

## Dining Out

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# Gordon Ramsay Takes Manhattan, Tiptoeing, He Says

By MICHAEL RUHLMAN

**I**VE been focusing on New York for the last five years," the mogul chef Gordon Ramsay said. "I've been busting my gut to get to New York."

That isn't surprising, since Manhattan, where he is opening a restaurant this fall, is one of the toughest proving grounds for chefs. But Mr. Ramsay's definition of "focusing" is uncommon.

During those five years he has opened eight individualized high-end restaurants in London. He has consultancies with restaurants in Dubai and Tokyo. A few months after the New York opening, he and a partner, the chef Angela Hartnett, will open a restaurant in Boca Raton, Fla., with Italian and Mediterranean accents. Less than a year after that, he plans to open a fine-dining res-

**An empire-building chef who minces no words, just underlings and critics.**

taurant in Los Angeles. And he is exploring sites in Dublin, Amsterdam and Prague for top restaurants, and, at home in England, for gastro-pubs.

This summer he signed a four-year contract, reportedly for \$16 million, with Channel 4 in England to continue his television career — he was the subject of two documentaries and is already the host of two shows in England — and at the end of the month he expects to negotiate a new multi-year contract with Fox Broadcasting, which intends to produce a third season of "Hell's Kitchen," his cooking competition show.

Whether he will be going on tour to promote his memoir, "Roasting in Hell's Kitchen," which will be published next month by HarperEntertainment, remains to be seen.

Still, Mr. Ramsay insists that his commitment to New York is total.

Gordon Ramsay at the London, a 45-seat restaurant with four-star ambitions, is scheduled to open in Midtown in November, along with the London Bar, a more casual place with 95 seats. They will both be at London NYC, the \$75 million renovation of the Rihga Royal on West 54th Street. Chris Hutcheson, the chief executive of Gordon Ramsay Holdings and Mr. Ramsay's father-in-law, said they are investing \$5 million to \$6 million in the project, their most expensive endeavor.

"This is not going to be some consultancy that I'm going to be appearing here for the next three weeks and you won't be seeing me till next July," Mr. Ramsay said, speaking from a hotel room in Norfolk, England, where he was finishing up the third season of the television series "Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares." He said he would be at the restaurant for 10-day stretches with 3-day breaks in London, at least until the new year.

"I'm not trying to take New York by storm," he said. "I just want to sneak in there, keep my head down, batten down the hatches and cook."

Mr. Ramsay, 39, is not known for keeping his head down. He grew up in Scotland and England at the knee of a father who wanted him to play professional soccer. Persistent injuries prevented a sports career, and he went to culinary school. Then, at age 19, he arrived in the kitchen of Marco Pierre White, the enfant terrible who put London cuisine on the map in the 1980's with his innovative food and volatile personality at Harvey's.

From then on, Mr. Ramsay worked only for chefs who had or would have three Michelin stars, among them Albert Roux, Joel

Robuchon and, most important, Guy Savoy. He returned to London from his Paris training to open Aubergine at age 26, and began hunting and capturing Michelin stars of his own. After a falling-out with his partners, he opened what would become his flagship, Restaurant Gordon Ramsay, in 1998.

He was helped with a substantial loan from his father-in-law, a successful businessman whose daughter, Tana, a Montessori teacher, Mr. Ramsay had married. (The Ramsays have four children.)

Restaurant Gordon Ramsay, known informally as Gordon Ramsay at Royal Hospital Road, earned its third Michelin star in 2001. By then he had developed a loyal staff and deepened his reputation as culinary virtuoso cum footballer thug. He famously ejected the restaurant critic for The Times of London and a companion, Joan Collins, from his restaurant. According to Jay Rayner, a critic and writer for The Observer in London, he then called the news media and told them what he had done.

Mr. Ramsay's media appeal is based on a fiercely aggressive, megalomaniacal television persona (not uncommon in the chef world but less often seen) that is not entirely exaggerated, and his interviews are laced with robust obscenities.

Though his behavior was viewed from the outside as a detriment, he has managed to rise from owning a single restaurant with three Michelin stars to the leadership of a global restaurant empire before his 40th birthday because of his relationships with people.

Many of his chefs de cuisine — like Neil Ferguson, who will be running the New York restaurant — have been with Mr. Ramsay since the early 1990's and are often given a financial piece of the restaurants they run.

