

# MARKET TIMES

PAGE 2-4  
NEWS BITES

PAGE 6  
FANCY FRENCH FLORISTRY

PAGE 8  
TWO DECADES OF FLAIR

PAGE 12  
ELAINE IN FULL BLOOM



We're celebrating the nation's florists on June 8th - come and join us!





# Editor's Message



It never ceases to amaze me how much happens here at New Covent Garden Market. The latest quarter has been no different and this issue of Market Times reflects that.

Also within these pages, you'll notice that there is a particular emphasis on the Flower Market, as we look forward to being a supporter of the first ever National Florist Day (NFD), on June 8th. This is a landmark occasion, as the flower industry celebrates florists of all kinds across the UK and highlights the magic they create, both within the trade and for millions of consumers.

Organiser Caroline Marshall-Foster is quite right when she says that the flower industry is not the greatest at showing off its traditional skills, or promoting the incredible work of professionals who create the floral designs that frame people's lives. It's an observation that could similarly be thrown at the wholesale market sector, of course – here too, there has been way too little recognition with our own ranks of the amazing jobs we all do and the value we and our fellow wholesalers hold for the nation.

NFD isn't about us though; it's an opportunity to shine the spotlight on thousands of hard-working, passionate and often brilliant floral technicians – most of whom quite possibly have no idea just how inspirational and meaningful their work proves to so many people on a daily basis. We look forward to showing our appreciation in June, at the back end of what will be the first British Flowers Week run by Flowers from the Farm, to whom we handed over the reins earlier this year. We will of course be supporting their efforts too.

This issue features three florists, one who calls NCGM home and two more who are long-standing customers and devotees of the products and services our market provides for them. Talking to customers of the market invariably evokes tales of long-term collaboration and friendships with the people who work here. You can buy your product elsewhere – we all know that, but there's nowhere else that enriches your life, as well as your business, to such a degree. In an age when we deal with so much negativity, it is genuinely heart-warming to speak to people who care about the market as much as it cares about them – a sentiment that shines through in the interview with Richie Edwards of DG Flowers, who has been serving customers in Nine Elms for 44 years.

On the back page, we introduce and welcome Wanda Goldwag, the new Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority, who arrives at a key time in the redevelopment programme of course, but also just in time to help us all mark our 50th anniversary here! Opposite on this page, you can read how to get involved with two projects that will both allow us to rejoice and reflect, while raising significant sums of money for charity.

The next issue will be fruit and vegetable oriented, as we move through the gears of this action-packed year. Enjoy the Spring – and enjoy the read!

Tommy

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer



# Mark your place in New Covent Garden history

Two initiatives over the next few months will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Market's relocation to Nine Elms and the Covent Garden Tenants Association (CGTA) is embracing the opportunity to raise funds for its selected charities.

## Dinner and dance

Fundraising has always been a focus for CGTA – over the last 20 years, the generosity of the Market community has seen more than £750,000 raised for several worthy causes – chief among them being Anthony Nolan and Trinity Hospice. After an enforced break due to the pandemic, the association is organising a 50th Anniversary Dinner & Dance, which it hopes will raise record-breaking sums.

The CGTA is looking for suppliers and customers to celebrate another milestone for this great Market with them, by buying seats and tables at the dinner and sponsoring various elements of the dinner to create a night to remember for everyone. Chair Gary Marshall said: "I could not be prouder of this Market and a big reason for that of course is all the wonderful people who are associated with it, in whatever capacity. For so many of us, New Covent Garden Market has been a huge part of our lives for many years and that is something worth celebrating."

The Dinner & Dance will take place on Saturday, November 9th, at The Royal Lancaster London, on the edge of Hyde Park. It will begin with a champagne reception, feature lots of fun and entertainment and climax with a

magnificent band and disco. Tickets are £100 a head and tables of 10 and 12 are available. "We're keen to make this as affordable as we can for everyone and we also want to make it a night to remember," Gary said. "There are plenty of ways to sponsor and attach your name to this occasion – to sponsor or to buy a table, please contact Ann Harding (info@cgta.co.uk).

## The Garden Wall

If you'd like to create a permanent reminder of the relationship you, members of your family or friends, or your firm have with NCGM, then another charity project will give you the perfect opportunity. If you're a tenant, a customer, supplier or friend of the Market, this is your chance to show how much this place has meant to you, your business and your life.

50th Anniversary

NEW COVENT GARDEN MARKET

# The Garden Wall

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE	EMAIL
Barry Collins	100 Nine Elms Lane, London W8 5NF	020 8996 1234	barry@barrycollins.co.uk
John Smith	101 Nine Elms Lane, London W8 5NF	020 8996 1235	john@johnsmith.co.uk
...	...	...	...

PRICES START AT £150

Celebrate our 50th anniversary with a personalised plaque on 'The Garden Wall'.

JIMMY FRANKS  
FRANKS & SONS

REMAAT  
COVENT GARDEN MARKET

BARRY COLLINS - SELLING VEG AT NCGM FOR 46 YEARS

Visit: [www.funditnow.co.uk/thegardenwall](https://www.funditnow.co.uk/thegardenwall)

"The Garden Wall" - with classy black zinc plaques with silver lettering available in two sizes, will be a combination of celebration and commemoration of people's time at the Market and the incredible service that so many people and firms have given to Covent Gardens old and New.

The aim is to unveil the wall in November, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the relocation to Nine Elms – November 11th. To reserve your space in market history, go to: <https://funditnow.co.uk/thegardenwall/book/select-products> - every penny raised after costs will be donated to the CGTA charities.



# June 8th is inaugural National Florist Day

New Covent Garden Flower Market is one of the patrons of the inaugural National Florist Day (NFD), which will take place on June 8th.

Organised by perennial industry champion Caroline Marshall-Foster, owner of The Florist Magazine publisher Purple Spotted Media, NFD promises to be “a rolling campaign and awareness day to celebrate all that is wonderful about our profession and the people in it”.

As a Patron of NFD, the Flower Market will feature in the event’s communications initiatives, across its website and in *The Florist*. The key aspect of it all for the Market and its traders (and florists) is that we want to show our support and appreciation of the legion of florists who are our customers. We will be holding an event and floristry demonstrations in the Market on the morning of June 8th and local primary schoolchildren are creating an installation for us, which will be unveiled on the morning. Everyone is welcome – we’ll be making more announcements in due course.

NFD has been Caroline’s dream for a number of years and she is thrilled to finally be in a position to make it happen, and for the country’s pre-eminent flower market to support it. “To have Covent Garden Flower Market involved is brilliant,” Caroline said. “My Mum used to buy from it way back in the 50s when she had shops, I have literally grown up and worked with it since the 70s so I am chuffed it is a Patron,” she said.

“The industry has never been very good at promoting just how wonderful the traditional sector is. It is driven by hugely skilled professionals who are also the very backbone and magic makers for the all-important gift and special occasion market.”

Registration for every type of florist is totally free and at the time of writing, more than a thousand had signed up to be involved. A number of high-profile Ambassadors are on board; NFD is asking for Faces of Floristry nominations; and there will be a host of consumer facing activities on the day itself.



# Mums the word on Fake or Fortune



The team from BBC show Fake or Fortune was filming in the Market on March 11, as presenter Philip Mould looked for some expert knowledge to help him corroborate the painting of a chrysanthemum.

