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BRANDED BLACK CABS HIT THE STREETS OF LONDON



Battersea fire fighters created a memorial garden with Flower Market support





July 27th marked the 65th anniversary of the establishment of the Covent Garden Market Act 1961, which founded the Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA) and transferred responsibility for managing the Market from the previous private company structure to a statutory public authority.

It provided the framework for regulating the Market and its wholesale horticultural activities and it also laid the foundations for a second Covent Garden Market Act, established in 1966, which enabled the relocation of the market from its historic central London site to Nine Elms and protected the future of this site as a wholesale horticultural market.

A lot of water has passed under London's bridges since old became new and Covent Garden crossed the River Thames in 1974. The Market and its tenants have evolved, adapted and shifted their focus to meet the changing demands of their supplier and customer bases. NCGM remains the largest wholesale market in the UK; this year's Best British Wholesale Market, and it has an unmatchable location, less than two miles from the centre of one of the world's foremost capital cities.

It was nice to reach an anniversary while marking another Market milestone – the first financial year in which the combined turnover of the tenant community has topped £1 billion. Turnover is vanity and profit sanity, sure, but achievements like this highlight the continued importance of what we do to both our supplier and customer networks.

This quarter has also seen the Market's largest wholesaler, Premier Foods Wholesale, named Fruit & Vegetable Wholesaler of the Year and The Menu Partners crowned Foodservice Partner of the Year – both awards recognising them as the standout operators in the national field. Several more NCGM companies were finalists across a number of national categories and AA Produce is now Best Independent Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Market Wholesaler 2026 – London, an accolade attached to the SME UK Enterprise Awards.

Just before we went to press, five London cabs went out onto the road decked in the Market's logo and messaging. This collaboration between two of London's great institutions will be seen by millions in the run-up to Christmas, as we continue to up our presence across the local and wider London area. We're around two years away from completing a complex, but potentially game-changing redevelopment of the site, which we hope lays the foundations for many more decades of success for NCGM and all the people it supports.

Enjoy the rest of this year, and as always, the read.

Tommy

Tommy Leighton,
Market Press Officer



Premier scoops top prize at industry Oscars

Premier Foods Wholesale and The Menu Partners both picked up prestigious national awards in the space of a few days at the end of September.

First, Premier Foods Wholesale was crowned Fruit and Vegetable Wholesaler of the Year at the FPC Fresh Awards, recognising its commitment to quality, customer service, innovation and continued growth while remaining true to its wholesale market roots.

The award was presented at Grosvenor House on Park Lane, with the judges recognising Premier Foods Wholesale's ability to maintain high standards of quality and service through challenging industry conditions. "Premier Foods Wholesale represents the very best of the wholesale fresh produce industry: traditional in values, yet progressive in thinking," the panel said.

"Winning Fruit and Vegetable Wholesaler of the Year is a hugely proud moment for everyone at Premier Foods Wholesale, particularly given the strength of the competition across our industry," said Founder Jason Tanner.

"This award belongs to our whole team, but also to the growers, suppliers and customers who have supported us throughout our journey. Quality has always been at the heart of what we do, and while we're incredibly proud of what we've achieved, we're equally focused on continuing to improve our service, embrace new technology and invest in the future."

Operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year from the Market, Premier Foods Wholesale has built its reputation on high-quality produce, reliability and finding the right solutions for customers.

Recent supply chain disruption has reinforced the importance of its experienced produce team and long-standing relationships with growers and supply partners, helping Premier maintain quality and continuity of supply. The business continues to develop its support to customers with weekly market reports providing insight into crop conditions, quality and supply trends, while its development kitchen helps manufacturers and caterers explore alternatives when availability changes.

Investment in technology and infrastructure is supporting the company's next stage of growth. During the past year, Premier launched a purpose-built ERP system incorporating HR, allergen management and stock control, opened a fresh produce pre-pack facility and expanded frozen storage through a 400-pallet freezer facility.

Founded in 1999 as a traditional market trader, Premier Foods Wholesale has grown into a national supplier with turnover exceeding £125 million, more than 50,000 square feet of facilities, over 30 vehicles and deliveries to more than 200 locations across the UK. Direct grower partnerships and farming operations in Rwanda, Tanzania and Morocco strengthen its supply chain.

Looking ahead, Premier plans to continue investing in its people, technology, sourcing and service capabilities while maintaining the quality and personal approach that have underpinned its growth.

Hot on the heels of this success, The Menu Partners was also named 'Foodservice Partner of the Year' at Restaurant Magazine's Readers' Choice Awards. Voted for by chefs and restaurant owners, the awards recognise the best suppliers in the restaurant industry, based on categories such as customer service, reliability, product range, and going the extra mile.

"These awards are brilliant recognition of the quality and passion that goes into the products we're proud to bring to our customers," said Jason, also Founder of The Menu Partners, which is in the same group of companies at PFW.

"We were delighted to win and even prouder to celebrate some of the brilliant suppliers we're lucky enough to work alongside," he said. "Our fish partner, The Stickleback Fish Co. Ltd, has had an incredible year, being named Seafood Supplier of the Year and Top Supplier. Our meat partner, Aldens of Oxford, has also been highly commended for Best Meat Supplier."

The judging panel praised The Menu Partners for supporting suppliers like Stickleback and Aldens, ensuring chefs have access to the best ingredients available. "Huge congratulations to the teams at Stickleback and Aldens," said Jason. "Thank you to everyone who voted for The Menu Partners and our fantastic supplier partners."

Several other Market businesses were distinguished finalists at the FPC Fresh Awards 2026. 'Floral and Plant Wholesaler of the Year': Ilo Bloom. 'Fruit and Veg Wholesaler of the Year': Bevington Salads; and S. Thorogood and Sons. 'Foodservice Supplier of the Year': Rushton's. 'Sustainability Excellence – Supply Chain': County Supplies and Rushton's.

To cap off a very successful month, Rushton's was also awarded a Highly Commended accolade for Best Fruit & Veg Supplier at Restaurant's Readers' Choice Awards 2026.



Market supports local fire fighters

Fire fighters from Battersea station of the London Fire Brigade, on Este Road near Clapham Junction, visited the Flower Market to source plants and supplies for a rooftop memorial garden.

The garden was being built to honour a fallen colleague, providing a peaceful place for both the grieving family and the station crew to relax and support their mental health. The project was also entered into a brigade-wide welfare competition to raise funds for The Fire Fighters Charity.

The crew came to shop for pollinator-friendly plants, hydrangeas, lavender, and materials to build a "bee hotel." CGMA funded a large part of the cost, but moved by the firefighters' cause, wholesalers Evergreen Exteriors, Evergreen Pots & Soil, Quality Plants, Porters Foliage and Ilo Bloom all stepped up generously, offering significant discounts, providing items at cost, and donating goods outright.

The visit concluded with the crew loading the sizable haul into their fire rescue vehicle, before returning to the station to create a special outdoor space.

Fire fighter Katherine Shaw said that supporting mental health is a major focus for the fire service generally. "We are so grateful for the support of the Market as we want the garden to be more welcoming, and a place for us to relax and for our own welfare. We're very big on supporting everyone's mental health," Katherine explained.

The Fire Fighters Charity, which helps and supports all fire fighters, has four separate centres around the UK and provides all kinds of rehab, mental or physical. "Anything we do to raise funds tends to go towards helping them, because they help us," Katherine added.

Chelsea Florals joins flower fold

A warm welcome to Oliver Hare and Angela Hernandez from Chelsea Florals, which opened in the Flower Market in September. It's an established online company offering bespoke hand-tied bouquets created with fresh flowers from across the globe.

Specialising in supplying weddings, events and renowned florists across the capital, what makes Chelsea Florals different, say Oliver and Angela, is its bouquet service – simply select the flowers you want and they'll create a bespoke bouquet while you wait. Oliver has already received several wedding enquires from walk-in customers, with lots of potential trade in the pipeline.

