

The Frenchman who went to Moscow

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Frenchman Guillaume Rochette leads his company, Eureka Search & Selection, from London. For five years, he has been helping Moscow's restaurant entrepreneurs to establish contacts in the West, consulted and chosen restaurant staff for the city's well known restaurant entrepreneurs.

Rochette is also looking for practical ideas that can be marketed as a suitable restaurant concept for the Russian public.

Moscow is moving ahead in leaps and bounds. In a few years, the restaurant sector has developed faster in Moscow than it has in London or New York in two decades, says Rochette, and forecasts that in ten years, Moscow will be an equally interesting restaurant city to those mentioned above.

Rochette's own career began in London twenty years ago in the restaurant industry. Impressed by the young Frenchman's service attitude, a client employed him as a headhunter in the restaurant sector. He founded his own company in the early 1990s.

Eureka was doing very well until September 11; that day changed everything. Business dried up completely. Then I remembered a French chef friend of mine, who had been raving about Moscow's opportunities. Initially I didn't want to leave, but had to. I called my friend and ordered a flight to Moscow.

Rochette was lucky, he was able to cooperate straight-away with the most significant players in the city.

Even though I'm proud to be French, the rest of the world seeks inspiration from London and New York. The French way of doing things was, however, still closely followed in Russia.

My strategy was simple. I wanted to show that the most successful luxury restaurants of recent years – the Hakkasan, the Nobu and the Zuma, which are significantly successful commercially – rely on Asian cuisine. And as Asian food – even when it was, honestly, very poor – was becoming more and more popular in Russia, the people from Moscow quickly understood this.

Rochette succeeded in attracting Andrei Dellos to London, and brought Dellos and Alan Yau from Hakkasan together. Yau brought his food menu to the Turandot restaurant and designed the kitchen.

The Russians are coming to London with their money, and in the near future, Rochette will orchestrate at least two high-profile restaurant openings. Networks are also established in Dubai and Athens.

Rochette's business activities include cooperation with restaurant entrepreneurs from London. He plans marketing strategies to attract wealthy Russian tourists as customers.

Rochette calls Russians "Asians with European faces".

When someone invents a good idea, everyone wants to do the same. It is copied and milked to death. At the moment, sushi is eaten everywhere in Moscow, you can even get it at coffee shops. It will be something else again next year.

Rochette reminds us that not everything will sell in Russia.

Fine dining does not work, but there is potential below that level. Moscow isn't an easy piece for Western investors and restaurant owners, even if there is a lot of interest. The Russians do not need outsiders for advice, and for example, international concepts are shamelessly formulated into more functional versions.

Rochette has acted as the key driving force behind more than twenty restaurants in Moscow. Although Rochette praises Moscow as the city of the future, he admits that there is still much to do, especially in terms of management.

Russians have practically been slaves for hundreds of years. Fear has been, and still is, the traditional management tool. There are also problems, of course, in service, which doesn't work even in the best places despite all the education. Consider, however, how young the service culture generally is in Russia. Ten years will do wonders.