We’re not at liberty to divulge much more information, other than the fact that Darren French of cut flower wholesaler R French & Sons gave his advice on whether or not the flower depicted was in fact a chrysanthemum and also imparted a great deal of information on ‘mums’ and their characteristics. He stopped short of declaring the painting real or fake though – that’s best left to Philip, a world authority in such matters!

We’re told the popular programme will air soon so watch out for Darren’s on-screen performance.

# First asparagus raises money in memory of Damian



South Herefordshire grower Wye Valley Produce auctioned off the first British asparagus of the year in memory of Damian Fowler.

Run by the Chinn family, Wye Valley Produce would normally expect its first asparagus to be available in early March, but began harvesting in early February this year, well in advance of the traditional ‘official start’ of the season on April 23rd.

The Chinn family has developed innovative sustainable growing methods and experimented with varieties to extend the homegrown asparagus season. They also have an established tradition of auctioning off the first boxes of each season, with full proceeds being donated to charity.

This year, the largest bid at the auction came from Mudwalls Farm, a 250-acre farm located in the heart of the Ragley Estate in Warwickshire. The farm grows a wide variety of apples, plums and vegetables. It’s managing Director George Beach, pictured, said: “This is a fantastic initiative every year by the Chinn family and I was thrilled to know that the money they raised has gone to such a worthy cause. I gave the bundles of asparagus away to friends – it was far too lovely to sell!”

The funds were donated to the Oracle Cancer Trust, the UK’s leading charity dedicated to head and neck cancer, in memory of Damian Fowler, who died in January. He had been a loyal, long-term customer of Wye Valley Produce in his role as managing director of Gilgrove.

His wife Jess has set up a Just Giving page in Damian’s memory – which has already raised well in excess of £20,000 for the Oracle Cancer Trust.

Wye Valley Produce supplies English asparagus to The French Garden.

# All aboard! Number 60 arrives for Chris

A vintage London Routemaster arrived at the Market in February to pick up vintage industry journalist Chris White for a special tour of London’s most famous landmarks to celebrate his 60th birthday.

Chris has been involved in the fresh produce business for more than 25 years and will be a familiar face to many in the Market. He joined Fruitnet Media International, publisher of the Fresh Produce Journal, Eurofruit and other produce industry titles, in 1988 and is now Managing Director of the group, which is based in the Food Exchange.

Happy birthday Chris – all the best for decade number seven!



# EVC points now charging

Following consultation at the Market’s Statutory Committees, from Monday, March 18th the Electric Vehicle Charging points in CGMA’s Multi-Storey Car Park and Interim Flower Market began charging at 50p/kW. This rate is lower than commercial charging services.

Access to the charging point and payment will be through the Monta app – either scan the QR code on the charge point or download the Monta app from the AppStore or Google play.

To use the app and start charging your car, go to <https://monta.com/uk/how-to-charge-with-monta/>



# Green & Bloom launches first local hubs



New Covent Garden Flower Market wholesaler Green & Bloom has formed partnerships with national operators Whittingtons and Country Baskets, which will expand the Green & Bloom cut flowers and plants offer to two new regional hubs.

The first new branch opened at Whittingtons’ Norwich branch, in Norfolk, on April 29th and a second will open for business at Country Baskets’ Stourbridge facilities, near Birmingham in the West Midlands, later this month.

The hubs are sub-branded Green & Bloom Local and both locations will be set up as collection points for online webshop orders, as well as offering local delivery to their respective catchment areas.

When Green & Bloom was formed by the merger of Zest Flowers and Arnott & Mason (and also joined forces with Floristry Trade Group) in 2021, expansion

beyond its primary market base was one of the medium term aims. Freddie Heathcote, Green & Bloom’s Managing Director, explained the thinking: “Both Whittingtons and Country Baskets are keen to increase footfall in their stores and the click and collect element of the business will achieve that. We will also be including their product ranges on our 15,000-line webshop, which will significantly expand the offer and our combined reach. We’ll be giving customers in both areas a far wider product range than they have had access to until now.

“We’ll be looking to onboard as many new B2B customers as we can in the initial months. From our London base, we have processed more than 1,000 new account applications in just two years and we’re very confident that we’ll have at least the same level of interest in Norwich and Stourbridge, where we can also tap into our partners’ substantial existing customer networks.”

Product from abroad will be transported directly to Stourbridge for same-day delivery, while the Norwich supply will be consolidated at NCGM overnight and delivered to Norfolk by Green & Bloom each morning.

“We’re looking to expand our range of UK-grown cut flowers and these transport routes will open up some opportunities to do that logistically and bring product back to NCGM for resale,” Freddie said. “Our customer portfolio here has expanded across the range of contracts, retail florists, events and corporate customers and the flower market, London and the South East remain core to Green & Bloom’s long-term objectives.”



# City Harvest solidifies Market presence

Following a successful three-month trial period, City Harvest will continue to operate at the market.

Dean Bernard, the charity’s Head of Operations, said the initiative has been a significant opportunity for City Harvest in terms of food rescue.

“Since its conception in January, we have rescued and redistributed 79 tonnes of food over a three-month period, equating to 188,000 meals delivered to those most in need,” said Dean. “This incredible collaboration would not have been possible without the tenacity of City Harvest’s phenomenal operations team with the support of the Covent Garden Market Authority team and the generosity of those market traders engaged in this project. Our relationships in the market grow daily; Richard and Mike are doing a tremendous job.”

Twenty-five per cent of people living in London are going without at least one meal a day, on a scale from there being enough food for everybody in a household to have three meals a day, down to households that cannot afford food at all. City Harvest’s Chief Executive Sarah Calcutt said: “Working with the amazing, generous people at New Covent Garden Market, we are collecting 8-9 tonnes of fruit and vegetables a week. As well as delivering a much-needed service for London, this also saves traders in the market money. However premium its quality, with any product there comes a time when it becomes maybe a bit too tired to sell to high-end customers. There is a cost attached to wasting that product, even when it is being done in as ethical and sustainable a manner as is the case here.”

Above left to right: Mike Motl, City Harvest, Colin Corderoy and Jo Breare, CGMA, Dean Bernard, Sarah Calcutt and Richie Barker, all City Harvest

# Obituary

## Geoff Lamb

Geoff Lamb, who for many years ran R Tealing in the Fruit & Vegetable Market, died after a short illness on March 27th, aged 79.

Born in Ilford, in 1944, Geoff was adopted by Bill and Jean Lamb and was very proud of the fact he’d been adopted by the “best parents in the world”.

His career started at WH Smith as a trainee accountant, but he left to work for his future wife Anona’s father’s greengrocers in Hornchurch. In his early 20s, he moved to Chapmans at Borough Market as a junior salesman and was a natural. He then worked for Terry Peachey at Tealing’s, in the old Covent Garden, before taking over the business with Keith Hamilton in New Covent Garden, working for nearly four decades with good friends including Susie, Paul, Michael and Jamie.