"Everyone's been friendly and helpful and we're looking forward to getting to know our fellow wholesalers over the weeks and months ahead," Oliver said. "I'm a long-standing Flower Market customer, now I'm excited to see the other side as a wholesaler. In the short time we've been open, we've been busy and introduced a bigger range of Ecuadorian and Colombian roses to meet demand. They're the highest-quality stems and that's what we specialise in."

The unique growing conditions of the South American countries mean roses grow at high altitudes in nutrient-rich soil, soaking up 12 hours of sunlight each day. "We use Ecuadorian and Colombian roses as they're perfect for events and bouquets," said Oliver. "Ecuadorian roses can last up to 15 days, with vibrant colours, sturdy stems and large blooms."

Chelsea Florals is also a wholesaler, so do pop in and say hello – you'll find them in units C21-C22 on the Flower Market's ground floor.



Mission Market puts members in the spotlight

Mission Market, hosted by Mission Kitchen (MK) in the Food Exchange in mid-September, gave 200 invited guests the chance to network with a diverse array of food industry pros, taste unique products, and discover emerging brands from 40+ innovators from the MK membership.

The 5-year-old food and drink business incubator put on a flavour-filled showcase of food and drink created by innovative start-ups from within its buzzy foodie community, including trend-setting snacks and sauces, globally-inspired condiments and desserts, artisan confectionary, sustainable catering concepts and innovative foods of the future.



As a special celebration of the organisation's fifth birthday, the event also featured: 'Hall of Fame' alumni who have lived the dream, outgrown their MK roots and moved on to do incredible things; an oyster bar shucked fresh by long-standing member Rocks Oysters; and bespoke curated cocktails whipped up by another member The Juicy Brick using member products.

As well as tasting incredible food and drink, guests could join in with demos and an energetic cookie-making class with another member, Happy Crumb Bakery.

If you haven't checked out the amazing work going on at Mission Kitchen, we implore you to do so – it's one of the most important things happening on London's food scene.

See more about the organisation and its members, including Happy Crumb Bakery – pages 9-13

YOUR LINK TO OUR PAST

We often get asked for back issues of Market Quarterly (the newspaper formerly known as Market Times). Every one of our previous 31 issues is available on the Market website – newcoventgardenmarket.com – via a link in the Site Map list at the bottom of each page. You can also scan this QR code if you have the immediate itch to access news, features and interviews from the last seven years at New Covent Garden Market!

For more on these stories and to keep up-to-date with news from NCGM, scan the QR code

Eric still blossoming after four decades at Evergreen

One of New Covent Garden Flower Market's much-loved veterans Eric Connick celebrated a major milestone this year, completing 40 years' service with plant wholesaler Evergreen Exterior Services Ltd.

For Eric, a 12.30am alarm call has been a way of life for most of his working life. Now approaching his 65th birthday, he remains as enthusiastic about the horticulture trade as the day he started. "I love dealing with the plants and I love the customers," he said.

He joined Evergreen as a casual worker during busy seasonal periods, helping with bedding plants and Christmas trees, before moving into a full-time role when the company's transport operation grew. "There was only one driver back then," he recalled. "Then they bought another lorry and I started driving a seven-and-a-half-tonner full time."

The role involved early morning trips bringing stock to New Covent Garden Market and over the years, Eric became a familiar face here, both from behind the wheel and on the sales floor. During particularly busy periods, colleagues began asking him to help serve customers and process orders. "When it got busy they'd say, 'Eric, can you pick a book up and book a customer out?'" he said. "Then I did more and more of it, and eventually I ended up selling."

Today, Eric manages Evergreen's unit at New Covent Garden Market, combining sales expertise with decades of horticultural knowledge. His favourite part of the job? The people. "It's the customers, the people and the banter," he said. "You



can have a good laugh with them, but you're also helping them."

Eric is especially passionate about sharing practical advice, from seasonal planting tips to the simple but often overlooked art of watering correctly. "You water into the soil, not over the top of the leaves," he said with a smile. "People are always surprised when you tell them that."

After four decades of pre-dawn starts, Christmas tree rushes, seasonal plant sales and countless customer conversations, Eric's affection for the Flower Market remains undimmed. "It is hard work," he said. "But then you look back and wonder where the time's gone. I've loved every minute of it."

TAIWANESE TASTERS

A Taiwanese fruit tasting took place on Buyers' Walk in late August, as the Far East country's exporters and a Manchester-based import partner looked to gain a wholesale market foothold in the UK. The tasting was put on by a Taiwan Agricultural Export Integration Platform, which works closely with local Agriculture Bureaus, Farmers' Associations and growers across Taiwan to bring high-quality Taiwanese agricultural products to international markets. Alongside UK import partner Cherrain Global Ltd, San Cheng, of Taiwan Agricultural Export Integration Platform, brought a wide range of Taiwanese fruits for traders to taste and give their professional feedback - including premium Arus melon, grown one fruit per plant, alongside three distinctive mango varieties, wax apples, dragon fruit, pink guava, pineapple, passion fruit and other seasonal produce.

NCGM TRADERS KEY TO ODDBOX'S SUCCESS

Food Exchange based Oddbox is celebrating 10 successful years of rescuing 'wonky' and surplus fruit and vegetables and delivering them directly to the public. The connection with NCGM goes back to Oddbox's 2016 foundation, when several Market wholesalers supplied the new venture to get it off the ground.

A BIT OF DECORUM IN THE MARKET

A group of 16 flower and plant growers from the Netherlands visited the Flower Market in September to see their products in a wholesale environment and meet traders. Decorum – a consortium of more than fifty family-run businesses – said the Flower Market was 'really well organised' with an 'amazing' assortment.

DORSET COLLEGE VISIT PLANTS SEED FOR SUCCESS

10 floristry students from Dorset's Coastland College enjoyed a tour of the Flower Market in October. Meeting wholesalers and florists, the students were keen to explore opportunities in the horticulture industry. "The students were buzzing when they jumped back on the bus!" said Floral Design teacher Peter Walkey.

NCGM WOWS WANDSWORTH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Members of Wandsworth Chamber of Commerce got an early-morning glimpse behind the scenes at New Covent Garden Market in September. Chamber Chief Executive Beverley Corson and Chamber members toured the Fruit and Vegetable and Flower Market, meeting traders, as well as seeing the latest phase of the redevelopment project.

BUILDING BRIDGES

The British-Uzbek Society builds bridges between our two nations through trade and culture - and few things connect people quite like food. Along the ancient Silk Road, Uzbekistan once linked continents through trade. CGMA's General manager Rob McAuliffe and Finance Director Rob Sisley attended a showcase at the Embassy of Uzbekistan that carried that spirit forward. The event was a private showcase connecting UK buyers with leading Uzbek producers, held as part of an official Uzbek trade delegation visit. The delegation included several export-ready producers across fresh produce, dried fruits & nuts, pulses, and canned & preserved goods - plus juices, cereals, and processed dairy and meat.

Obituaries

Sharon Melehi



Sharon Melehi, a well-respected professional florist and much-loved friend of New Covent Garden Flower Market sadly passed away in August, at the age of 65.

Sharon was a renowned floral stylist and artist who ran her business – Sharon Melehi Flowers – from her London base, specialising in weddings, corporate functions, and social events. A regular visitor to Nine Elms, Sharon would inspire her peers with her creativity, using her deep knowledge of classic, high-end floral artistry to bring her clients' visions to reality.

She was the principal teacher at London's Kenneth Turner Flower School. Working extensively with Kenneth for many years, often for high-profile and royal clients, Sharon helped train generations of florists and was regarded as one of the world's top florists herself.

Members of the floral design community have shared tributes honouring Sharon's talent, kindness, and her dedication to teaching others the art of floristry.

