



The hottest food ticket in town

From herbs grown hydroponically in the ceiling to the till and video screen ordering system, London's Barneys Place combines ingenuity and innovation to deliver a fantastic sandwich and salads food offer.

Nellie Nichols investigates



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I've always found hydroponics, the idea of growing stuff without soil, fascinating. But I must confess my last encounter with them was excruciatingly embarrassing.

Back in my Hazlewood days when VHB, the cress grower, was still part of their portfolio, I recall a memorable visit to their hydroponic tomato hothouse on the coast.

I don't know what possessed me at the time, but I remember thinking my bright yellow wool jacket would be smart and casual at the same time, and therefore I deemed it very appropriate attire for the day.

If my memory serves me well I can't have been in the hothouse more than a few minutes before the production manager demanded rather abruptly, I recall, that I take it off and then threw it some distance away from us.

Rather unnecessary behaviour at the time I thought. It wasn't long before many bumble bees followed my said lovely jacket and it was pointed out to me that in their eyes I was just a great big moving chunk of pollen, a walking giant tomato flower. The whole experience was terrifying, chiefly

as it brought back vivid memories of getting a swarm of bees in my hair as a child and my grandfather turning me upside down and dunking me in a water butt to get rid of them.

But the hydroponic system I'm looking at now is right in the middle of Houndsditch in the City of London and being bee-less, far safer. Trays of beautifully growing herbs sit suspended on a metal rack from the ceiling of the newly opened Barneys Place, soon to be joined by micro salads and tomatoes. It's built on a simple and small scale, but a professionally installed hydroponic system none the less.

Barney Stoppard, the second son of the playwright Tom Stoppard, opened Barneys Place in January, and far from having the rock-solid background in food I would have expected from someone opening a new venture like this, he actually comes to the industry via a career in video production. He initially opened a sausage sandwich stall in 2004 in Broadway market and then returned to his career. Only temporarily as it turned out: he was smitten and in 2006 he opened the first Barneys Place in the form of a modern

metallic and glass box kiosk, selling takeaways in Broadgate Circus and still very much there.

What strikes me about the kiosk is its modernity and how inviting and cleanly designed it is. The refreshingly polar opposite of every grubby roadside café van I've ever passed.

No one ever knows what lottery of natural talents they are going to arrive in this world with, and, rather than concentrate on what we're given, some try very hard to be what they simply never will, or strive to emulate creativity in countless different fields.

Others, like Barny, have been born with a natural aptitude for the composition of a dish of food and a deep innate ability to constantly conjure up fantastic ideas and create tastes that are well in sight of perfect. Having met him I'm sure he will be very surprised I'm saying all this, because he is a person of great modesty and just gets stuck in to whatever needs to be done. He is the very genuine epitome of 'hands-on'.

When I arrive at the Houndsditch shop opposite the massive building site, soon to be the City's new skyscraping Heron Tower, I have to stop in the doorway just to take stock of this industrial cavernous space, with its exposed pipework, rough concrete walls, huge glass windows and vibrant open working kitchen. The tables are made from scaffolding tubes with simple melamine and MDF

tops; the counters laid with slate tiles, written on each day in chalk, with arrows pointing to the detailed descriptions of the daily seasonal salads.

Originally a dull and lifeless employment office, Barny ripped out a total of three tonnes of rubbish, keeping only the original light fittings. Working on a tight budget, he undertook the work himself, yet one gets the impression that thousands of pounds have been spent with a slick and expensive team of shop designers.

I can see Barny in the exposed open plan kitchen cooking with his team. There is a very obvious harmony among them that is strikingly unusual; no pre-lunch pressure is bubbling over here, just well-spirited and organised production.

This is a group of young and very dynamic people from varying walks of life, each encouraged to voice their opinions and try out their ideas. Later, when I sit and try some recipes, Abby, an electrical engineering student from Canada, asks if I would like to try her limeade recipe. She'd never made limeade before working with Barny, but wanted to try, and her recipe, without doubt, puts any similar commercially produced product I can name to shame. Tart, sweet, acidic, citrus and zinging with freshness all at the same time, without a hint of bitterness, it has an Alice in Wonderland magic about it. I'd drink it all the time if I could.

Barny takes a break to come and talk to me,

Janes Pantry invest in Stevens Recipe Formulation & Traceability

So, why do so many companies choose to invest in Stevens for their Recipe Formulation & Traceability needs?

Gloucester based bakery JanesPantry has recently installed a 2 terminal Recipe Formulation System from Dataprocess Stevens

The 'off the shelf' bakery system is designed to provide effortless recipe traceability.

Neville Morse, Managing Director of Janes Pantry, is delighted by the purchase of the system "we were told by Stevens about the impressive payback from raw ingredient reduction and at first we were sceptical. We've calculated that by installing this system into our bakery we've saved around 5% of our annual raw ingredient cost..."