“I first met Geoff over 37 years ago, when I joined him and Keith at Tealing’s,” recalls Susie. “From an average start the business grew into one of the top market wholesalers of fruit and salad, with every delivery counted in and out with Geoff’s usual flair and flamboyance. He was not always the loudest person on the stand, however put a prime piece of fruit in his hand and whether discussing the merits with an individual or group visiting the market, he and that produce became alive in a way very few people could achieve. By the end of the performance that produce went away with the recipient, even if they had only come in to ask the time!

“Geoff was a generous, kind, and lovely man who will be missed by many. I was honoured to be his friend and I know that is true for many more.”

Tennis was a huge part of Geoff’s life. He won many club singles and doubles championships at Gidea Park Lawn Tennis Club and through Australian friends, he also became good friends with an even better player than himself, Pat Cash. In 1985, Geoff and Anona’s son, Patrick, was born – named after Pat and two years later, Geoff was in Pat’s supporters’ box at Wimbledon, watching his friend win the Men’s Singles Final and (infamously) climb the stands to the box. Millions saw Geoff on live TV and his picture - alongside Pat and his family - was in all the papers the next day.

In 1995, Geoff and second wife Jeanette’s son, Matthew William, was born and in 1998, their second son, Ashley Ayrton, was born – named after Ayrton Senna, reflecting another of his dad’s passions, Formula One.

Geoff leaves family, friends and memories across the world. His presence was larger than life – when you met Geoff Lamb, you didn’t forget him!

Rest in Peace Geoff.



# Obituary

## Dave Knight

David John Knight, co-founder and director of Quality Plants in the Flower Market, died in April, aged 59.

Born in Dartford on April 3rd, 1965, Dave began working at New Covent Garden Market in 1985, when he joined Norman R. Cole. He bought Quality Plants Exterior Ornamentals Ltd with business partner Craig Broadley in the late 1980s and together they built up a popular and extremely successful business. Dave, Craig and for the last 22 years Dave’s son Dean cemented long-term domestic and international supplier relationships, as well as a reputation for product quality and customer service that created a solid customer base across the South East of England.

Outside of work, Dave was a big football fan, supporting Arsenal. He leaves daughter Danielle and son Dean, their mum Anne and granddaughter Belle and grandson Kien.

His sad, unexpected and premature death came as a huge shock to his many friends at the Market. Rest in peace Dave.





# Catching the people of the market in action



Clive Boursnell has been taking pictures of Covent Garden Market since a late summer morning in 1968, when he found himself stood at the top of James Street by Long Acre at 5am. The street had been soaked by an early-morning rain shower and the fruit, veg and buyers and porters glistened in the rays of the sun, creating an entrancing scene that stole this photographer's heart and has kept him enraptured ever since. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Market's move to Nine Elms, Clive is sharing some of his photography (and the stories behind it) with Market Times



A busy market provides a daily dose of 1,001 distractions, yet be it the seller, buyer, porter or as there is these days in the market, the food 'prepper', there are always those still moments of absolute concentration. That tender attention on the produce in hand lasts just a moment, yet in a night or day's work, it is repeated so many times by all who work at New Covent Garden.

So, amidst the general organised chaos of market life, I can be seen looking for that still moment of total focus on the job in hand. I might be waiting a second, a minute or much longer, but I never stop looking for, perhaps, the buyer so lovingly, yet so clearly knowledgeable, sub-consciously drawing on years of dedication and experience while considering which box of artichokes to buy.

It is these very human moments that I seek to capture; this oft-under-rated facet of a most multi-faceted market. From this photographer's perspective, to be there for these moments was first a question of building the trust of the market's people, while continually increasing my own knowledge of how the market works. With the camaraderie, acceptance and trust of the market, I have been able to photograph the people of the market at very close quarters, at work, rest and sometimes even play without I hope becoming a distraction to them.

These are moments that I cannot set up, ask for or direct, the subject or subjects of the photo have to be themselves or themselves, without me overlaying or directing them, as far as possible unaware that I am capturing their work. I have to be distant to them, no matter how close I am, seeing and giving full attention to what is happening before my lens. My time building an understanding of the way people work in the market is crucial, as it creates the anticipation of when the moment will arrive, though I never know of course if all the elements that make a picture of such 'at oneness' will eventually hold the attention of the viewer.

To get that moment into the camera that says, 'this is the work that these people do'.

That moment when the Nun is considering the quality of the flowers while the seller gives his full, but slightly anxious attention, ahead of the hoped-for sale. Or Mairead, on the move with an armful of flowers yet suddenly caught by the sight of another bunch she considers for the briefest split second before moving on. She is in perfect balance, she and flowers are as one.

The longer moment as Sophie considers which, if any, wrap of flowers to have. Here it is more the facial expression that is key to telling us all about the decision making process as one arm holds an already selected wrap while the hands hold two flowers close together to inform the final choice. One wholesaler makes perhaps the final check he has all the fruit and veg he needs for the day, pencil in hand above the paperwork. It's an evocative image, but also key to it is that the picture could only have been taken in Buyers' Walk, Nine Elms.

To this very day, I strictly frame each photograph as I take it. No picture is snapped with the idea that I can reshape or reframe the picture either in the darkroom or using photoshop later.

The whole process happens as I see the picture unfolding before me, recognising the star element and framing the shot to support the main point of the photograph.

The difference between an image that works and one that doesn't is perhaps best illustrated by my last photographs here, in food prep. In the first, for me it is the position of the feet, the way the head and shoulders are hunched over the hands pushing the cabbage through the cutting machine and creating the blur of the cut cabbage falling into the plastic basket. This star action is supported by one full basket of uncut cabbage and one cut and ready-to-go. The second picture just fails as I miss the mesmerising movement of the cabbage falling into the basket. Please also note the lower eye level of the camera; shooting from a lower angle increases the stature and power of work and man.



See you next time!  
CB 05/24





“ The Market is my home. I want it to keep thriving and supporting it is part of that. You have no excuse not to be on trend if you come here



# Liz's retreats get Channel 4 exposure

**Liz Inigo Jones, the owner and inspiration behind wedding florist Blue Sky Flowers at the Flower Market, launched a new venture last year and recently received a nice bit of promotion through an appearance on Channel 4's Château DIY. We asked Liz about her Les Fleurs French retreats**

Formerly known as *Escape to the Château: DIY*, the Channel 4 documentary series, narrated by Dick Strawbridge and his wife Angel Adoree, follows the stories of couples or families who are renovating châteaux in France. One of the chosen locations is Château de la Ruche, which is about four hours drive south of Calais, near Le Mans, where the famous 24-hour race takes place each year.

Liz first visited Château de la Ruche in 2018 to do a photo shoot and struck up a friendship with one of the owners, Bec. “They bought it in 2017 and are still doing it up, but it’s lovely,” says Liz. “I actually found them on Instagram and contacted them about the shoot. Their original idea was to do weddings, but although with 15 acres of wild parkland and woodland surrounding the château the grounds are ideal, they decided

the château itself is not quite big enough or located in quite the right place to do the whole wedding package.”

So instead, they have transformed La Ruche into a B&B within the château and added a beautiful gite, with four bedrooms and a living area. “When they initially looked to buy, *Escape to the Château* was taking off and anyone in the market to buy in France, Channel 4 latched onto. Some they followed through the process, mostly Brits and they may have to be a little crazy to take on some of the challenges they face!