"When I think of Sharon I picture a ray of sunshine with a very bubbly personality, always brightening up every day," said Liz Marsh of Elizabeth Marsh Floral Design Ltd, whose studio is based at the Flower Market. "Sharon freelanced for me for a few years and then stated doing more events on her own," said Liz, adding that weddings were her forte. "She'd get to know the brides well and often stayed friends with them after the weddings. Sharon was one of the old-school florists and she'll be greatly missed by everyone."

Christopher Hammond-Davis, Creative Director at London event florist Woodbrown, enjoyed a long relationship with Sharon "Anyone who worked with Sharon will know what an absolute powerhouse of energy, enthusiasm and talent she was. I find it hard to use the past tense, because she is alive in all the hearts of those who knew her.

"The talent for wired wedding work is unfortunately fading for our industry now," said Christopher, "but Sharon was known to have been helicoptered from one international wedding to another, just to make the wedding bouquet. She truly was an international florist, travelling the world creating her floral masterpieces, such stunning work."

On behalf of everyone here at New Covent Garden Flower Market who knew and loved Sharon, thank you for the kindness, friendship and the inspiration.

Rest in Peace.

John Olney



The wholesale market community was deeply saddened by the passing of John Olney, a highly respected market trader, business owner and industry representative whose influence extended across London's wholesale markets for several decades.

John owned and ran Donovan Supplies, part of the long-established Donovan Brothers business, which supplied paper bags, packaging, floristry sundries and other essential products to traders throughout the fresh produce and flower sectors. The Donovan name was synonymous with Spitalfields for generations, with roots stretching back to the East End's historic market communities.

John was equally valued for his commitment to supporting fellow traders. He served as Chair of Spitalfields Market Tenants Association for six years during the 2000s. His calm, measured approach and willingness to listen earned him widespread respect among traders, market operators and industry colleagues alike.

For more on these stories and to keep up-to-date with news from NCGM, scan the QR code

Sonja's passion project takes a stroll through floristry history

Fifty years after joining Pulbrook & Gould (P&G) in 1976, Sonja Waites has fulfilled a long-term ambition and written a book about the company that was for several decades synonymous with Britain's finest floral design. From society weddings and country house celebrations to royal commissions and London events, the company built a reputation for craftsmanship, creativity and an unrivalled knowledge of flowers. We spoke to Sonja, a Market regular for half a century about her passionate, yet poignant trip down memory lane

The Amazing Lady P, named to honour Susan, Lady Pulbrook, depicts an everchanging floral industry landscape, with Covent Gardens old and New at its heart. The delightful book features incredible photographs of high-society events serviced by Pulbrook & Gould over several decades, alongside a history that frames a period many would see as the halcyon days of floristry.

It also includes profiles and recollections of members of the P&G team including the recently departed Ken Turner and Sharon Melehi, and others familiar to this parish such as Tracy Gorton, Simon Lycett and Shane Connolly, who provides a thoughtful and thought-provoking foreword.





The Market and its evolution runs parallel to the P&G story in Sonja's words, reflecting the undying commitment that P&G showed to the traders here and the ever-changing shape of the industry. Flower and plant traders including Dave Gibbs, Barry Bethell, John Hardcastle and Bob Cooley all share their thoughts on both the old Market and New Covent Garden and expand on how the trade changed for them and their customers through the decades.

When Sonja returned from six years living in Italy and joined P&G, the 20-year-old company was already a respected name in British floristry. Founded by her sister in law Lady P and Rosamund Gould, the business combined entrepreneurial flair with exceptional floristry expertise. At the time, British-grown flowers still formed the backbone of the trade. P&G sourced flowers, foliage and shrubs not only from the then literally new New Covent Garden Flower Market but also from an extraordinary network of private estates, country gardens and specialist growers across the country.

What set the company apart was its unparallelled understanding of plants and flowers. Many members of the team came from gardening backgrounds, bringing an appreciation of seasonality, cultivation and flower conditioning that became a hallmark of the business.

> "The book reflects an undying commitment to the firms' suppliers at the Market

But whatever the source of the flowers, the daily buying routine at the Market remained central to operations. The flower industry underwent a dramatic transformation during the 1970s. During a global oil crisis, many British growers struggled vainly to cope with soaring heating costs. Many dropped out of the industry altogether and to fill the supply gaps that opened up, increasing volumes of product began arriving from the Netherlands, offering wholesalers and florists the year-round availability they required to meet demand.

By the turn of the century, buying direct from Dutch suppliers had become a more plausible proposition. However, true to its roots and its principles, P&G chose a different path. Despite witnessing the arrival of the first Dutch lorries loaded with flowers ready for immediate sale, the company remained committed to purchasing through New Covent Garden Flower Market.

The decision showed loyalty, trust and a belief in the value of the Market community and the quality of the product and the service available at the Market. As Sonja recalls, if something went wrong there was always someone at the Market prepared to help. The traders understood their customers' requirements, could source difficult products and provided a level of personal service that direct imports on the back of a lorry could never replicate, she told us.

Throughout the book, Sonja and her selected commentators illustrate beautifully how different the flower trade once was. Seasonality defined the industry. Private growers delivered unique flowers and foliage from some of Britain's most beautiful gardens. Florists were expected to understand not only design, but also plant husbandry and flower care. Expertise was passed down through experience, and early mornings at the Market were an essential part of the job as those personal relationships shaped the trade.

As New Covent Garden Flower Market prepares for its future home within the redeveloped Market estate, Sonja's book serves as both a celebration and a record. Many of the people who helped build both P&G and the industry in which it thrived have now retired, while many more are sadly no longer with us. Their stories, knowledge and experiences form an important part of this Market's heritage.

The story of Pulbrook & Gould is ultimately a story about people: growers, florists, traders and customers brought together by flowers. It is a special story we're sure a lot of readers would like to be reminded of.

The Amazing Lady P – The inspiring story of Pulbrook & Gould and their English-grown flowers, by Sonja Waites, was published on September 29th and is available from major booksellers and online retailers. Priced at £30, it can also be purchased by scanning the QR code below.

bitly

Dave reflects on a lifetime of work, fun and friendship in flowers



For Dave Gibbs, New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) has never been a place to simply make a living. The Flower Market is where he grew up, learned about life and his trade, raised a family and forged life-long friendships. As owner of DG Wholesale Flowers, Dave is proudly one of the Flower Market's longest-serving and most respected traders

DG Wholesale Flowers sells premium-quality cut flowers to florists, event companies and street traders, as well as supplying contract florists across London and beyond. Yet Dave's story began long before the modern Flower Market opened at Nine Elms in 1974; at the old Covent Garden in the 1960s.

"I've been a part of the Market for most of my life – it's all I've ever known," says Dave, whose route into the industry came through a childhood determination to earn money. "Unlike some of the traders here, I didn't inherit a family business, and my introduction was by chance really."

Growing up in Islington, N1, Dave was constantly searching for odd jobs. One of those was on a fruit stall run by Jimmy Cardu, a former boxer and a friend of Dave's father who regularly visited London's wholesale markets. One day Jimmy invited Dave to join him.

"Jimmy told me that he was going to Covent Garden Market and that if I wanted to come, I had to ask my dad," explains Dave. "We never had a lot of money growing up so I was always looking for jobs and the Market seemed like a good way to earn."

At first, Dave's role was straightforward. He helped load the lorry, moved produce and lent a hand wherever he was needed. But while Jimmy spent hours walking around buying fruit, Dave realised there was another way to earn money, as he explains.

"The guy I was on the lorry with said, 'Why don't you go round the Market and ask if anyone wants a cup of tea? You might earn a few bob.' It turned out to be a better business decision than I could have imagined. I earned more money in the three hours getting tea than I did working for Jimmy all day. Not surprisingly, I quickly changed direction and Jimmy got the elbow," he laughs.

The man who changed Dave's life

As important as that first visit to the Flower Market was, the turning point was when Dave met Charlie Sharman, a salesman at J. & E. Page. Fifty years later Dave still speaks about Charlie with enormous affection, and it's clear Charlie felt the same about Dave, perhaps seeing a younger version of himself, as he began giving Dave jobs around the J. & E. Page stand.

