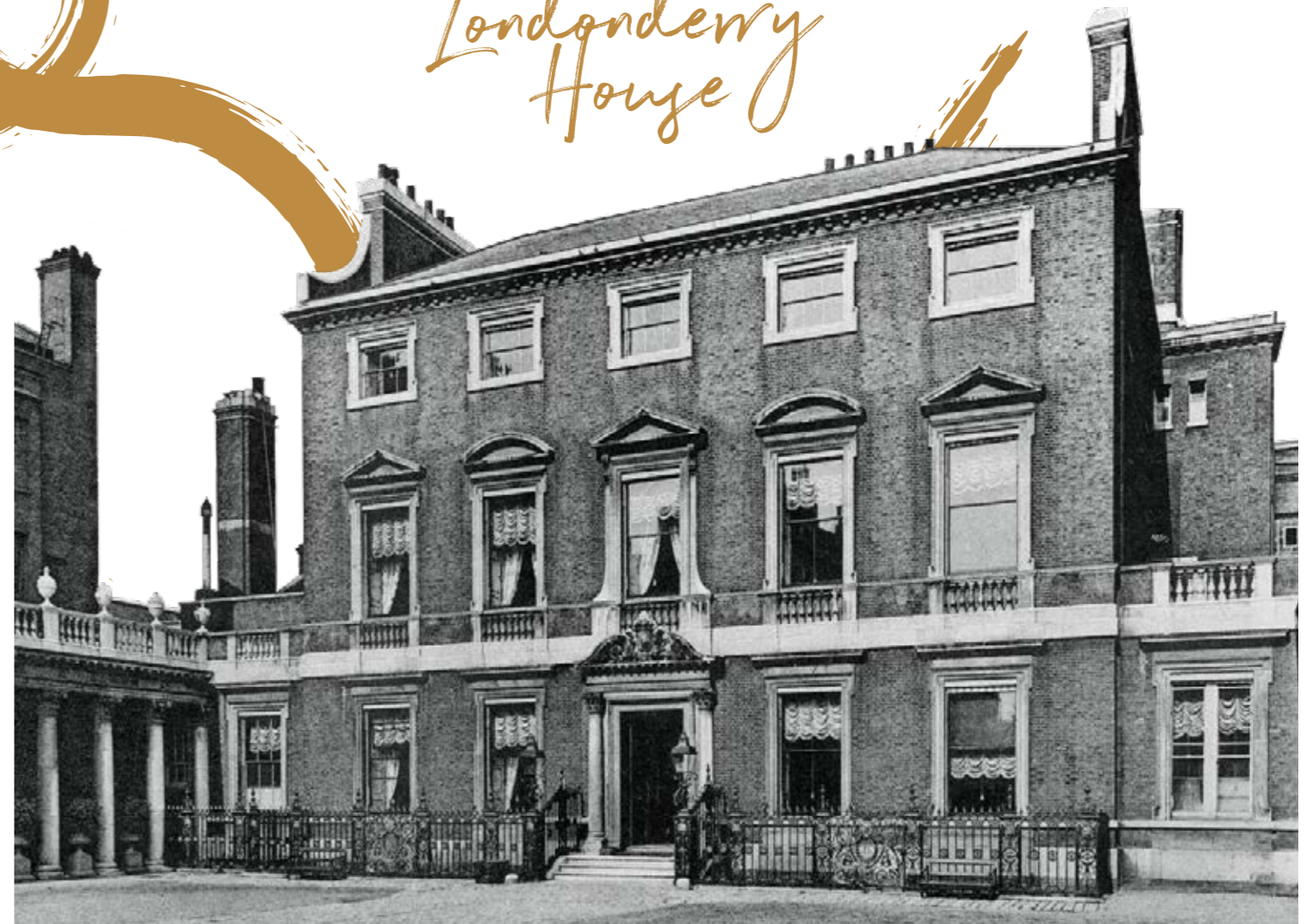
great event. Every order was delivered on time, complete with cutlery, china, glass and linen, but the trouble began when the Hire Department tried to recover the equipment the next day. The traffic congestion caused by the crowds who came to view the decorations was so great that it became virtually impossible to collect the large amount of equipment needed for the many celebratory lunches and dinners being arranged the day after.