“They’ve made it into a really nice place to stay and now Bec has also started to do retreats. We had talked about the possibility of me running floristry retreats there when we first met and our Les Fleurs retreat is the result.”

Les Fleurs invites flower lovers to join Liz

for three days “playing with flowers, creating everything from bouquets, and tablescapes to archways and arbours, all while learning about the best sustainable mechanics”. The days give guests access to loads of foliage and flowers to get creative with and the very best laid-back tuition while the evenings are spent at beautiful tables full of flowers and great food and drink, sharing the passion for floristry.

Last year, nine florists came to the château for a Tuesday to Friday retreat. “We had brought in loads of flowers and foliage and we foraged a bit around the château as well,” says Liz. “They were all established florists from across Europe and it was really a way for them to gather new skills together and see how we and their counterparts do things.

“There was a German girl who had never made an arch, for example, so it was a good





learning experience for her to work with other people and see how they went about it. We set them individual and group tasks, gave them the flowers and the foliage and basically said ‘go for it’.”

Hosting the retreat is quite nerve-racking, admits Liz, “but it’s also really enjoyable and relaxing, which allows everyone to enjoy themselves, including me. Even though we are doing what we do for work, it isn’t really work.

“We took bedrooms in the gite and the château and they cooked for us day and night; the food was spectacular!

“We had already booked the week for our retreat when it transpired that the *Château DIY* production team was coming to film in that same week. They wanted to film us, to illustrate what the château offers and obviously that was fine by us. They filmed a lot of what we were doing and I knew they wouldn’t use much of it, but we still had to ‘perform’. It was great fun.”

April flowers

After she spoke to Market Times, Liz has hosted another successful Les Fleurs retreat, at the beginning of April. “We didn’t get a lot of screentime, but the show aired in January, which was pretty good timing. Bec got a few more enquiries when it went out and so did I. We did it just before the château’s official season opened and we jointly promote it. Last year it filled up really quickly, this year took a little bit longer, but we sold out again. I’ve got my network and Bec

Blue Sky Flowers thinking

Liz gives us a whistle stop history of Blue Sky Flowers and her relationship with the Flower Market.

“I worked in magazines previously – *World of Interiors* and *Elle Decoration* – so I kind of knew this industry. While it was a departure for me, it was still something similarly creative. A lot of interior designers were my first clients.

“I’ve been doing this for 20-odd years now. I never wanted to do really big weddings – I know my level and understand the types of work I want to do and what I don’t want to do.

“All of my clients are lovely, occasionally they are a little bit demanding, often when they are under stress. You are a service to them; a lovely service that they want and need, but a service nevertheless. If you’re dealing with clients in this industry, you need to be good at dealing with people. Some people just can’t do it – there’s nothing wrong with that, but if you’ve never had to deal with the general public, it can be quite difficult to learn.

“I got my own unit in 2012 – I used to share a facility in the old market with Mick, The Flower Man, who I met in his shop in Belsize Park, when I lived in Hampstead. I’d started to work for another florist and bumped into Mick at the market. He told me he had a workshop there and he was like a father figure to me, so I gradually moved in more and more. I started doing runs for him, he’d give me work and I’d reciprocate. Then a unit came up next door, so I moved into that, then moved here when the temporary flower market was built.

“We’re here for a reason. I buy everything from the market apart from some British flowers direct from growers in their season. I’ve never worked anywhere else and I don’t think I’d find it easy now to come here, buy, load up and drive back somewhere else. I forget things and because it’s only downstairs that doesn’t matter!

“I’ve always figured I might be able to save a bit of money doing it another way, but I don’t do enough contract work to warrant that and it would be a slap in the face to the market. The market is my home, I want it to keep thriving and supporting it is part of that. I know lots of florists who come here and also buy from other wholesalers, but they come here for specific items and things they just can’t get anywhere else. They also come here to see people, that social aspect is really important. I sometimes come in even when I haven’t got much to do, to chat to people and see what’s new and happening.

“You have no excuse to not be on-trend if you come here.”



also has a very good network and used to be a journalist – her newsletter brought three of the participants in.”

This time, Liz was hosting a guy from Jersey, who is a florist, someone coming from Scotland and an American lady who lives in France and is setting up a flower farm. The rest were from what you might call Middle England though.

“The first time I did it, I didn’t want to have a number of very experienced florists, then someone who didn’t know what a jam jar is, as I felt that would be too difficult,” Liz says. “Now I’ve done it, I realise you could definitely have enthusiastic amateurs, but not someone with no real idea. I don’t want people to pay to be there, but then not enjoy it or get anything out of it.

“I’ve done a lot of teaching over the years and there’s nothing worse than a group of people who just sit there and look at you. If you don’t have some kind of interaction, there’s no energy or atmosphere and you need one or two people at least who are going to ask questions.”

After two sell-out retreats, there will definitely be more, maybe even taking in a different area of France. “I’m thinking about doing one at another château next year, in Cognac. I did a wedding there for someone I knew in 2023 and thought it was another place I could go back to.”



**Opposite page left:** The retreaters created bouquets, tablescapes, archways and arbours  
**Opposite page middle:** Bec and her partner bought the château in 2017  
**Opposite page bottom:** Liz has been in and around the Market for 20 odd years



# Market fits nicely into Hybrid model

**Flower Market customer Hybrid Flowers is 20 years old this year. Originating from Covent Garden, for the past 12 years Hybrid's home has been on Bondway in Vauxhall, a short walk from NCGM. The studio-based corporate and events florist has grown to become one of London's top flower companies, creating beautiful floral designs for events, parties, weddings, hotels and offices. Market Times met the floral designer's driving forces: Caroline Ball, Alan Simpson and Pamela Lada**

Hybrid Flowers was set up in 2004 by Caroline and Alan, whose paths had crossed "so many times since the late '90s" that they soon became great friends, eventually deciding to set up in business together. "We first met in Chelsea, then again in the West End and finally in Camden; someone was trying to tell us something!" said Caroline in the on-site studio interview.

She adds: "Just before we took the plunge and started up as an official company, I was on the lookout for potential clients everywhere. So much so that I decided to walk onto a building site in central London and ask them if we could do the flowers for the building when it was completed. The occupant turned out to be a very big law firm, we got the job and we provide their weekly office and event flowers to this very day! We were (and actually still are) so excited and optimistic about the future that we took on every opportunity that presented itself."

"We set up our Hybrid Flowers workshop in the old laundry rooms of a large conference and banqueting venue in the heart of Covent Garden," says Caroline. "It was meant to be temporary but we stayed there... in the very centre of London... for eight years. And we still do the flowers for that building too!"

Alan takes up the story: "Loyalty is very important to us and we are so proud to still work with a lot of our original customers. We've never advertised – all our growth has been word of mouth through the clients and venues that we've worked with."

"Fast-forward 20 years and during that time we have worked with massive blue-chip corporations, iconic London buildings and truly remarkable and creative organisations. We have just been listed as an accredited florist for events at the National Gallery and we are terribly proud of all of our clients just as much as we are proud of our amazing team of brilliant people."

At the time of writing, the Hybrid Flowers' team of florists was nine-strong, though it was recruiting additional florists when Market Times visited. "It is very important that the company is not just about the founders. We are very proud of the work that everyone, over the years, has put into the company, and so it is hugely important that our team of wonderfully talented people blend perfectly together," Alan says.