"Charlie would tell me to get the tea, tidy up, empty boxes, and I was always learning," says Dave. "Over time, the relationship grew into something far more significant, and he took me under his wing. He became like a father figure to me."

For years, Dave worked weekends and school holidays in the Flower Market, learning everything he could. "Charlie guided me through the flower industry and educated me," he says, adding those early years created the foundations for all that followed. "Every Saturday and every spare moment was spent inside the Market. I'd catch the 5.45am Tube from Holloway Road, the first train in the morning, so that I'd arrive in the Market just after six."

Sometimes Dave brought his friends along and, as with most teenagers, there was plenty of messing around before Charlie delivered some practical advice. "We used to muck about because we were only young," Dave says. "Eventually Charlie had had enough and told me to leave my friends at home and come on my own." The message was clear. The Flower Market could offer a future, but only if Dave treated it seriously. And that's exactly what he did.









Joining J. & E. Page

Dave officially joined J. & E. Page when he turned 16, working for one of the Flower Market's best-known businesses with a history stretching back generations. This first job wasn't on the sales floor but as an office junior, a role that gave him an education behind the scenes.

"I used to do the post every day, sending invoices to people," he explains. "Many people found the work boring, but I saw it differently, as it gave me a good understanding of how it all worked." Dave would still arrive in the Market during the early morning hours to unofficially help on the floor before moving into his office duties.

Looking back, he believes the Market gave him an education that could not have been found elsewhere and, by his early twenties, he already knew flowers inside out. The other thing Dave learned is that successful businesses depend on people, relationships, and trust – and that's how you earn your reputation.

"Every morning involved conversations and every sale depended on relationships built over years," says Dave. "The Market operated like its own community, with its own rules and rhythms and it was a world I loved. The education I received was invaluable, the combination of roles helping me understand sales, administration, invoicing, customer relationships and cash flow – long before I ever dreamed of owning a business – and those lessons would stay with me for the rest of my career."

Starting a business

The friendships formed during those early years would help shape Dave's future career, especially his connection with fellow trader John Hardcastle (who now owns NCGM firm Bloomfield Wholesale Florist Ltd), and the two men would eventually go into business together.

"I left J. & E. Page at 25 and spent time working for Fyffes Monro, another major market company," says Dave. "But I had bigger ambitions and I felt that I needed to do something on my own. In 1989 I joined forces with John to launch a new business called Euro Sales. We thought we could have a fresh start and move forward."

Dave fondly remembers the difficulties as Euro Sales launched, the first of which was finding somewhere to trade as space at NCGM was at a premium. "We purchased an empty trading area that was formerly occupied by a business that had gone bust," he says. For £60,000 all we got was a bit of concrete, an area of space. It was a leap of faith."

Launching a new business is never easy, but Dave and John had chosen a tricky time to start their firm: the flower industry was changing rapidly and traditional wholesalers faced increasing competition from Dutch suppliers that were selling directly into the UK market. "For decades, many secondary wholesalers would buy stock at Covent Garden before selling it on," says Dave, "but that customer base was starting to disappear and a lot of the customers started going direct to the Dutchman."

Despite the challenges, Dave and John stuck to their guns and Euro Sales not only survived the changes but went on to successfully trade for 16 years.

A fresh start

By the early 2000s, conditions were becoming increasingly difficult, and many long-established names were disappearing. Dave and John decided to go their separate ways and close Euro Sales. "The decision was amicable," explains Dave, "as we'd been selling flowers for a long time. We both thought there was enough business in the Market for both of us."

Three months later, Dave launched DG Wholesale. Those first months were among the toughest of his career and, despite Dave's decades of experience, there was no guarantee of success.

"In my first week I lost four and a half grand," he admits. "The second week I lost three grand. The third week I lost two grand. But I didn't walk away, I kept going as I knew trade would come back." Dave's confidence came from understanding the nature of the flower business and believing that his customers, hard fought for over many years, would eventually return.

"Competition remained fierce and companies around you would do their best to keep your customers from returning to you," says Dave, who had to rebuild momentum through determination and long hours. Working seven days a week for eighteen months, he was a one-man-band at this point with nobody else to fall back on. "Sales needed making, flowers needed buying, and accounts needed doing," he says, "so the only solution was working harder than the competition."

Pictured: Dave in and amongst it as one of the best known and respected faces in the Market and with some of his current sales team at DG Flowers (left to right: Louie, Jay, Richie and James)



> People have realised there's more to life than working and how important flowers are to their lives

By the end of the first year, DG Wholesale had stabilised and broken even. It wasn't glamorous but it was progress and, as the business grew, Dave developed a clear strategy. “Rather than fighting competitors on price, I wanted to become known for quality,” he says, thinking back to those difficult days. "I tried to work high-end with the quality of the flowers and my approach was deliberate. I always tried to improve the quality I was selling."

As well as a premium assortment, Dave became obsessive about presentation and availability. "I consciously filled the stand up with flowers every day,” he says, adding that even on difficult days, he made sure customers never saw half-empty displays. "Whatever I sold out of, I refreshed. My reasoning was simple. When customers come in, I have plenty of flowers for them."

Over time, the strategy paid off. Event florists, contract florists and premium customers increasingly chose DG Wholesale and Dave felt he was attracting a better clientele, not because he was the cheapest but because customers trusted DG’s quality.

Moving to the interim Market

Dave’s witnessed enormous changes over the decades, including the move from the old Market buildings into the current (interim) Flower Market in 2017, which is due to relocate to its final location in the Food Exchange building in 2028. Unlike some traders, he welcomed the change. "It was nice to move into a new building and although we knew it was temporary, the modern building offered better facilities and a more efficient layout,” he says. “It was more condensed, plus my new stand was around 25 per cent larger too.”

The move created opportunities for expansion and allowed the business to continue growing. Dave recruited additional staff. Then came the Covid-19 outbreak.

The challenge of lockdown

For most Market businesses, the lockdowns that Covid-19 brought represented the biggest challenges they had ever faced, and DG Wholesale was no exception. "Before Covid we were trading well, with sales and profits constantly rising,” he says. Then everything stopped.

Established trading disappeared overnight as the lockdown brought a standstill to the hospitality and catering industries that all NCGM businesses rely on for their livelihoods. But what Covid brought in equal measure was a determination to succeed despite dreadful circumstances. Like many businesses, DG Wholesale had to adapt quickly to new ways of selling their stock.

Top: Dave with market snapper Clive Boursnell and long-time friend and former business partner John Hardcastle. The black and white image of young scamp Dave was taken in Covent Garden by Clive when Dave was just six!



"We started doing click and collect,” says Dave, “and recovery was gradual. It took about a year for sales to regroup, but it left a lasting impact in different ways." Dave believes the pandemic changed consumer attitudes to the benefit of the flower industry, which has resulted in a new breed of customer with more money to spend.

"I think people realised there's more to life than just working,” he says. “What initially was a disaster eventually generated renewed appreciation for what flowers bring to people's lives. We saw people were investing more in their homes and surroundings and flowers provided comfort and positivity. People started buying flowers to cheer themselves up."

Marathon man

Away from flowers, Dave is an enthusiastic runner who has completed nine marathons, including four for charity. His fundraising experiences have reinforced his belief in the Flower Market community as, time and again, colleagues and customers supported his fundraising efforts. "People can’t wait to sponsor you,” he says, revealing he raised at least £2,500 every time he ran a marathon for charity. “That generosity remains one of the things I value most about our unique industry,” he says. “People are very generous in the flower game."

Of course, no community is perfect. Traders disagree, competition exists, arguments happen. Yet there is a spirit of camaraderie that keeps bringing people together. "We all have a fall out now and then,” says Dave, “but that is only part of the story. The majority of people get on with each another and we try and have a laugh every day."