One of the biggest and most elaborate of the parties was a special dinner for

100 and dance for 500 at Londonderry House in Mayfair. It was organised by Mrs Perle Mesta, an American socialite, political hostess, and United States ambassador to Luxembourg (1949-53), who was Washington's no. 1 party giver, dubbed 'the hostess with the mostest'.

Also in 1953, Searcys achieved a remarkable feat in hosting the first ball in St James Palace since the 1600s, pulling out all the stops to bring the historic ballroom back to life for one magical evening.

Londonderry House



1963

30 PAVILION ROAD

Searcys opened our 30 Pavilion Road events venue in Knightsbridge, which was famed as THE party venue of the capital in the 1980s and 90s.



1990

THE BARBICAN

It wasn't until 1990 that Searcys really transitioned into the venue-focussed business it is today. Our first catering contract was at The Barbican, then fairly newly built, which continues to be one of our key venues today.

2002

VINTNERS' HALL

Searcys became the caterer at Vintners' Hall. The Vintners' Company, with its first Charter in 1363, is one of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London. With a history in the trade of wool and wine throughout the Middle Ages, it is the home of wine trade in England and boasts one of the oldest private dining rooms in London.



2004

THE BIRTH OF SEARCYS AFTERNOON TEA

Searcys opens The Pump Room Restaurant in Bath and Searcys Afternoon Tea is born. Built in the 1790s with its glittering chandeliers and a spa fountain, The Pump Room was famed as the destination for high society to meet and 'take the waters' from the hot springs and today is a must-visit location in Bath.



2007

THE GHERKIN AND ST PANCRAS CHAMPAGNE BAR

Searcys became a restaurant and bar operator, launching the longest Champagne Bar in Europe and an all-day brasserie along the Eurostar concourse at St Pancras. This was a homecoming for Searcys long history in champagne, and a venue to celebrate our own cuvée, as well as explore many more independent vineyards and English sparkling wines.

Same year, Searcys launches the first skyscraper restaurant and events space at 30 Mary Axe, better known as the Gherkin. The iconic structure was completed by Sir Norman Foster in 2003, and is widely considered to be the 'prettiest' of all London's skyscrapers.



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2011

BLenheim PALACE

Blenheim Palace appoints Searcys as its official caterer, a proud moment for the company's legacy.



2012

LAUNCH OF 30 EUSTON SQUARE

Searcys becomes an official caterer at the Royal College of General Practitioners its headquarters, 30 Euston Square is launched.

2014

WESTBURY STREET HOLDINGS

A few years later in 2014, the WSH (Westbury Street Holdings) group acquired Searcys, bringing a wealth of experience, knowledge and support to the company.

2019

THE KING'S FUND AND THE ROYAL INSTITUTION

Searcys is appointed caterer at both King's Fund (No. 11 Cavendish Square) and The Royal Institution – elegant venues in the heart of London that offer a mix of period and contemporary spaces.

2021

PALL MALL AND RCS - GLORIOUS PARTNERSHIPS

Searcys becomes the official caterer at The Royal College of Surgeons of England and launches the brand new central London events spaces for the College, The View at Lincoln Inn's Field. We also sign a partnership with 116 Pall Mall, and commercial launch our catering services for IoD members, events, a new Searcys Champagne Bar and afternoon tea at this magnificent venue. Our bespoke tea service designed by a British manufacturer and featuring Searcys signature honeycomb pattern is launched across our restaurants.



2022

CELEBRATING 175TH

Searcys celebrates its 175th anniversary, with the launch of new premium Searcys Blanc de Blancs champagne and our first-ever English sparkling wine.

The Stationers' Hall in the City appoints Searcys as its in-house caterer, in time for the venue's relaunch in summer 2022.

Searcys long-standing partner, The Inner Temple, launches its historic venue after a significant revamp.



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