## Studio Nirvana

The Vauxhall studio that Hybrid relocated to in 2012 is, they say "the florist's nirvana: a living, breathing space for props, vases and work benches; a nice cool temperature that our flowers love; and a creative office space for client meetings and team brainstorming".

"What's more", Pamela, Hybrid's Head Designer, adds, "it's just a stone's throw from our favourite suppliers at the Flower Market."

Alan explains: "The market has always been really important to us; it is at the heart of everything we do. We buy almost everything from there, (apart from a few specific British-grown products and bespoke props). When we first started out it really was just two people (Caroline and me) chatting about flowers all day, every day, so it was a relief to venture into the market to talk to somebody else about them! The people at the market became our colleagues, we could vent to them and learn from them - they became as important to the company as we were. And it's the same to this day; a lot of those people are still there and they are our

friends, part of our Hybrid family."

Caroline says: "Back in the day we used to deal extensively with John Austin, Dennis Edwards and Zest Flowers. We now buy regularly from Green & Bloom, Pratleys, G.B Foliage and Porters Foliage, Whittington's and Quality Plants..." Alan interjects, "In fact, there is not one stand in the market that we haven't bought something from in the last couple of months."

Alan lives in Margate now and tends to get to the market for around 7.15am, but "our Eddie" (another Hybrid stalwart and familiar face in the market) has usually been in earlier to pick up the orders. Because we have such great relationships, we can always call someone and know that they will help us if they can", Alan continues, "so on my way in I will often ring Terry at Green & Bloom and ask him if he has got something that he can set aside for me."

## Premium Expectations

Like all florists, Hybrid is reliant on accurate quality, availability and pricing information from the people it buys from, to ensure it can





deliver as promised to the customer network. Pamela says: “We’ve always known that we’re only as good as the product we sell. We almost take it for granted that we will get that service from NCGM.”

She believes that while it’s hard to compare quality with alternative sources, as the Hybrid team buys nearly everything from the market, they take great comfort in knowing that the traders at NCGM “understand who our clients are. “For example, they know which flowers are perfect for our 7-day hotel contracts and which flowers need to be ‘open and flourishing’ on just the right day for a large awards event,” she says.

In a nutshell then, what does the market mean to Hybrid? “It’s our home.... our base,” says Alan. “We just love having the market on our doorstep and it means the world to us. It means we can always be creative. Sometimes you can be sitting in the office late one evening agonising over the perfect flower to make a design really stand out for, say, a corporate proposal and all it needs is a visit to the market the following morning to spot something amazing that will finish the design off perfectly.”

Celebrations

So how is the company celebrating its 20th anniversary? “We will no doubt take the team out for a celebratory drink or two,” says Caroline, “but we have found ourselves reflecting a lot. We’re actually gobsmacked that it’s been 20 years - it has just flown by!

“We are slightly tweaking our brand logo; we’ve had the same one for 20 years, and we love it, but we are really celebrating our love of colour and freshening everything up for a new look.

“We’re also changing our website and we’ll be doing a lot

more video – we were filming in the market recently and involved many of our suppliers and clients. People were so pleased to be asked to comment on our work and their kind words have been overwhelming. So it’s been a really eye-opening thing to do. We’d never really done that before.”

Reset

The anniversary comes on the back of a period that has challenged pretty much everyone in floristry circles. “We won’t be the only ones who had a massive reset during the pandemic and although we wouldn’t have chosen it, we had to look for the positive side to it,” Caroline admits.

Alan says it was the biggest challenge to the events industry in recent history, explaining: “Like a lot of florists, it has made us evaluate what we do, and how we do it. During lockdown, some florists channelled their efforts into online retail orders, but as we had never invested in being a retail florist, we stuck to our guns, kept our focus on our corporate clients and waited for events to resume.”

Caroline adds: “It was worth the risk. Over the last three years, we have worked on some fabulous projects and beautiful events. In fact, the boundaries between corporate and private events have blurred so much since lockdown. Corporate clients have focussed on enticing their staff back to the office with



**Opposite page:** The fantastic Hybrid team created this stunning tablescape at the Hari  
**This page, left:** Celebrity clients and endorsements are numerous  
**Left, top to bottom:** Caroline, Alan and Pamela have been busy making sure the company's 20th anniversary is celebrated properly!

“ The people at the market became our colleagues. They became as important to the company as we were

Pamela says that although enquiries nowadays do tend to be a bit more last minute, it keeps the whole Hybrid team on their toes. We are all really enjoying our work,” she says. “The designs we are making for clients this spring and summer are going to be stunning with some very exciting projects that are going to keep us, and therefore the market, just that little bit busier!”





# Still boxing clever after 44 years

Ex-boxer Richie Edwards has worked for several firms since he first stepped foot in the market in 1980. Here, he looks back on his time here, tells a few of the stories that can be repeated and charts some of the changes that he's seen

### The career path

"I came over to have a look in the school holidays with my Grandad, who had a big flower stall on East Street down the Walworth Road and was a long-term Covent Garden customer. We said hello to a few fellas, then one asked me why I wasn't at school. I said 'I just left school' and he said 'well in that case why aren't you at work? He turned to my Grandad and said 'bring him at 4am sharp on Monday and I'll give him a month's trial'.

"That was in 1980 when I was 16 and 44 years later I'm still here. But I'm not on trial any more!"

"I was a tea boy when I first got here, tidying up and doing odd jobs here and there. I was on £32 a week, with the odd tip. It wasn't great [money], but I wasn't getting nothing doing nothing was I?"

"First I worked for David Ingamells where Colin and Greg looked after me. I was there for a few years and then joined Alagar and spent a lot of years there with Alan and Stella. I then went to Deano's for a couple of years, before Alagar asked me to come back. When Alagar closed down, I worked at John Hart for a while, before going back to Deano's. I've been at DG Flowers since Deano's closed down about 18 months ago.

"I had no idea Deano's was closing down. It was one week before Christmas when he told me, but I've been here a long time and I'd had four offers within a few hours. I took a week out, but ended up going with John and Dave. I think it's the busiest company in the market, there's never a really quiet day.

"I didn't do portering, but became a junior salesman at Ingamells and I've been a salesman ever since. I really made my way with Alan and Stella though, they were a really good couple and made sure I got on."

### Travel tips

"I live in Bexley Heath now, but originally I was from Walworth, then lived in Bermondsey for a few years. I used to walk from the Old Kent Road down to the market and I'd see this milk float go past me at Elephant & Castle most days. One day he stopped, told me he delivered the milk to the market, and said 'jump in'. So, for about a year and a half, I got a lift from the Elephant to work on a milk float! I then found another fella, Freddie Horner, who worked on Carey's and he lived two minutes from me, so I used to meet him outside the Hourglass pub every morning and he was my new lift."

### Diamond dahlias

"I've had the same customers for a long time. There are people I've served for 40 years, but I also have a lot of new customers now. They do tend to follow you from firm to firm though and I'm known especially for dahlias. I've been getting them now for 38 years from a guy in Essex who I used to serve. He brought me in a couple of boxes and they were great quality and we have built that up over time to around 200 buckets a week during the season. They always start last week of July or first week in August and end when the frost comes. For the rest of the year I have people asking me when I'll have dahlias again! I get them exclusively as it's the only way to make money out of them – you can't spread them around, so he's only dealt with me for nearly four decades.