A family affair

Dave’s wife Loraine has been an essential part of the firm’s success, running the office operation from day one despite no prior experience of office work. “Loraine has been with me since we first started,” says Dave, “and without her dedication to the back of house operation, the company wouldn’t be where it is today.”

Dave and Loraine’s children have also worked at the Flower Market at various points. “Over the years my children have helped me during their school holidays, which I hope they enjoyed,” says Dave. “My son Louis worked with us for a few years, eventually moving on to work in recruitment. We also have our niece Nicola, who works in the office, so it really has been a family success story.”

Bringing up the next generation

One of the most important chapters in Dave's story began during the financial crisis of 2008. His son James had lost his job and Dave offered him an opportunity, but not a shortcut. "James had been made redundant so I said to him that he could join the business, but he’d have to start work as what we used to call ‘a bucket boy’, doing a little bit of everything and learning the ropes."

Dave never believed that family members should receive special treatment, and James embraced the challenge as his dad had done decades earlier. He started by sweeping floors, carrying buckets, making tea, and cleaning up. Eighteen years later James is now running the business, alongside his dad.

Reflecting on his son’s NCGM career with obvious pride, Dave explains that James now handles much of the purchasing and the day-to-day flower buying. "He hasn’t done a bad job, has he?” he says, adding that a formal succession is now underway. “I’m looking to take a step back over the next year or so, with James set to fully take over within the next two years.”

Now, aged 65, Dave is finally thinking about retirement. “Seeing the next generation step forward is one of the most satisfying moments of my career,” he says. But Dave’s connection to the Market will never disappear. "I'd always be there helping James."

He also acknowledges the ‘great team’ of experienced salesmen he’s recruited to work at DG Wholesale, who collectively bring decades of experience to the business. Ask him what makes him proudest and he doesn't mention turnover, profits or market share. Instead, he talks about colleagues, friends and family.

"I've managed to give my family a good life,” he says. It’s an answer that says everything about his character. After more than 50 years in the flower trade, Dave’s greatest achievement isn’t the business he’s built but the life it’s enabled him to provide for those around him.

Brewing up a different kind of tea business at Mission Kitchen

For Jonathan Sun, founder of Root Tea, his objectives are about much more than providing the British public with a comforting hot drink. Jonathan sees a real opportunity to introduce British consumers to higher-quality, distinctive blends while encouraging a deeper appreciation of the craft and provenance behind every cup







Root Tea began its journey in a familiar way for many London food and drink start-ups: by testing products directly with consumers at the capital's retail markets. Jonathan secured a membership at Duck Pond Market, enabling him to put his teas in front of customers across various markets and gather valuable feedback.

By his own admission, early sales were modest, but selling was only one part of the equation. What those long days at the market really did was provide the validation he needed to convince himself there is a genuine demand for the product.

Root Tea is the classic side hustle, as Jonathan builds it alongside his established role as venture capitalist, fintech investor, and entrepreneurial ecosystem builder. He is best known for backing very early, idea-stage founders using flexible financing structures. It's no great surprise then that his two worlds collide, as he combines market trading and the development of partnerships with farm shops and organic retailers, with funky corporate events centred around his teas.

At the heart of the Root Tea brand is a commitment to quality and authenticity. Jonathan sources leaves from Fujian Province in south-eastern China and combines them with carefully selected flowers and botanicals to create distinctive blends. The result is a collection of teas designed to be both enjoyable and beneficial to health, offering flavour alongside wellbeing. One of the company's most popular products, an oolong, rose and ginger blend, delivers what he describes as a sharp, refreshing taste with subtle sweetness, making it suitable for morning energy, digestive support, stress reduction and better blood circulation.

However, building a premium tea brand comes with challenges. Jonathan believes one of the tea industry's biggest hurdles is consumer education. While coffee has undergone a transformation over the past 15 years, with consumers increasingly willing to pay more for quality and provenance, tea has yet to experience the same shift. Root Tea's mission is therefore not only to sell tea but also to connect consumers with the value of carefully sourced ingredients, specialist blending and higher production standards.

"Everybody who has tried and bought our tea has been very satisfied," Jonathan says. "The tricky bit for us is that the general consumer is used to buying 80 Twinings tea bags at their local Tesco for £5, or even much cheaper when they are on offer, as they regularly are. I think what the tea industry needs is different makers and different companies to kickstart the transformation that allowed coffee, and especially higher quality coffee companies to start to gain positive notoriety.

"There are currently about 10-15 similar, high-quality tea companies that I know of in the UK. No-one's making blends exactly the way we're making them, so I feel pretty safe about our own differentiation in the market," he says.

"There are quite a few companies that we draw inspiration from though. I hope one day we can in some way follow the steps of what Good & Proper have done, for instance. We love how they've gotten into just so many different cafes and farm shops and how they've really put that B2B side of their business front and centre. And companies like Brew Tea Company and Nectar & Leaf are great too."

By studying what others do well, while maintaining his own distinctive approach to blending, Jonathan continues to refine his brand's offer and positioning. "We routinely buy a lot of our competitors' teas, just to taste them and compare," he says. "I've also been trying to build relationships with a lot of them just to see how they do things."

Mission Kitchen has played an important role in Jonathan's journey to date and helped him to clear some of the traditional start-up hurdles. Although only a handful of tea businesses operate from the community, he says the value of his Mission Kitchen membership extends far beyond sharing a product category. Like many food and drink entrepreneurs, he faces common challenges around supplier relationships, wholesale distribution, retail margins, packaging decisions and investment choices. Being surrounded by founders tackling similar issues creates a valuable environment for learning and collaboration.

Alongside the mentoring network and access to potential customers, the ability to exchange ideas with other producers and learn from their experiences has established itself as a key benefit of being part of the Mission Kitchen community. "The challenges are often the same, regardless of the product," Jonathan explains. "It's an ongoing conversation; everyone else here has to answer the same questions at some point in their development," he adds.

Looking ahead, the ambition is clear. While major retailers such as Whole Foods and Waitrose remain longer-term aspirations, Jonathan's immediate focus is on continuing to build credibility and traction through his diverse network. It is a measured strategy that prioritises sustainable growth over rapid expansion and for him, success will come not just from selling more tea, but from helping to elevate perceptions of tea itself.

Through thoughtful sourcing, innovative blends and a collaborative approach fostered by Mission Kitchen, Root Tea is quietly contributing to a new chapter in Britain's tea culture.

Currently he sells them online at http://roottea.co, or you can find him on Instagram @drinkroottea.

Nurturing the next generation of London food businesses



As Mission Kitchen celebrated its fifth birthday in June, its founders reflected on the work that has established it as one of London's most important launchpads for emerging food and drink businesses. Chris Bavin came to meet one of those founders, Charlie Gent, at Mission Kitchen's fantastic facility within the Food Exchange at New Covent Garden Market, to find out more

Chris: Firstly, congratulations on your first five years. Let's start with the basics. What exactly is Mission Kitchen and what does it do?

Charlie: Mission Kitchen is an incubator for food and drink start-ups; a platform for food and drink talent to get started, created to support more entrepreneurship and innovation. We try to make it easier, more affordable and more accessible for people from a diverse range of backgrounds to start exciting new food businesses.

Chris: So, if we put it in layman's terms, this is the equivalent of flexible office workspaces where a small business can rent a desk for whatever period of time. It's like that, but for food, isn't it?

Charlie: Exactly. We've taken the principle of shared workspace and applied it to food. Instead of desks, it's kitchens. Members can book time flexibly and scale up as their business grows. The idea is to keep it affordable and supportive while people get their businesses off the ground.

Chris: Incredible. How has it gone so far?

Charlie: The five years have flown by. We started in 2021 with 32 businesses. Today, more than 100 businesses are based here and, over those five years, we calculated that 404 businesses have been members at one time or another.

We've tracked the wider impact too. We estimate that 346 jobs have been created by businesses based here, while more than half of our businesses are led by female entrepreneurs and more than 50% by global majority founders. Increasing representation and diversity in food and drink is a really important part of what we do.

