

The Entourage Group CEO on restaurants, ambitions and upcoming projects

In an interview with ELLE, CEO Stephanie Pearson reveals the secret behind the success of The Entourage Group's restaurants.

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THE ENTOURAGE GROUP

With their popular *high-end* concepts like Momo and Mr Porter, **The Entourage Group**, of which **Stephanie Juliet Pearson** is the CEO, has become an indispensable part of Amsterdam city centre. We sat down in one of their Amsterdam locations, Mr Porter, to talk about restaurants, ambitions and upcoming projects.

Can you briefly introduce yourself and The Entourage Group?

'My name is Stephanie, I am originally from England. I graduated at 21 in English Management. It is very normal to graduate young; in England you go to university at 18 and study for three years. After my studies I went into the corporate world; in restaurants. Then I met my partner and we decided to build a business together and that is where we are now with The Entourage Group.

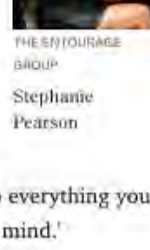
What makes restaurants special for you; why did you decide to build a business in this industry?

'I didn't grow up with the idea that I wanted to build restaurants and work in the hospitality industry. During my studies and student life I had part-time jobs in several restaurants, like most young people do to earn some money and survive university, but it wasn't my ambition. **I always had a passion for entrepreneurship and setting up a business**.

And my partner; he had a background in hospitality, so when I met him we decided to start a business in that. He's very much into creating and building the brand *from scratch*. Once he's done all that, he hands it over to me to turn it into a business. So I do all the *front of house*, I oversee all the marketing, HR, etc. As CEO of The Entourage Group, I do two different sides of the business.'

What is something you do to make your restaurants special; what makes them unique?

'I would say it's something that we do as The Entourage Group and that we try to do in all of our restaurants. We always try to make everything very personal. We're very detail-oriented. We don't just check a box and move on. **We try to look at every detail of every aspect of a business**. From the moment people walk in to the moment they leave, their entire experience.



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Stephanie Pearson

We don't want people to feel like they're just one of many. We want to create more of a family feeling for our guests, our customers and the people who work for us. So everything you see or touch in our locations is designed with that idea in mind.'

What is something you specifically look for or pay extra attention to when you go to a different restaurant?

'Our hobby is going out to eat and visiting new places. When a new restaurant opens, I never see it as competition, but as new fun things happening and a source of inspiration. It keeps me alive, I like to go to new places!

I'm taking inspiration from Madrid now, the hospitality scene there is really taking it to the next level. London is of course always one of the key places to watch. It used to be New York, but after Covid it kind of stayed in the same place, while London came back strongly.

So I look at restaurants differently. It's not always the same style as ours. But I look at the design; at their concepts; at their food and how the staff is. **Sometimes I just go somewhere if I know there's good staff, because then you know you're going to get good service**.'

What are your absolute do's and don'ts when it comes to restaurants?

'I think the feeling you get from a place is really important. Of course it's important that the food is good quality, but **when you walk into a restaurant you need to feel valued; you need to feel understood; you just need to feel welcome**.

'Feeling appreciated is such a different feeling than when you go into a restaurant and you're looked down upon. Some restaurants you can wait in there for 10 minutes and no one notices you. And when you're spending that much money in a restaurant, our restaurants are pretty *high-end*, you need to feel appreciated.'



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Restaurant Izakaya in Amsterdam

What does a working day usually look like for you?

'That's the beauty of hospitality; every day is so different. It's not a typical job, at the moment we're planning the opening of Ibiza and the opening of a new restaurant in London. I'm looking after all the new staff and the staff we have at the moment. I'm busy with all the events that are happening. **You wake up every day and you never know what's going to happen**. With the amount of staff we have, over 900 people in Amsterdam alone and then we have the German and Spanish side, there's always something interesting happening.

I like to be at the locations because I want to see, live and breathe the experience of my guests

'There's something new happening every day. And I like to be in the middle of it, as you can see this is my office for the day. I do have an office at our head office, but I'm never there. I like to be on the premises because I want to see, live and breathe the experience of my guests. **I don't think I can help the company if I'm looking at a wall. I have to see everything around me and be part of it**. For me it's important to experience it as a guest too, to see what it's like to be on the other side.'

Did you grow up with certain role models and do you still have them now?

'I knew growing up that I wanted to be a businesswoman, that I wanted to be a career woman and that I wanted to follow my own path in life without depending on anyone. I wouldn't say that I have or had a specific role model that I looked up to. **There are so many business people, not just women, men too that inspire me**. Usually everyone focuses on strong women and how we feel in this world, but I think it's also how you see it, how you interpret it.

It's like teaching your children to focus on their development. I try to see that we're all equal. When I'm in a meeting with a table full of men, I don't feel inadequate. It's about how you present yourself and what your knowledge is behind it.'

Have you ever had bad experiences as a woman working in the hospitality industry?

