

MIDDLE EASTERN EXPANSION

Meet Yossi Eliyadoo, Hospitality Entrepreneur, Founder and
Co-Owner of THE ENTOURAGE GROUP



“Hospitality chose me. I grew up to it,” says Yossi Eliyadoo, Hospitality Entrepreneur, Founder and Co-Owner of THE ENTOURAGE GROUP. Having kickstarted his career within the industry during his teenage years, to earn some pocket money, Yossi moved from Tel Aviv – where he was born and raised – to New York right after high school. He soon returned to his hometown to operate some of the most renowned places in the city as a general manager. Pursuing his passion within the hospitality field, Yossi went on to launch and operate several Italian coffee shops. However, fate had other plans. A project opportunity to relocate to England and create a concept for hotel chains in the UK and Europe came forth, which led to the launch of his first concept in Nottingham, the vibrant Pan Asian cuisine restaurant with a Latin twist, Chino Latino.

Yossi met with hotel entrepreneur Liran Wizman through mutual friends in the UK soon after, who quickly took notice of the rising trailblazer in the hospitality scene and reached out to launch a joint venture in Amsterdam. “Liran had just bought the Park Hotel and they were planning on a massive renovation. He was looking for someone like me that specializes in hospitality,” says Yossi. After a couple of visits to Amsterdam, Yossi fell in love with the city, a place that was never a part of his big plan.

In 2008, THE ENTOURAGE GROUP was formed with the launch of the iconic MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge in Amsterdam and the rest is history.

The renowned venture's distinct and ever-growing repertoire includes IZAKAYA Asian Kitchen & Bar (Amsterdam, Munich & Ibiza), Michelin awarded THE DUCHESS, MR PORTER (Amsterdam & Barcelona), THE BUTCHER (Amsterdam, Berlin, Ibiza & Manchester). In an exclusive interview with Yossi, he delves into his journey and upcoming projects, with the expansion of the hospitality group to Dubai later this year.

Tell us about the creative process behind MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge and how you got started in Amsterdam.

In 2007-08, our first baby was born - MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge. As we know, Amsterdam is very cosmopolitan and international, but people stick to traditional places. The city has exceptional Asian restaurants, whether it's Indonesian, Chinese, or any other cuisine. Everything is too traditional though, so I thought about bringing a fresh cosmopolitan

breath to the city, and something more contemporary with the design, food, and environment. Personally, everything I found here was very basic. It wasn't like London, LA or New York, there was a big gap between those cities and the F&B culture. I thought Amsterdam was a great place to introduce this concept since Asian cuisine, in general, is very playful. Everybody likes Asian flavours! The way we created and introduced MOMO was fun. We've now been around for 14 years and it's still breaking records - it is one of the strongest restaurants in the city and I think we're going to stay.

What was the response like when introducing a concept as such to the city?

It was a mix; the media weren't the biggest fans. We didn't get nine stars, but there was a queue of 200 people every single night, since the beginning. When the critics came to dine, they thought it would only be a trend for a year. I knew I wasn't doing a trend and I built a strong base around our service and quality. There's no

GET TO KNOW THE ENTREPRENEUR

Your favourite global and regional restaurant

I love lunch at La Petit Maison and ROKA, Charlotte Street in London. I also love Casa Jondal in Ibiza for lunch. It's a really beautiful restaurant. We spend time there in the summer. Most of the time I spend time in our places, we have several restaurants and we are always hanging out. In Dubai, I love the food and atmosphere at Nammos.

What's your favourite home-cooked meal?

I come from a house full of casseroles. So, I'm loving home cooking and don't have it enough but whenever I do it's like a celebration of mouthwatering flavours.

Is there any dish that your kids love, that you make?

It's definitely the Chicken schnitzel. Kids love schnitzel!

reason that MOMO is not going to be there for another ten years or more. It's become a very strong establishment in Holland.

Is there a renowned chef at the helm of the kitchen?

We never build restaurants around the chefs. I don't believe in chef restaurants. It's all about the team and the concept. It's ideal that the chef decides to go travel the world but then there's a strong team behind him.

Tell us the process behind the conceptualization of a restaurant.

First of all, it's the location, concept and everything in between. You are looking into so many different aspects but it starts with writing a script and a brief of the concept - from A to Z. What are the concepts about? What's the look and feel? The aspects include the design, food, bar, open kitchen, and cuisine. Once we have a full brief, it goes to a graphic artist who looks through the brief and says, "Okay, this is a very clear identity for the brand."