Our ambition is that people come to us with an idea, spend a year or two here growing, and then outgrow us and move on to bigger things.

Chris: It must be like fostering a child. Is it emotional when a member leaves?

Charlie: It is. I recently had a baby and one of our members joked that I already had hundreds of them! We build strong relationships with founders and become very invested in their journeys. It's bittersweet when they leave, but it's also rewarding because it means the model is working.

Chris: I love the concept. It's one of those brilliant ideas that, as soon as you've heard it, it makes total sense. Where did the idea come from?

Charlie: Two things. First, my co-founders and I saw that London is full of talented people with great food ideas, but breaking into the industry can be difficult if you lack resources, networks or knowledge.

Second, I wanted to start a food business myself. I assumed there would be a place where I could go and get started, but there wasn't. That sparked the idea of creating one.

Chris: How did you make it happen?

Charlie: We started talking to Covent Garden Market Authority eight or nine years ago. As the Market redevelopment progressed, we could see the opportunity to create a vibrant ecosystem of food businesses in one place.

The Food Exchange was identified as somewhere that could nurture innovation and new business activity. Together, we developed the concept and secured support and funding from the Mayor of London, who recognised the potential for job creation and industry growth.

We were ready to begin construction when Covid struck in March 2020, delaying everything for several months. Eventually we opened in summer 2021, just as the economy was reopening, and we haven't looked back.

Chris: Give me a few examples of products that have been born in this kitchen?

Charlie: It's a real cross-section of the food and drink industry. We've supported drinks brands, snacks, paneer producers, bakers, ready-meal companies, chilli sauce makers and condiment brands.

We also work with caterers, street-food traders and hospitality businesses using the space for preparation, menu development and concept testing. Alongside them are consultants, photographers and other people working in food who value being part of the community.

Chris: It's about that community, isn't it? It must be creating a real buzz.

Charlie: It's amazing. We run events, mentoring and learning programmes, but members often get the greatest value simply from being surrounded by more than 100 fellow entrepreneurs.

If someone has a problem to solve, chances are somebody else in the building solved it recently. Whether it's packaging, branding, pricing or operations, there is usually someone who can help.

Chris: A difficult one. Can you highlight any standout successes who have made a real go of it?

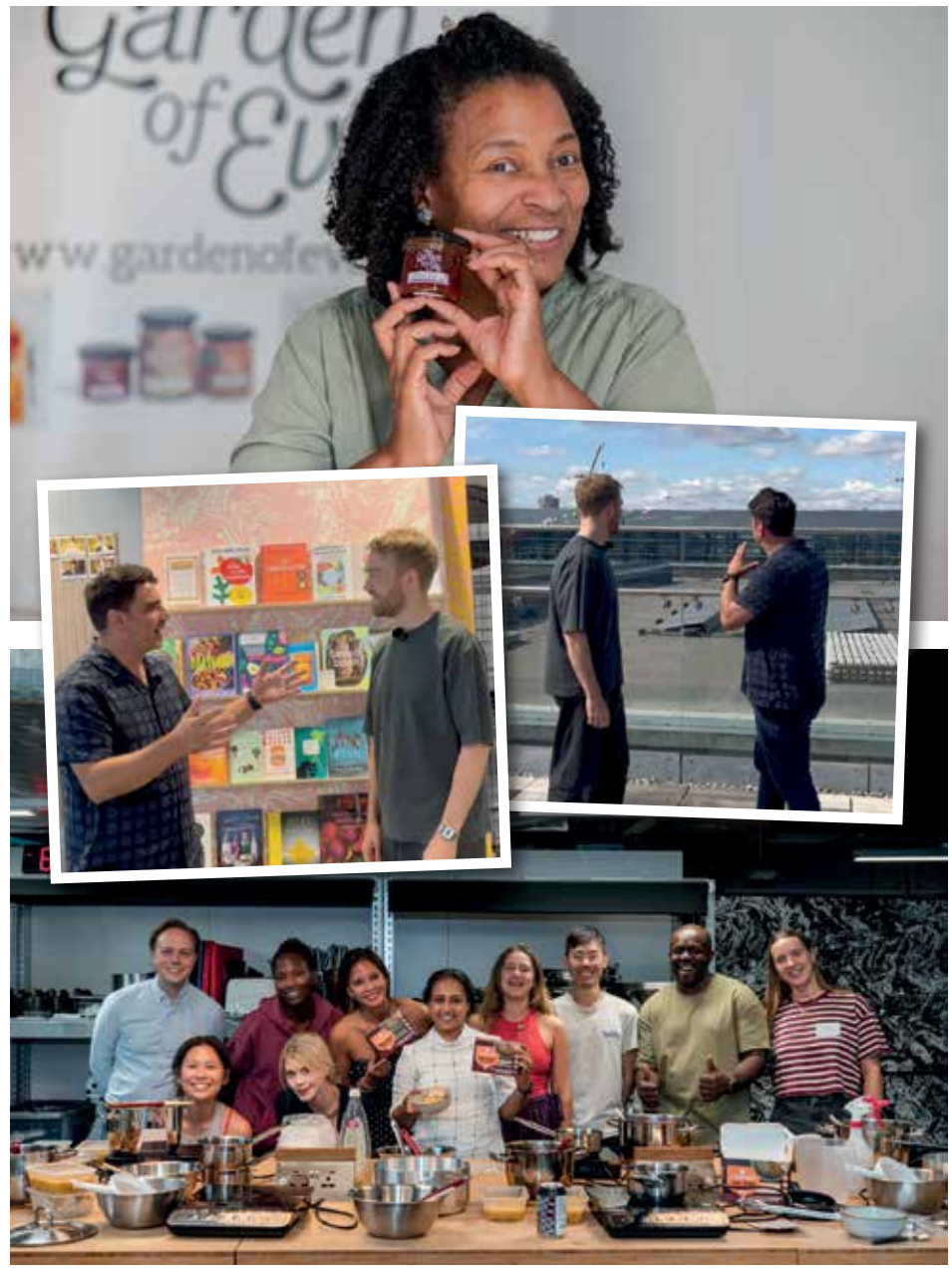
Charlie: I can't have favourites, but there are a few good examples.

All The Aunties was founded by Riya Patel and Jack Newton. Riya came to us with the idea of creating a modern paneer brand. After developing recipes and the branding here, the business quickly secured listings with Whole Foods and later joined the Tesco Accelerator Programme. Today the products are stocked in Tesco stores across the country.

Another example is Tom Palmer from Yep Kitchen. After spending a decade in China, he returned to the UK determined to produce authentic Sichuan chilli oils and condiments. He began by making products by hand here, secured listings in Whole Foods, Selfridges and independent retailers, and eventually raised investment to build his own specialist chilli-oil factory.

Lune & Wild was another early member. Founders Nadia Simonds and Lara Rodgers created premium organic baby and toddler food. They started small, outgrew Mission





Kitchen within a year, moved into their own facility and have since grown into a national business producing more than a million meals a year.

Chris: There must be a real pride to that.

Charlie: Absolutely. Seeing businesses arrive with little more than an idea and later become examples of success is exactly why we created Mission Kitchen. It was fantastic to have those founders back at our fifth birthday celebration.

Chris: In a helicopter?

Charlie: Exactly. The limo pulled up… but seriously, seeing people return five years later having built successful businesses is incredibly rewarding.

Chris: So, tell me, if I'm walking in on day one with an idea for a fantastic product, what's the process?

Charlie: All members get access to three things.

The first is high-quality commercial kitchen space. Rather than taking a lease and investing heavily upfront, members gain affordable access to fully equipped kitchens, storage and operational facilities on a flexible basis.

People can start with just an idea, using evenings and weekends around an existing job. As they grow, they can access more kitchen time, dedicated workspaces and eventually private kitchens where they can install their own equipment and operate independently.

Making food is only one part of building a company though. Founders also need space and support to develop every other part of their business.

