

FRUITS DE MER

Scottish Lobster, Clams,
King Scallops, Mussels,
Dressed Brown Crab,
Scottish Langoustines
Spots, Arbroath Smoker,
St Marys Smoked Salmon
Loch Creran Oysters

FOOD & DRINK

A Taste of Scotland

Taste of Scotland

Restaurant Owner Malcolm Duck takes an irreverent look at the challenging time that the restaurant industry is currently facing.



What happens when the wallet people worry about their jobs, homes and pay? They put the brakes on spending and stop going out! The restaurant industry has taken a real kicking. Some are doing well at either end of the poles; McDonalds and the Michelin Star guys, but the restaurants in the middle are really toiling and numbers have decreased already with more on the edge?

Some have been clever, Pierre Levicky, Chez Pierre, of Pierre Victoire fame is doing extremely well, but then he is one of the brightest, hardest working guys I know. He specialises in the cheaper end, knows his market, cooks properly and uses the recession to play right in to his hands; low cost, ultra simple food done well. I have never seen so many two for one offers. And are these busy fools or sensibly driving revenue? Customers these days are fickle beasts; the worry is when the two for ones stop so will the customers.

There have been more changes with wine suppliers in the past 18 months than I have known in the last 22 years. Scotland has always been well served by wine suppliers of quality but the recession has seen a real shake up and a jostling for position. The devaluation of the pound against the euro, Australian and American currency has led to a real hike in prices at a time when people are trying to spend less. This in turn has led to some very inferior wine being punted by some in the wine trade trying to expand into areas of

the market vacated by the departed. It will be interesting to see if those with expansionist goals survive. Price is a real issue, Tennents Lager went up about seven pence in real cost in January 2010; do you absorb it, pass it on or add a margin as well? This is a very difficult time for suppliers; many are really being much tighter on credit terms and time to pay, which is understandable as risk of business failure has risen steeply but it doesn't help the struggling business.

The ability to defer PAYE and VAT has been a godsend to many over the winter and has come at a time when learning to managing cash flow has been for many the difference between survival and closure. There seems to be a little bit of optimism creeping back but I wonder how long it will last. VAT 20% and rise in NI, 3% mandatory pension contributions? Gulp, and that was planned before the bank bail out and the much heralded pain to come. We can only hope those in government realise the responsibility they are charged with. Now is a time for them to lead by example and cut hard in the public sector. A huge boost to the food and drink sector would be to allow entertaining to be tax deductible as it used to be.

We always have a choice to be happy or sad no matter the circumstance. Those who choose happy will be far better placed to face whatever challenges lie ahead and will see the opportunities which will present themselves more quickly. A difficult year ahead but I am sure the weather will be good!



Malcolm Duck

Malcolm Duck spent eleven years as an officer in the Royal Marines, owned Ducks at Le Marche Noir restaurant in Edinburgh and has now taken Ducks to Aberlady in East Lothian which he runs together with Donalds Bistro and the 26-bedrooomed Kilspindie House. He is the founding chairman of the Edinburgh Restaurateurs Association, sits on the UK Restaurant Committee and Chairs the East Lothian Golf Group. He also sits on Edinburgh Tourism Action Group. He is married with two children.

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