The same goes for language with graphics and interior design. Then, we



IZAKAYA Ibiza



develop the cuisine, sketch menus with the chefs and team. This slowly comes through in stages, there are no shortcuts. Sometimes it takes a year, sometimes it takes longer and that's better. If you do a concept in two months and you're rushing everything, it's never gonna be the same as if you had taken a year or two.

For MOMO, I think it was the shortest one because we just came and planned to open the restaurant, so it launched within a year. Sometimes there are delays and it gives you more chances to do better.

What was the next restaurant after MOMO?

We opened THE BUTCHER and then IZAKAYA Asian Kitchen & Bar within a couple of months. The Butcher is a casual dining spot and burger joint, where we also opened a speakeasy bar behind it

in Albert Cuyp market, Amsterdam. IZAKAYA actually opened over ten years ago, we recently celebrated its ten-year anniversary in November.

Why did you decide to step into casual dining after MOMO?

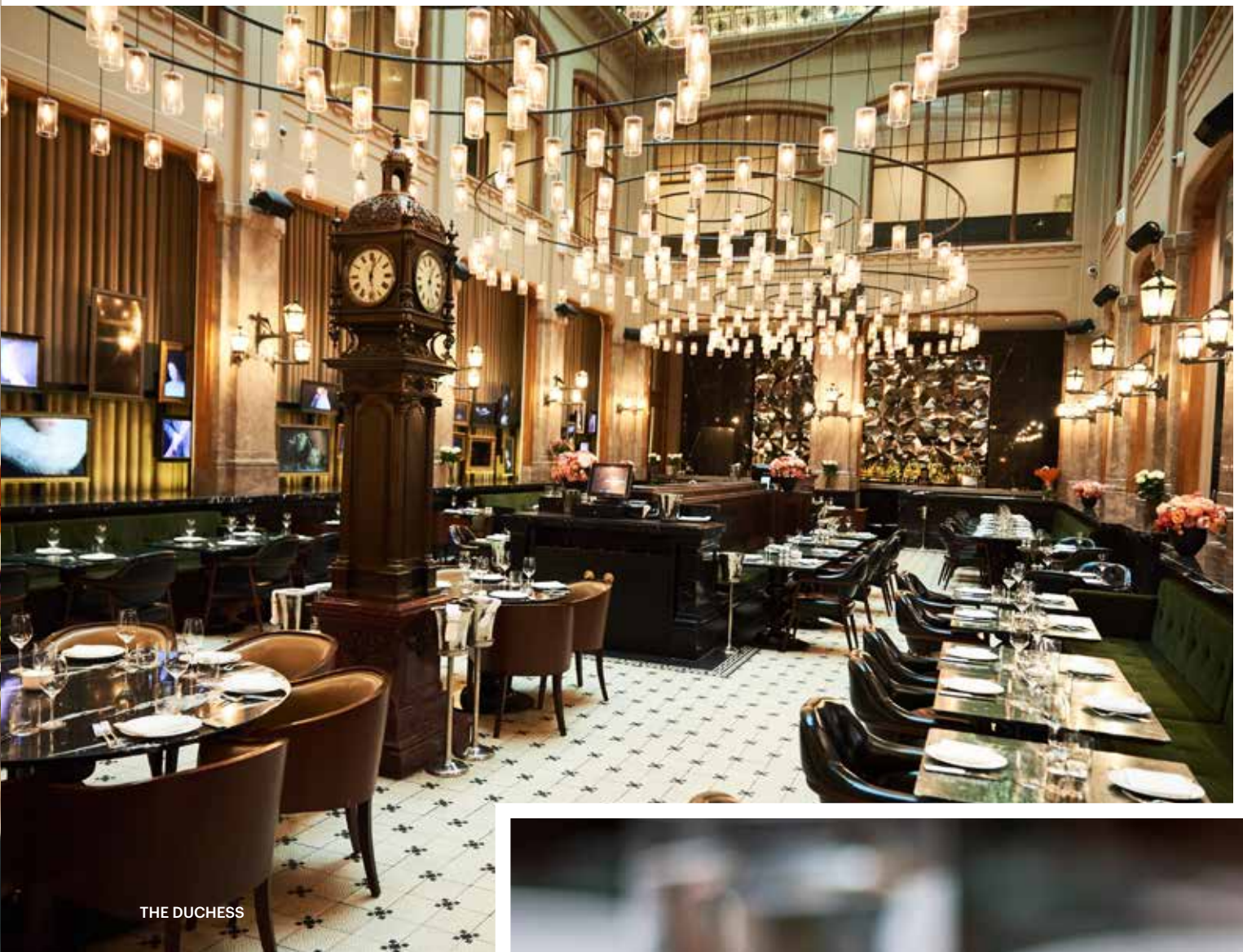
To do high-end is fine but I think as a hospitality group, we have a nice variety. There aren't many hospitality groups that have high-end restaurants, Asian, Mediterranean, steakhouses, Michelin star venues, burger joints, pizza joints and casual dining all together. On the other side, there are clubs and speakeasy bars so it's great to have everything under one umbrella.