That's why the other half of the site operates as a co-working space with desks, offices, meeting rooms and all the facilities people need to run and grow a business.

The third element is our business support programme. We provide expert advice, workshops and training covering everything from marketing and finance to trademarks and legal issues.

We also run meet-the-buyer programmes with retailers and foodservice companies. One of the biggest challenges for emerging brands is getting in front of buyers and decision-makers. We help create those opportunities through relationships with retailers including Whole Foods, Waitrose and, later this year, Ocado.

Chris: I love that. And I suppose it becomes self-perpetuating because the more products developed here that become successful, the more buy-in you have as an untapped source of new food producers.

Charlie: Absolutely. Everyone wants to know what's coming next in food. Buyers are looking for new flavours, products and brands.

Because we're a platform for emerging entrepreneurs, they know they'll discover something original when they visit Mission Kitchen.

Chris: How beneficial is it for Mission Kitchen to be situated at the heart of New Covent Garden Market with all its history and heritage in fresh produce?

Charlie: It's incredibly exciting. Our members are surrounded by one of the most important food hubs in the country, with access to produce, expertise and industry knowledge.

Most of our members source ingredients from Market traders. We also work closely with the Market community through events, tastings and product development activities, and we regularly introduce members to traders through tours and networking opportunities.

Chris: It sounds like reciprocal inspiration.

Charlie: That's exactly what we're excited about. The Market provides access to fantastic produce and generations of expertise, while our members are creating innovative products and businesses.

As the Market's development continues, there will be even more opportunities to connect producers, entrepreneurs and customers in one place, creating a complete journey from raw ingredients to finished products.

Chris: That feels like a marriage made in heaven. So, what's next for Mission Kitchen?

Charlie: We've built a strong community and support model. The next step is expanding the services and opportunities available to members.

We're also working with larger organisations across food, retail and catering that want closer connections to start-ups and innovation. We'll be hosting more events that bring major industry players together with emerging entrepreneurs.

At the same time, we want to open our doors more widely to the public, giving people opportunities to eat great food, meet founders and celebrate what's being created here.

Chris: I'll hold you to that. But how do people get involved?

Charlie: The easiest way is through our events programme. People can attend panel discussions and networking sessions, meet founders and learn more about the community.

If they're interested in becoming a member, we can arrange a tour, provide information and guide them through a straightforward application process.

Chris: Brilliant. Well, I have got a product. So, I'm going to book a tour in and we'll get that rolling.

Charlie: We look forward to it!

Above: Charlie chats with Chris in various parts of Mission Kitchen, with the backdrop of a selection of the members who call it home



From spare time to prime time

How Happy Crumb Bakery has risen from domestic kitchen hustle to a fast-growing cookie business with the support of Mission Kitchen





Little more than a year ago, Happy Crumb Bakery was a small-scale baking side hustle operating from Grant Marshall-Koper's home kitchen. Today, the business produces hundreds of cookies each week at Mission Kitchen, supplies wholesale customers, runs busy, weekly market stalls across London and is about to launch a new corporate experience designed to share its expertise with professional and domestic chefs alike.

Like many Mission Kitchen members, Grant's journey into commercial baking has been anything but conventional. Prior to making the leap, he spent more than a decade working in the performing arts. "I trained in musical theatre and performed for probably 10 or 12 years," he explains. His stage career included musical revues, cruise ship stints, a long-running show in the Canary Islands and a traditional British music hall production in Sheerness.

He continues to write, but like many performers, the impact of the Covid pandemic prompted a change of mindset. "When Covid hit, I moved into theatre management, and while I was managing I started a little side hustle at home," he recalls.

That side hustle was to become Happy Crumb Bakery. It survived disaster when Grant's kitchen flooded and was unusable for six months, with the silver lining being it forced the change of direction that brought Mission Kitchen into play and created genuine momentum. "I restarted the business in the summer of 2025 with renewed focus, taking products directly to consumers through local markets," he says.

The growth was rapid. By October he had left his theatre management role to focus on Happy Crumb full-time.

Finding a home

Grant first heard about Mission Kitchen through a friend who already worked with a business based there. "They said 'have a look because it might be a really good fit for you'. The recommendation has been transformational." Mission Kitchen's flexible workspace model allowed Happy Crumb to grow quickly, but at its own speed, initially renting shared space for set time periods, before progressing to its own dedicated production bay, which now serves as the team's permanent base.

The difference between baking at home and operating in a professional environment was immediate. "At home, I could make 24 cookies in one go and that would take me a couple of hours. In an hour here, I can make maybe 150," Grant says.

That increase in efficiency completely changes the business's outlook and, of course, its potential. "When I started working the local markets, it would take me a week to prepare for one day's worth of sales. It was never going to work at home long term."

Just as important has been the collaborative nature of the community at Mission Kitchen.

He describes a culture where businesses share knowledge, techniques and ideas, creating an environment that accelerates learning and innovation. "I've definitely become a better cook and a better baker from being here, just from being surrounded by other talented people.

"You pick up tips and all sorts of tricks and techniques and ways of working that you just wouldn't have considered."









Smart cookie

Remarkably, Grant had no formal culinary training. Instead, his baking knowledge came from family. “My nan was a really good baker and I learnt techniques and things from her and my mum. I’m completely self-taught,” he admits. He obviously has the skills , as what began as experimenting at home soon developed wings.

He chose to produce cookies because, practically, they travelled well and could withstand courier delivery better than more fragile baked products. Over time, he developed his own dough recipe that forms the basis for his unique range. And the final sprinkle of genius was to make traditional dessert favourites the focal point of his equally unique cookie flavour profile.

While London’s food scene is fairly crowded with cookie brands, Happy Crumb has created its own space by deliberately avoiding the flavour combinations commonly found elsewhere. “You won’t find a Kinder Bueno or a Biscoff cookie, although I’m definitely partial to those flavours myself,” Grant laughs. “Among the flavours we’ve developed so far are carrot cake, tiramisu, bread and butter pudding, cherry Bakewell and sticky toffee pudding. Far and away the most successful to date has been our apple crumble cookie, which combines cinnamon dough, apple puree and real apple pieces. It’s got a real following - there was uproar when we took it off the menu for a little while!”

Opposite page: Grant works at Mission Kitchen on his fabled apple crumble cookies
Above: Delivering a masterclass in the Market and out with his wares at a London retail market

Building a brand

Retail markets have been central to Happy Crumb’s early success. Today the bakery regularly trades at Lower Marsh in Waterloo, Sydenham Market and Croydon’s historic Surrey Street Market, while also attending larger seasonal events and festivals. For Grant, these markets serve a purpose beyond sales.

“The markets are essentially our storefront,” he says. The strategy is working. Popular locations regularly sell out, generating both revenue and brand awareness. For Sydenham alone, the bakery prepares around 500 cookies every week and routinely sells every one. Larger events have produced even bigger results.

Growing beyond retail

Happy Crumb has expanded beyond market trading. Those face-to-face interactions help drive online sales, corporate orders and wholesale enquiries through word of mouth and repeat custom. Cookies are increasingly being sold wholesale to cafés and hospitality businesses, on subscription to corporate customers who treat their staff to them, and as branded corporate orders, which have become particularly popular within London’s theatre sector, where it all started for Grant.

The connections he and his husband have in theatreland are bearing fruit, as many West End productions are ordering customised cookies featuring show branding for opening nights and press events.

The next major development is the launch of the Cookie Lab, an interactive team-building experience hosted at Mission Kitchen. Participants will learn how to make New York-style cookies, develop original flavours and create their own concepts and branding before presenting them to colleagues. One of the most common questions customers ask is how Happy Crumb creates its famously thick cookies. The Cookie Lab finally reveals this secret.

In October 2026, Grant also introduced Crumb Supply, a dedicated wholesale brand for cookies and desserts.

Market base

Being based at Mission Kitchen places Happy Crumb at the heart of New Covent Garden Market, a historic wholesale food hub that offers myriad business opportunities.