'When I was very young and working behind the bar, I was of course a bit more vulnerable. **But I think times have changed now. It's about how you present yourself; how you want to be viewed and treated**. I think it's very equal now. But I've always had good company around me, maybe because I created it myself.

I never want to have just women, or just men. It's really good to have a mix, also with different nationalities. I think it's great to have people from different places, like the Netherlands and Spain and Germany. When you put all these people together it's so unique and so different. **I'm very open to mixing for different nationalities because that's when you create that *spiciness* or *example adding some Italian flair***. And bringing people together also means bringing knowledge together, learning new things and getting inspired. I love meeting someone new, there is always something small that inspires me and that I take with me on my journey.

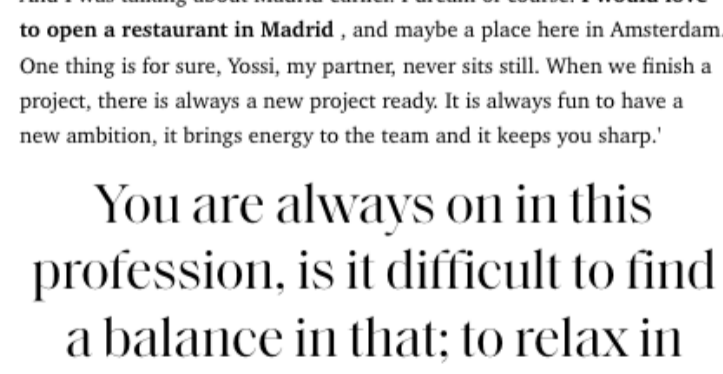
That's what I hope everyone around me does, when they're in meetings or meeting new people. I hope they get inspired by something small. That's why you have to interact with different people, how else can you grow? It doesn't have to be the same work. It can be the way they present themselves, the way they talk, their kindness.'

What do you think of the Netherlands and the Dutch?

Before we moved here, we were a tourist family. We loved coming to the Netherlands; it's one of our favorite places, we love the beauty of it. We often came here on the weekends when we were doing business here, and we fell in love even more. So when we had our children, we chose to settle here because we wanted to raise them in the Netherlands. We love the culture. We love the people. **It has the simplicity, but also a great style**.

And something I said before; **the ambition is really high**. For a small country what has been achieved is really special, the Dutch always want to be at the top. It is great to be with such people and to be in such a cosmopolitan city as Amsterdam.

It's funny how everyone always says, "What about the weather?" I'm from England. We have the same weather. It doesn't really make a difference. I'm not from somewhere exotic.'



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Restaurant Momo in Amsterdam

What can you tell me about your upcoming projects?

'Mr Porter in London will be our biggest project, back to our roots. It's a challenging market and we're coming with our brand and our Dutch team, **so it's like "Holland takes on London" and we're very excited about that**.

Everyone has embraced Mr Porter so well in Spain and here, and so many international people are coming back, or even flying back, to visit our places and enjoy the atmosphere we have here. We can't wait to create this new atmosphere in London.

And I was talking about Madrid earlier. I dream of course. **I would love to open a restaurant in Madrid**, and maybe a place here in Amsterdam. One thing is for sure, Yossi, my partner, never sits still. When we finish a project, there is always a new project ready. It is always fun to have a new ambition, it brings energy to the team and it keeps you sharp.'

You are always on in this profession, is it difficult to find a balance in that; to relax in between?

'I really see the job that I have as a luxury. I learn something new every day and I meet someone new every day. I always say to my staff, when they say "maybe we should get a new job", **imagine missing all the people, the *spiciness* and all the new things that are happening**. You never know who is going to come into the restaurant today; what person, what personality. In that way, your customers always dictate what is going to happen.

There are definitely stressful days. I have to bridge those with the positive side of the job. Because it also gives you energy. That's the thing, this *business* gives you energy.'

You told us about your latest projects in Ibiza and London, when can we enjoy your latest restaurants?

Last week, on Friday 17th May, we opened our first pop-up of Mr Porter in Ibiza, which is located in the Sir Joan Hotel. Mr Porter on Park Lane in London will take a little longer; we expect to open there in **September**.



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Mr Porter pop-up in Ibiza

We founded The Entourage Group 16 years ago with our **first restaurant and venture here in Amsterdam; Momo Restaurant, Bar & Lounge**. After the success of Momo we opened **Izakaya Asian Kitchen & bar**, followed by **The Butcher brand** which we now have in ten different locations. After that we opened **The Duchess** which we now have a **Michelin star** for; that is across the street.

We also have multiple locations abroad, such as **Mr Porter Steakhouse, Bar & Lounge** in Barcelona and Izakaya in Munich. This summer we have our first pop-up concept of Mr Porter in Ibiza. Last Friday, May 17, we officially opened the doors. And in September we will open our first location of Mr Porter in London, Park Lane.

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Michelin star restaurant The Duchess in Amsterdam