Do Michelin stars and accolades hold value in your opinion?

With the concepts that we do, we never aim for a Michelin star. I got the news

about the star for THE DUCHESS, when I got a call from my wife in the middle of the night. I said, "Okay great. I'll speak to you in the morning." That was that. It was something that we never aimed for because we are not formal restaurants. We are not the sort of venue that does 40 chefs with 40 covers a night, operating in a tight environment. It's more happening, more fun, informal and high-end.

In the past few years, I think the Michelin star also wants to step into that, where it's not just about a boring environment. When restaurants do big numbers, which I think is much more difficult than doing 30 chefs with 30 people every night covers. It's much more difficult to do 250 with that level of food and a menu of 48 items. The Michelin star identified that and I'm grateful that we have it. Getting the Michelin star title is



THE DUCHESS

fantastic and a great achievement for any hospitality person. On the other hand, it gives people different expectations because it's a Michelin star. They come in and it's something completely different than what they thought a Michelin-star restaurant would be. It's all about people's expectations. We are very happy to be part of the Michelin star platform and it's a great additional title to have but we made sure we didn't change our identity. We didn't change who we are. We didn't change the food or pricing. I made it very clear to the team that this is who we are. That's why we got the Michelin star. We need to stay the same and adjust ourselves.

You're finally expanding into the Middle East. Why was Dubai your first choice?

The best restaurants in the world are





in Dubai. I think a lot of brands created in Dubai go abroad. You think about Dubai, you think about food and all the aspects, from casual and markets to high-end and everything else. In addition, it's a playground for architects and buildings in terms of design and investment. Dubai has become one of the top cities in the world for dining and in the hospitality industry.

Will you be launching a new concept in Dubai?

We believe our concept with MR PORTER, which is a modern steakhouse, will really suit Dubai. It's one of the most interesting steakhouses you will see with a lot of creative dishes on the menu. On the other hand, it also specializes in vegetarian options and seafood. We have a very strong feeling the international crowd coming to MR PORTER in Amsterdam and Barcelona really embrace and love the concept, so we want to roll it out to Dubai. We have something

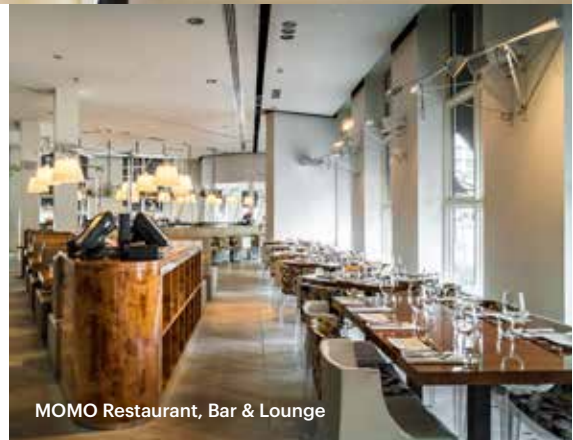
that's about to be signed in Downtown Dubai. It'll hopefully open in Q3-Q4, around September.

Are you looking to open multiple restaurants in the Middle East?

We're going to start with one first but when we successfully begin operating, we definitely want to develop more concepts. It's easier to do more in the city than to do just one alone, since you have a fully operational team looking after more venues.

What's next for THE ENTOURAGE GROUP?

We have been working on a project for four years. The pandemic stopped the process for our new contemporary, Mexican high-end restaurant. It was at a location that we pulled out when the pandemic started. And now, we are on the verge of closing a new location in Amsterdam that'll come up in the second quarter of 2023 for the concept.



MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge



IZAKAYA Amsterdam