But perhaps more critical is his relationship with his real estate partner, John Cerialle, who runs the hotel division of the Blackstone Real Estate Group, an arm of



Paul Ramsey

**THE CHEF AS MODUL** Gordon Ramsay, above, is to open his first New York restaurant in November. Left, the chef's flagship in London, Restaurant Gordon Ramsay, which has three Michelin stars and is often called Gordon Ramsay at Royal Hospital Road.



Griffith Barclay-Bloomfield News

the Blackstone global private equity and advisory concern. It is Mr. Cerialle who, more than anyone else, paved the way for Mr. Ramsay's global fleet of restaurants.

In 1999, working with the restaurant consultant Barry Wine, Mr. Cerialle met with Mr. Ramsay to ask if he would be interested in running a restaurant at Claridge's in London. Mr. Ramsay opened there in 2001, and since then he and Blackstone have become partners in seven of his nine London restaurants, the three restaurants opened or planned in the United States and the prospects in Prague, Amsterdam and Dublin. In the past year, his restaurants earned \$124 million, with profits of \$14 million, Mr. Ramsay said.

Of Mr. Cerialle, he said: "He's been phenomenally generous in terms of the vision, the understanding, and I think it's been a benefit to Blackstone. They're not scared."

And he added, more coarsely than can be fully printed here, that the company has "a level of commitment and loyalty to you that is second to none."

The partnership is unusual in the world of chef empires. Often when chefs expand, they do so more in name than in capital. L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon at the Four Seasons hotel in New York, for example, is owned and operated by the hotel's owner, Ty Warner. Mr. Robuchon receives a consultancy fee. Often the marquee chef pays rent to the hotel, in the form of a percentage of restaurant sales. This allows a chef who may not have the millions required to build a fine-dining restaurant in Manhattan to open a restaurant there.

This is not the exactly the case with Mr. Ramsay. While the restaurants in Dubai and Tokyo are purely management deals, Mr. Ramsay has full or partial ownership of

the rest. But Mr. Hutcheson, the Gordon Ramsay Holdings chief, noted that there were complicating elements in New York, such as dealing with a union, hotel and restaurant employees Local 6. Union employees have substantial power in addressing workplace-environment concerns, which can be an issue for a chef inclined to shout at his employees.

"I've already been warned," Mr. Ramsay said. "The moment I touch down at the airport I get put in my straitjacket and I go straight to my management skills to learn how to ask a kitchen porter to wash out a copper pan for me."

The London Bar, his casual restaurant, will be entered through the hotel lobby and will serve tapas-style food in the manner of Mr. Ramsay's Maze restaurant in London. Those dining at Gordon Ramsay at the London will go through the bar to a screened linen door leading to the 45-seat restaurant, which includes a chef's table where patrons may dine in the kitchen.

The menu will feature both à la carte and tasting menus similar to those served at his flagship restaurant in London. While he hasn't finalized pricing, Mr. Ramsay said "it's not going to be a basement bargain, but it's not going to be the most expensive restaurant in New York either."

Mr. Ramsay described the food only as "very natural" and "very proper," adding that any patron trying to take pictures of it would be banned.

"We're not going to stand there and gawk," he said.

But can Mr. Ramsay really bring anything new to New York? He was raised in the tradition of French fundamental technique brought to bear on the finest ingredi-

ents, not unlike that of Alain Ducasse or Daniel Boulud, for instance. How his food will be received in New York, which has been quick to embrace innovation and increasingly obscure and exotic ingredients, will be interesting to watch.

Much may depend on Mr. Ferguson, who has traveled widely in preparation for his role as chef de cuisine and is familiar to the staffs of Manhattan's high-end kitchens.

Moreover, there is the question of how many four-star restaurants Manhattan will support.

"If anybody can succeed he can," said the restaurateur Drew Nieporent. "But the market has changed in New York, and he needs to be sensitive to the casualization of fine dining in New York."

In addition to serving both restaurants, the kitchen will provide room service to the hotel's 564 rooms, which will have coffee tables specially designed for fine dining; they interlock and can be raised to normal dining-table level.

He said his benchmark would be the Trump International Hotel and Tower, where Jean-Georges Vongerichten runs the restaurant Jean Georges, which received four stars from Frank Bruni in The New York Times in April, and the more casual Nougatine, along with providing room service.

And after the three American and three European restaurants are up and running?

"I'd love to go back to Paris, to be honest," he said. "You know how arrogant the French are — extraordinary. They make us all look so normal. I got such abuse there, I was like a tortured child. So the idea is to go back to Paris, staff the restaurant all with English and call it Roast Beef!"