

Metropolitan Restaurants
43-45 Charlotte Street, London W1P 1HA
Tel: 020 7631 9870
Fax: 020 7631 9873

Owner: Stefano Fraquelli
Restaurants: seven in the group – three Gettis; The Original Spaghetti House; Zia Teresa; Vecchia Milano; Galileo's Italian aperitif bar and restaurant
Average spend (Getti): £20 without drink
Average number of customers (group): 10,000 per week
Estimated yearly turnover: £10.4m

Getti's fortune

JUST over a year ago, a modern Italian restaurant called Getti was launched on the London restaurant scene. The opening was significant for two reasons: first, it heralded the beginning of a new chain of restaurants; second, for owner Stefano Fraquelli it signified a move away from the traditional Italian eaterie to a more modern cuisine.

To put this change in context, Fraquelli comes from the family that, along with the Lavarini family, jointly owned one of the capital's oldest restaurant groups, Spaghetti House, established in 1955. Two years ago, the families decided to divide the 13 Italian restaurants to "release the potential of the company". Fraquelli inherited five restaurants from his father, which he consolidated under the name Metropolitan Restaurants.

Through this new group, Fraquelli took the chance to use his "pent-up artistic and creative talents" to update the look of his eateries – one of which still sported hanging bottles and plastic plants.

And so the Getti concept was born. Fraquelli – every inch the suave Italian, with groomed hair, perfect goatee and well-tailored suit – calls it the product of his "progressive thinking". This is also reflected in the choice of name – a simple contraction of Spaghetti House.

Turkish delights

This concept came to life in the first Getti restaurant, a 120-seat, two-floor villa with lit gardens, which opened in Istanbul, Turkey, in November 1999. This was also the first new launch for the Metropolitan group, which now has an estimated annual turnover exceeding £10m and serves 10,000 customers each week. Fraquelli says Istanbul was chosen because of its vibrant market, and because his wife is Turkish.

Fraquelli then had the confidence to bring the concept to London. As part of his plans to invest £2m in the Metropolitan group, Fraquelli bought two new premises in the capital to start from scratch.

The 100-seat Marylebone High Street restaurant was opened in January last year, and the tiny 36-seat outlet in Wardour Street started trading in June – this has only three bookable sittings per evening because of its size. The latest Getti restaurant to

Twelve months ago, Stefano Fraquelli, son of the Spaghetti House founder, opened his own Italian restaurant, Getti. **Noella Pio Kivlehan** talks to him about his vision for Getti and the break-up of his father's business



Getti style is "classy but comfortable"

open, in November, was the 90-seat Jermyn Street branch, which was converted from a former Spaghetti House.

All the Getti restaurants are fashioned in the same style – tiled floors, wooden tables and chairs, and pale-coloured walls. Blue and brown are the dominant colours. Fraquelli describes the interiors as "classy, but comfortable, intimate but not intimidating, and high quality". The majority of the 150 staff in the group are Italian-born.

Getting the interiors right was important to the image-conscious Fraquelli, who confesses to being a fan of Sir Terence Conran (there's a Conran shop a few doors away from his Marylebone High Street restaurant). "I want to do for Italian restaurants what Armani did for suits," he says.

Modern Italian food

Like the decor, the food has a modern feel. The executive chef for the Getti restaurants, Alessandro Cristiano, joined the team last month and has created menus comprising "Italian specialities with updated interpretations of many Italian classics".

The menu changes every six weeks and is split into seven sections: starters, soups, risotto, pasta, meat, fish and salads. Prices start at £2.95 for roast cherry tomatoes, mozzarella, basil and olive oil on toasted slices of bread, up to £15.95 for the breaded veal chop with fried courgettes, fennel and marjoram mayonnaise. Average spend per head is £20 excluding wine.

A mixture of traditional and modern Italian dishes are served in Fraquelli's other four London restaurants: the 160-seat Zia Teresa, the 100-seat Vecchia Milano, the 150-seat Galileo's aperitif bar and restaurant in Haymarket, and the 200-seat Spaghetti House in Goodge Street.

The Spaghetti House was the first of the chain to open back in 1955, but it has since been refurbished, the plastic plants and hang-



One of the dishes Getti serves is fillet of sea bass with tomato, garlic and white wine

"I want to do for Italian restaurants what Armani did for suits" **Stefano Fraquelli**

"After 1999," says Fraquelli, "I wanted to catch up on my designs, and break away from the staid image of Italian restaurants. I think the Spaghetti House continued to evolve, but it lost its role as a leader in Italian restaurants. I wanted to do something different."

ing wine bottles giving way to tidy shelves. Its name has also been updated and now includes the word "original". The revamp has paid off – business at the 46-year-old, four-storey eaterie has shot up by 10%.

Fraquelli is keen that the non-Getti restaurants in his group should evolve individually. "They are not brands because of their locality," he says. "Brands wouldn't suit them."

He is also confident his restaurants are more adventurous than the Spaghetti Houses he inherited. But he is quick to add that this is not a criticism of the outlets that went to his father's partner's son, Luigi Lavarini. Fraquelli describes the split as a "very sweet and charming parting of the waves".

Lavarini still markets the remaining seven Spaghetti Houses – the lease ran out on one of the restaurants – as having "family appeal", a far cry from the affluent 20-45 age group at which Getti is being targeted.

Fraquelli wants it to be known that the Spaghetti House group is now two separate companies, and he is going to send out mailshots to "sort out any confusion about ownership", he says. When asked why he left this move for two years, he shrugs and says that he "wanted things to settle down".

Now that they have settled, Fraquelli is ploughing on with his own expansion plans. There will be more Gettis, and possibly other individually branded restaurants within the Metropolitan group.

Fraquelli is reluctant to discuss expansion details. "We have grown by 40% since January last year," he says, "and my purpose is to maintain that in the future. I am aiming for solid growth." But, when pressed, he adds: "With a broad brush, I think the group will double its size in three to five years, certainly in Britain, most likely in London."

The Italian revolution is on a roll. ■



Right: the 100-seat Marylebone High Street Getti was one of the first to open in London
Top: Fraquelli has big plans for his group