The newly installed Vantage system provides Recipe Control by enabling the Production Manager to schedule the daily requirements for the recipe batches on the PC in advance. The batch requirements are then displayed

on the Vantage Touch Screen display to enable the Operators to select from the list of requirements without the use of a paper production schedule.

Once selected, the recipe is pulled from the main database and the Operator is prompted through the recipe formulation process one ingredient at a time, ensuring that the weighing tolerances are met and no over or under weighing occurrences can spoil a batch, which can be a costly mistake.

Since Stevens invented the Recipe Formulation System as part of a nationwide initiative by British Bakeries in the 1980's, over 1000 customers worldwide have benefited from their installations.

Stevens now offer modules to compliment their Recipe Formulation System to provide factory wide traceability to their customers. These additional modules include Goods Receiving, Mixer Collation (for combining the traceability of bulk fed ingredients with the pre-weighed



ingredients), Average Weight & SPC, In-Line Checkweighers and also their new Finished Product Dispatch System (proving to be a top seller in the USA).



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NELLIE NICHOLS

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leaving a trail of suggestions behind him. Even then he patiently answers questions from the kitchen about salads that are being made up: a recipe for Dijon dressing comes straight from his head in precise quantities; he finds a photograph for reference to show one of his team so he can explain how to tear the chervil and where to place it on a salad.

A big bowl of chunky roasted butternut squash is placed on the slate counter. Without a doubt, part of the balance of this production is his never-ending patience and attention to detail that manifests itself in what he does. Here is more proof of what I have always believed in: that competent training builds the strength of the team and provides the steel-plated backbone of any successful kitchen.

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He wants customers to consider the taste of food alongside its history and seasonality and is constantly trying out and serving weekly specials of stews or roasts from different parts of the world.

This week's special is a slow-roasted Mexican pork. He cooks it for sixteen hours and goes off to get me some to try, bringing it in a lovely big bowl with his own recipe Salsa and an avocado relish made with lime. The meat is shredded by hand and is as tender and buttery as only a slow roast can be; the salsa is full on, full bodied and rich.

My resigned expectation was that it would be like so many others: thin and watery and cumbrously mixed with raw tasting chilli.

His norm is to only use fresh seasonal produce each day. His food is not, as he says, 'designed by a calculator'. His personal recipes change all the time and he has hundreds, each meticulously photographed. It doesn't matter what salad you buy, they are all the same price, charged straightforwardly by weight: you put in your carton what you want to pay for.

There is no fridge full of cold sandwiches - you won't find them here. Barney is genuinely surprised at the suggestion. His product is 'hot food fast'

along with his wonderful ever changing range of homemade salads.

He is focused on a simple offering. Where else after all, he wants to know, can you get a takeaway, freshly cooked rib eye steak sandwich (and at £5.85 unbelievable value) this fast and this good? Is that a glimmer of pride I think I see, as he explains why his average transaction time is almost non-existent? Get that right and you've got the main artery helping to pump success through any food on the move business. His is a sophisticated till and video screen system that has your order ready for you by the time you've chosen and paid for it and walked to the end of the counter.

The massive sloping grill flame cooks all the bespoke prepared meats: hand made hamburgers, made with the best beef available, and juicy, seared, marinated free range chicken breasts are held in perfect culinary suspension in the state of the art Texan holding oven - a masterpiece of technology that regulates the appropriate temperature and moisture to ensure each and every sandwich tastes fresh off the grill.

Choose your sauce - you'll get a handful of crisp lettuce and some thick slabs of market-fresh tomato; perhaps ask for a cute little box of home fries to go with it, with his excellent (God, I loved it) bbq sauce for dipping. You have total freedom to choose any combination, yet the sandwiches only come on one locally freshly baked authentic Portuguese bread roll - perfect in its texture and the softest bed for any of the fillings.

There isn't a huge choice here but everything you want is covered, from breakfast to the delicious baked pastries and absolutely nothing is missing. After all, why offer lots of bread types when all you really need is one fantastic one that does the job so well.

Barney is one of the few but growing band of innovators that have truly tried to understand some of the very real disciplines required for launching a successful food business and has painstakingly researched and worked through those issues: how to design a small, simple yet compact menu that seems big; the ability to deliver it with bells on; how to avoid profit eating queues, and above all having a genuine USP.

Suddenly he's saying goodbye and leaving me with a table covered with food to try. I'm presented with a huge greaseproof pillow of deliciousness that I'm not sure is an early Christmas present or the grilled free range lemon marinated chicken sandwich I've ordered with home made garlic mayo, just immaculately wrapped. I've got my doll size box of home fries and Abby's limeade and... well, I think I'm just going to stay here all afternoon.

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The above is based on her independent views