"You've got to have something about you for people to keep coming back. You shouldn't just expect them to turn up day-in, day-out. Plenty of the same people come and see me every week, you know what time they'll be there and roughly what they might order and you understand their business. You have to think ahead and buy stuff that you think people will like and it has to work



**Above left:** Richie fighting Norris Dennis at Dulwich Baths, his last victorious fight

**Above:** I enjoyed every firm I've worked for – you get from a company what you give and I'm one to just get on with the job. I don't need to be told. If it's not my job, that's not a problem, help someone else out.

**Above right:** Richie was a successful amateur boxer and fought seven bouts as a professional

**Right:** I'm nearly always stood by entrance in the back right corner of the firm. I wanted to be somewhere where I could be seen and I could see what was going on!





for them or they won't come back.

"I don't mind doing the odd delivery either – today, I'm going to drop off at a florist in Bexley Heath on my way home. I used to serve this lady a long time ago – she started buying from a Dutchman, but she's come back to the market and she's come back to me. She messages me two days before, I order the stuff and if she can't make it in to pick it up, I'll deliver it. At the end of the day, if you're going to take £400 or £500 off a customer, why wouldn't you?"

### Standout quality

"The best place to get your flowers is still from this market because you can get what you want when you need it and you can guarantee consistent quality.

"Years ago, everything was sold by the box, there were no buckets and water. Nothing was sold by the bunch. Now, it's still a wholesale market, but people can come and buy a few bunches – the supermarkets have driven that. There are still salesmen here you can go and have a barter with, but that's also getting rarer – lots of people have a price, it gets scanned in and that's it. So you don't get the banter you used to.

### Market family

"I split the sole of my trainers in the early days and had brown tape keeping them together. I used to help out the guys opposite at the end of every day and they'd treat me really well. One day they asked me about my shoes and asked what size I was. I didn't think anything of it, but the next morning they gave me a brand new pair of trainers. 'If you help us we'll look after you' – that sort of sums up what the market is.

"It's a cliché I know, but it is a massive family. You get bred into it. You come here 'normal' and you just become a market person!

"I have so many mates here – everyone knows who I am and we've shared so much together. We go out for a beer and we have a laugh about football and this and that. They joke about my time as a boxer and I'm a Chelsea season ticket holder, so there's plenty flying around from the Arsenal and West Ham fans at DG!



### I was a contender!

"I was a boxer as a kid at my Grandad's gym at Manor Place in Walworth. From there I did a bit of unlicensed stuff, which you're not supposed to obviously! Then I turned pro – as a lightweight, 9 stone 6 believe it or not; that's why a few people call me Tubby now! I was the first signing of Frank Maloney (now Kelly Maloney) who went on to be most famous as Lennox Lewis's manager. We all used to train together. Kelly is my son's Godfather. I had seven professional fights and was undefeated, then came home one day in 1984 and put my bag down. I knew I'd had enough and I never went back. So, I never lost as a pro. I had 96 amateur fights and won 85 of them, but beat everyone I lost to in the return fights. I won all 11 of my unlicensed fights too, so I did alright."

### That's life

"I've got a good life. I used to wonder what I was doing getting up in the middle of the night to go to work, still do sometimes. But the market's been a massive part of my life.

"Would I change it? With hindsight maybe I'd think twice about doing the hours again, but while you're doing it, it's what you do. Obviously now, I'm a lot older than I was when I came here (Richie was 60 years old last month) but I've never come seriously close to doing anything else. There is nowhere like this place, for the antics, laughing and joking, playing tricks on everyone.

"There are still guys here now who I laugh and joke with about when I first came into the market. 'You were a right proper little Jacko' they say, to which I'll reply 'but I was just a kid'. Obviously someone then shouts 'yeah and you still are!'"



“ The best place to get your flowers is still the market because you can get what you want when you need it and guarantee consistent quality



# Elaine changes Pesh direction, but sticks with her suppliers

**Pesh Flowers had been a fixture on Camberwell High Street for 67 years before a huge hike in rent rendered the business unworkable for Elaine Graham in 2019. She made the big decision to close down the shop and move on. Five years later, one of the Flower Market's regular customers may occasionally look back, but recognises that the new way of working has improved life for her and her family**



"I worked for the previous owner until she retired and we kind of approached each other about me taking over in 2002," Elaine recalls. "I knew the shop was busy, of course, but was still a bit blind to just how busy when I went from being an employee to running it the following week."

"When I first took over, we'd fill the transit van up twice a day at the Flower Market almost every day we went. It was a lot to take on, but I was 20 and I loved it. We had a lot of contract trade and the shop was always crazy busy; we didn't do a lot of weddings at the time."

"I had five full-time florists, a full time driver and other people in and out. For Valentine's Day, I'd have 27 people working, including drivers. I even had firemen driving

for me at one point, although they wouldn't do it in uniform. I would have paid extra for that!"

In the end, the reason to close wasn't just the rent, but also a combination of Elaine having 5-year-old twins and not seeing them as often as she wanted, increasing staffing issues and overheads that were just getting too much. "We were working harder for less and less, so I looked around for different premises, realising that when I moved I would lose my walk-in customer base anyway, so I needed to rethink the whole thing," she says.

It meant scaling down a 1,600 sqft shop floor to a small, but charming studio nestled in behind Elaine's parents' house in Forest Hill, the house she grew up in, in fact.



Husband Lee, a landscape gardener who is also a regular customer at NCGM, built the new Pesh Flowers HQ out of reclaimed timber and there have been a couple of new additions for storage, plus a new greenhouse. The rear half of the back garden of the house has been commandeered and dad's vegetables have been replaced by a selection of cut flowers, which add a touch of personalised class to Elaine's work when they are in season.

"I'm still in my main customer area and I still have a workplace to come to every day. It's also about halfway from my house to the market. I miss the buzz of the shop, but I like the birds and squirrels and it's nice to see my mum most days! The stress levels are also way down and I get to spend so much more time with the twins (now 10)," she says.

"Luckily enough, I was out of the shop before Covid hit. I got really busy with deliveries – because we had that established customer base who knew me, so many people started to order for delivery. I still get phone calls from people asking if they can pop down the shop and collect some flowers – it takes time for people to get used to change!"

"I have house flowers that go to people every week, and a lot of corporate, PR and events customers that I've kept hold of. So, in between the weddings, there is plenty of weekday activity going on."

## Long-term relationship

Elaine has been buying regularly from NCGM since she was 16 and working for a florist in Crystal Palace. "My relationship with the market has changed," she admits. "I have always preferred to buy from the market than anywhere else, although I do buy some top-up product from other wholesalers at times. I used to aim to go to the market four days a week, though it almost inevitably became five or six days, early hours."

"Now, I go to the market three times a week outside the wedding season, but in the summer it will be a more often and a lot earlier. I still buy from everybody in the market, just not in the sort of volume I used to. I tend to go about 5am and earlier if it's for a wedding and I want some British product and I can hit up Green & Bloom or Pratleys for an odd bucket of something unusual."



**Opposite page, left:** No longer tied to the shop, Elaine can get out more to be creative  
**Opposite right:** A Flower Market customer since the age of 16  
**Bottom:** Husband Lee built the new Pesh HQ from reclaimed timber

“I’m not the massive buyer that I used to be so I don’t suppose I’m in the first rankings when it comes to priority, but sometimes I’ll ring ahead with a colour palette and they’ll put a bit aside for me and I don’t feel like I get treated any differently. I’ve been going well over half of my life, so I have known them for a long time, seen lots of faces come and go, and have socialised with lots of them over the years. They are my friends.”

## The key difference

When we met Elaine in March, we asked her what the main differences are between buying from the market and other suppliers. “The last couple of weeks have been really quiet,” she answered. “I’ve done a lot of admin and not been very well and I was buying more than usual from the people I usually use to top up. I can sit in bed and order up to midnight for next-day delivery, so that works, but the product just isn’t the same. The difference is really obvious – both because I can physically pick my own when I’m at the market and also because the

selection at the market is much nicer.

“I know when I go to the market that most of the guys I deal with love what they are doing. You can go to G.B. Foliage for instance and get the knowledge of what’s in season. He’ll never let you buy something if he doesn’t think it’ll work for you. Then you’ve got Sonny at DG Flowers who sees you pick up some new season roses and tells you how wonderful they are. You know he knows what’s around and he’s not just saying it for effect. That’s invaluable – it builds real trust.

“It’s also nice when you get missed. Ken, who had SR Allen for years, is a really good friend – if one of us wins the lottery we’re splitting it! But he was genuinely worried about me when we hadn’t seen each other for a while. Anything else is soulless, there’s no relationship or real personal contact.”

It’s never quite the same two days running now, whereas the shop could be repetitive and was sometimes a case of running on adrenalin, Elaine admits. “Some days I don’t see anybody here and then on other days, I’ll



“ For me, the charm is 50% the stuff you can buy there and 50% the people. I’d be lost without it

have someone to bounce off. It can be quite isolating being on your own, so it is always nice to say ‘what do think of this idea?’ and have another perspective. The market is also good for that – even for bumping into other florists to compare experiences and discuss business. Instagram was great at first but working on your own it can make you quite insecure looking at what everyone else is posting. I think you just have to focus on your own lane, as a lot of it is smoke and mirrors.”

## Renewed focus

Elaine now relishes the fact that she’s not tied to the shop and can take on weddings down in Surrey or Kent and drive out to venues and spend time moving things around. “I started teaching because the shop was so big and we needed to make the space



work in the quieter times,” she says. “I still do that now, workshops here in the studio and at venues I hire for wedding florist sessions. I show them my techniques and mechanics and get photographers in to take pics of what they create for their portfolios.

“Like many people, I’m not a massive fan of technology, but I’ve started photographing venues I would like to work at and sending them concept sketches. I’ve got a few pick-ups through that. It’s also great when you can go to a venue with a bride and groom and do the design for them on-screen while they are talking. I used to pen and ink sketch, or use other people’s pictures, but now I have jumped on the technology that’s out there, it has worked.”

As well as its plastic free and sustainable commitments, one of the defining features of Pesh Flowers floristry is the dedication to using locally sourced flowers. By embracing the seasons, each wedding arrangement becomes a reflection of the unique, ever-changing beauty that British flora has to offer. The market is getting better at British flowers,” says Elaine. “There used to be more, of course, but I do think there’s a move to get more. There are lots of new British growers and it’s always nice to top up what I grow myself, which is very small volumes. It’s definitely a trend that’s getting bigger.”

## Colour and character

New Covent Garden Market remains central to Elaine’s thinking. “I would be lost without the market if I’m honest. It’s a big part of my life,” she says. “When you go up and see the products, the colours, the characters. That’s what makes it. If the characters weren’t there, you’d just be buying from a flat bar-coded system. For me, the charm is 50% the stuff you can buy there and 50% the people.

“It’s a really hard job – hats off to them for doing it. I know how hard it is when people ask me to do things socially and I know what time I have to get up the next morning. In my 20s, I could do any hours, but I’m not so good at it any more! They have to get up even earlier and they do it six days every week.

“A lot of the new breed of florist don’t go up as early, there’s not as much of a social side to things maybe. Owners have got older or like me have had children. It’s a long day and then you have to go home and do your admin.

“But the feeling that you’re dealing with friends and they will look after you is vital. From a business point of view, you need that support and the wins that can give you too.”





# Authentic flavours of Southwest China – created in south London

Yep Kitchen is on a mission to bring Southwest China's rich and fiery flavours to the UK, via a line-up of award-winning chilli oils and ferments created here at New Covent Garden Market. Founder Tom Palmer started the Yep Kitchen brand back in November 2022 when he rented a production unit at the market's Mission Kitchen space, a shared commercial kitchen with state-of-the-art equipment available to rent on a monthly basis. But the idea? That goes back to Tom's time working and living in China

## Getting started in China

"I moved to China when I was 21, initially just to travel and as a base to explore the rest of Asia," says Tom. "I wanted to teach English and learn Mandarin at the same time I was gaining my qualifications, which I really enjoyed. Soon, I was working in Beijing at an international school, teaching Maths, English, and History. I used the school holidays to travel across China and found that I learned so much. I didn't expect to stay in China for 10 years when I first moved there, but my plans quickly changed after falling in love with the food and culture. Working overseas was such an amazing experience and I found it harder to leave China than leaving the UK in the first place."

It was when Tom was contemplating returning to the UK that he saw the business opportunity to bring the authentic – a word that Tom uses a lot – taste of Chinese food back home,

with a range of chilli oils and ferments that can be added to any dish for an immediate splash of flavour. Tom's first idea was to create a brand for the UK public who were curious and looking to experience more genuinely faithful Chinese food, giving people cooking at home a new range of flavours to explore besides the overly-sweetened ones typically found in Asian aisles at British supermarkets.

"Before I returned home, I drafted a plan and had spoken to various suppliers in China – we had the brand name and everything. We decided we wanted to use Erjingtiao chillies and premium Sichuan peppercorns in all our oils in order to showcase these flavours faithfully – we knew it wouldn't be the cheapest option, but we imported both of those key ingredients directly from Chengdu because you can't beat the originals! It also meant we could maintain the quality as we've got a direct relationship with the suppliers. Yes, it's

more expensive to import directly from China, but getting the right ingredients from the right places is part of our USP."

The seed money to create the new start-up brand came from money Tom saved while working in China and he self-funded the launch, selling at Farmers' Markets at first and getting great feedback from Chinese ex-pats who loved the product. Initially, Yep Kitchen used the wording 'inspired by' on their packaging but soon changed to 'authentic' to reflect the main ingredients sourced from China.

## Award kickstarts sales

"We'd just set up the business when we realised that applications for the Great Taste Awards closed in February 2023, which meant a quick turnaround," says Tom. "We suspected that winning the award would translate into sales





“ We suspected that winning the award would translate into sales and that's exactly what happened

and that's exactly what's happened. After the amazing feedback from Farmers' Markets, we moved into the retail market in the summer shortly before winning the Great Taste award. We noticed a clear difference when approaching retailers after the award compared to before, it was much definitely easier to get the award-winning products listed.”

Starting from scratch, with no understanding of the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) market, could have been a huge hurdle but Tom didn't let that stop him. With a great backstory to the Yep Kitchen brand, authentic ingredients, and the Great Taste award on the packaging, they've been



successful from day one, with demand increasing at a steady pace.

A vital ingredient of any new and emerging brand is the artwork, which in Yep Kitchen's case is – once again – authentically Chinese. Tom was a decade-long fan of a Chinese creative brand called Plastered 8, known in China for fun, playful art. Tom approached them via Instagram before launching the first batch. “I contacted Dominic from Plastered 8 when I was about to launch Yep Kitchen and he gave me a lot of support for our launch, including allowing us to use some Plastered artwork on the thank you cards for our online orders which I was so grateful for,” Tom recalls. “After six months, when we'd proved the concept, we approached Plastered again, this time to produce a new brand identity for Yep Kitchen. They produced an incredible piece of artwork and created Yep Kid, who we hope will become synonymous with Sichuan chilli oil in the UK.”

### Mission Kitchen and beyond

“One of the reasons we're doing so well is thanks to the support within the Mission Kitchen community and beyond. Moving into a commercial cooking space was daunting, especially scaling up our production. Since joining Mission Kitchen back in October 2022, I've learned so much in the first year – especially about how to use all the equipment.”

Now the time has come for Tom to move to new premises, a former bakery production facility that Tom says was a ‘great find’ as he's been able to quickly set up all the equipment he needs. “We've loved being a part of the Mission Kitchen family but it's time to scale up because we have new clients that we can't currently supply from a shared workspace. At Mission Kitchen we were able to produce around 2,500 units per month, labour provided by me and my one employee, with everything done by hand. In the new space it's a semi-automated unit, so we'll be able to produce 5,000 units each week, with two new distributors lined up to take the products.”

However, it's not goodbye, as they'll still be part of the Mission Kitchen family thanks to a new membership package called the ‘Network Membership’. It doesn't include access to the kitchens but does include access to the Mission Kitchen community, including Q&As and ‘meet the buyer’ events. “All our growth has been organic – initially we never planned on being the biggest company – our aim was simply to create

a genuine product that people would love. We know we're taking a risk moving, but it's the next stage in the company's growth – and to be honest, I enjoy taking risks. We have our new clients lined up and we're looking forward to upscaling our production, so we're confident we can continue this growth.”

Selfridges and Panzer's Delicatessen in London's St John's Wood are two of Yep Kitchen's more well-known stockists, with another major player coming on board very soon. “We're already stocked in more than 85 independents across the UK,” says Tom, “from Cornwall to Scotland. We've worked with a distributor called Mahalo, who have been fantastic in growing our brand alongside their own.”

### What's Yep Kitchen's aim for the next year?

“At the moment we've just secured some private investment and have successfully completed a crowdfund campaign. As part of this, our crowdfunding pledgers will have access to some amazing rewards, with one pledger accessing our top tier reward and will be visiting our new production site to make their own batch of chilli oil with us.”

“We want to upscale our production and apply for ‘SALSA’ accreditation which will enable us to gain listings in major UK retailers, then I'll aim to step back from production into more of a CEO/founder role, focusing on developing the Yep Kitchen brand further,” reveals Tom. “It's hard to predict how fast the business will grow but we've got the capacity in our new unit to ramp up production if needed. We're going for the independent sector first before we then look at getting into supermarkets. The challenge is to upscale our volumes and still maintain the quality of the products, as that's what's got us this far. That's the reason we're only increasing the production by small amounts and will continue to produce in small batches and increasing the quantity of batches instead – this way we're sure we can maintain the quality.”

“We see the investment as a great opportunity to promote the brand and focus on our products. It's been an amazing experience so far and it's really fulfilling to see our concept grow into a successful product that people love.”

**Above:** Authenticity underpins quality at Yep Kitchen



# Meet the new CGMA Chair: Wanda Goldwag

**Wanda Goldwag has been appointed Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA). She began her four-year term on April 2nd, succeeding John Lelliott, who stepped down from the position of Interim Chair**



Wanda has a history of success across various sectors. She is currently Chair of Nuclear Transport Solutions and of the Uniform Network Code Modification Panel, a technical body in the gas industry. She previously had a 25-year marketing career culminating in being Managing Director of AIR MILES, the British Airways owned loyalty scheme. Since then, she has specialised in creating a portfolio of non-executive private and public-sector roles.

Her expertise is in providing strategic direction, risk management and building successful management teams. She has chaired a wide variety of boards and has also been a regulator.

Wanda was delighted to be asked to lead NCGM at such an important time and said she is “committed to ensuring the market’s ageing facilities are effectively replaced to ensure the market traders and their customers benefit from facilities that support their businesses to grow and flourish”.

She told Market Times: “Whenever a new person joins my team, I wait a month and then I ask them what they were surprised about in our organisation. My experience is that in the first month people learn a great deal and are at their most observant and independent.

“I have been here less than a month so I’m still at the discovery stage.

“I fully understand the difficulties that the tenants have experienced while working through the redevelopment process for almost a decade. My first surprise when taking on this role was that we are building a new market while still running the old market as operationally well as we are doing. While the decision to do that probably seemed very sensible at the time, the challenges we all face are very obvious to me. I am heartened by the good spirit of everyone in trying to make the process as painless as possible.”

Wanda added that she has observed that an operational dynamic is occurring within the market that is changing the business model of the people who work here selling fruit, vegetables, flowers, plants and foliage. “The number of visitors who physically come to the market to buy their product is noticeably decreasing and more and more each year, the business of the market is not necessarily being done face to face, as has always been the norm, but by transporting goods from the market to customers’ locations,” she said. “This is a substantially different model from the one envisaged when the market redevelopment was first being discussed in 2008, or in 2014 when the final plans for the new market were drawn up.

“People always predict business models and methodologies will change rapidly. In my experience that is rarely true. What tends to happen is that they evolve gradually until they reach a tipping point – only then does that change really begin to speed up.”

Wanda herself has personally already lived and worked through what were, with the benefit of hindsight, seismic changes in two industries: the travel industry where almost everyone booked holidays through a travel agency, but now the vast majority of us book ourselves on-line; and the music industry, where records, tapes and CDs were almost entirely replaced by digital music. In both industries, the revolutionary changes of direction were pretty rapid and had huge structural impact on those industries, but neither were easy to foresee before the momentum of efficiencies driven by technological advancement made them inevitable.

“I sat in a meeting at British Airways when easyJet was just starting to make a name for itself,” she remembers. “The BA staff were scathing about the potential of budget airlines, saying things like ‘no businessperson will ever willingly travel on an easyJet plane, all they will get is poor students and backpackers. As all readers know now, within a few years easyJet had wiped out BA’s entire intra UK operation. No-one was flying BA to Edinburgh or Glasgow because they could not justify the difference in fare for such a short flight.

“Future gazing is hard; and most difficult for the people who have the longest experience of it having always been “like this.”

“My own experiences tell me that as well as planning for now and the next period, it is vital that CGMA creates with its tenants a vision for not only what sort of market we need now for our existing businesses, but also a market suitable for the businesses they will become and the new tenants that a change in business model will inevitably attract.”

## Market Times – a sustainable future

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