Grant says the location has already provided significant advantages. “It’s fantastic. Really, really well connected,” he adds.

The bakery’s proximity to Waterloo means freshly baked products can be transported almost immediately after production to the market there. “We pick up the cookies and 10 minutes after they’ve come out of the oven, they’re on the stall down there. But beyond logistics, New Covent Garden Market offers us future opportunities for sourcing ingredients and building commercial relationships with traders and foodservice businesses operating across the site.

As Happy Crumb also experiments with new product lines, including fruit-based tarts and wholesale pastry products, those connections could become increasingly valuable.

Longer term, physical retail remains firmly on the agenda – “maybe a shop or a unit of some kind”, muses Grant. Whatever form the next stage takes, he remains clear about the role Mission Kitchen has played in getting the business to where it is today.

“Would we have got to where we are without them? Almost certainly not.”

Judging by the fervent desire for Happy Crumb’s apple crumble cookies, London’s appetite for the company’s next chapter is going to keep Grant and his team busy for some time to come.

Evergreen Exterior Services looks back on 40 years of consistent growth

From tiny beginnings as a small market stall at New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) in the 1980s, Evergreen Exterior Services – known to most as Evergreen – has grown into one of the UK's leading plant wholesalers. As the firm celebrates its 40th anniversary, NCGM remains a vital part of its business model



When Evergreen began trading at the original New Covent Garden Flower Market on Wandsworth Road in 1986, its ambitions were understandably limited. Brothers Steve and Tony Doe, together with business partner, Peter Gibbs, started the business with a single stall here. The business gradually expanded to a permanent base in Banstead, Surrey, and has steadily built a huge customer base largely thanks to strong relationships with suppliers across Europe.

Today Evergreen employs more than 50 people, operates a fleet of 25 lorries and vans, and delivers plants nationwide. Its customers range from independent florists and shops to landscapers, garden designers, gardeners, estates, local authorities and, increasingly, garden centres. A company that began with one small market unit now boasts annual sales of around £23.9 million, with New Covent Garden Market itself accounting for approximately £2.3 million.

Catering to every customer

There's no such thing as a typical day, as Evergreen's customer base is so varied. "A small florist might be looking for houseplants, while a landscape contractor could require mature trees or hundreds of metres of hedging," says Thea Pitcher, Evergreen's head of marketing. "There's not really anything that we can't get for our customers and that's what makes every day different."

As a Kew Gardens-trained horticulturist with 25 years of experience in horticulture, design, and TV, Thea's well placed to comment on the firm's impressive transformation. "It's been an amazing 40 years, a real success story and the business has come a long way from quite humble beginnings.

"We've always has a great relationship with NCGM and we're still here," she adds, highlighting that Evergreen's growth remains closely connected to NCGM. "We have two large units at the Flower Market, managed by Paul Fairhead".

Many Evergreen employees have spent a substantial part of their working lives with the company. Sales Manager Oli Doe (son of Tony), joined as a teenager, while current owners Craig Marshall and Danny Cumber both started at Evergreen's as Saturday boys at the Banstead nursery when they were just 16. In 2020, Craig and Danny decided to buy the business after working their way up. But more on that later.

Eric Connick – who celebrated 40 years' of service with Evergreen in August this year – provides a collection point for customers ordering stock from Evergreen's Banstead nursery, as well as holding a larger selection of plants for landscapers and other trade customers. Whereas Paul, with fewer years' service but a lifetime in the industry, is more focused on smaller plants, florists, shops, bedding, houseplants and interior planting.

"Eric is a proper Market boy," says Thea, "someone who embodies the character and traditions of the environment in which Evergreen was born. Eric's longevity is extraordinary, particularly given the early hours involved over so many years." Now approaching 65, he remains a familiar presence at the Market. "He's been an amazing employee, a constant at NCGM, totally reliable."

> "Our Market operation effectively brings the stock closer to the customer

For Evergreen, long-serving employees represent something more valuable than institutional memory. They carry the history of the business with them.

Thea describes how, when she recently needed to establish how long Evergreen had worked with a certain supplier, she simply sat down with co-owner Craig. "He could tell me everything," she says. "A lot of companies would have to go through historic records." At Evergreen, the records are often in people's heads.

24-hour plant-y people

"Our operation is designed around speed," says Thea. "Customers can place an order with Evergreen in the morning and, where stock is available, we'll have it ready for collection at the Market the following day. We have lorries that travel from Banstead to Nine Elms five days a week, as well as suppliers that deliver directly to the Market."

For a landscaper working in central London, that sense of urgency can make a significant difference, and that's where Evergreen's click & collect service excels. "A contractor who discovers halfway through a job that they need another 20 plants doesn't necessarily have the time to drive out to Banstead, collect them and return to site," says Thea. "Our



Market operation effectively brings the stock closer to the customer. For a lot of companies who have businesses in central London, it's an invaluable service."

The pace of the business is reflected in Evergreen's working hours, which means it's often a 24-hour operation. While the Market trades between 4am and 10am, Evergreen's operation stretches well beyond that, with staff often working through the night to receive and sort deliveries, while drivers transport plants between the nursery and the Market.

In October Evergreen gained its Plant Healthy Certification, following an independent audit of its operations at both Banstead and NCGM. “The certification recognises businesses that meet the Plant Health Management Standard and demonstrate robust plant health and biosecurity practices,” explains Thea. “We source plants from an extensive network of UK and European growers, so this certification represents an important milestone and reinforces our commitment to responsible sourcing, traceability and plant health.”



“There are really not that many hours when someone isn’t working,” Thea says. “There are a lot of cogs to make the wheel turn and our biggest asset is our people.”

The challenges of Covid

Buying Evergreen in 2020, Craig and Danny’s purchase came just before Brexit kicked in and was followed almost immediately by the Covid-19 lockdown. But what looked like a disastrous moment to take ownership of the company turned into something very different.

“As people were confined to their homes, gardens and outdoor spaces suddenly became enormously important,” says Thea. Sales of houseplants boomed, while demand for plants for gardens and outdoor projects surged. The Flower Market closed for three months, but Evergreen’s Banstead nursery remained open.

Thea recalls long queues of customers waiting to get in. “Lockdown went from being a really low point to being a super high point,” she says. “We saw the value people place on their outdoor space become increasingly important.”



Change is the only constant

Over the past 40 years, it’s not just the level of trade that’s changed. When the company started, most of its growers were UK based and international sourcing was not really on the radar. That changed around 35 years ago, when Evergreen started importing plants to boost its assortment. Today, a substantial proportion of its stock comes from European suppliers, particularly from Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

British growers remain an important part of the supply chain, and the shift towards imported plants is not necessarily a reflection of customer preference. “Many climbers, trees and perennials, for example, are still sourced from the UK,” says Thea. “If more British stock was there then our customers would buy it. But it must be good quality. We pride ourselves on having quality plants as well as offering incredibly good value.”

Quality, value and speed

The combination of quality, value and speed have become the three pillars central to Evergreen’s customer proposition. Scale provides significant buying power that allows discounts to be passed on to their customers, but it’s the speed of Evergreen’s supplier network and its own transport operation that proves the cornerstone of success.

Evergreen’s Banstead site operates both as a cash-and-carry and as the company’s main distribution hub. The wide variety of plants available is a world away from the company’s original NCGM unit, with access to thousands of lines, ranging from everyday bread and butter varieties to tropical plants, cacti and trees reaching 10 metres in height.

With ever-changing stock based on the alternating seasons, Evergreen can source any plant a customer might want. “Our supplier network means even relatively obscure requirements can generally be sourced quickly,” says Thea. “We always maintain a strong core range while having the ability to find something different when our customers need it.”

However, Brexit regulations have made things more difficult. “In the past an order for a plant sourced from Belgium could sometimes be placed on one day and delivered the next, she says. “That’s become more complicated, but our logistics operation still gives us considerable flexibility.”



Future aims

Despite Evergreen’s business expanding far beyond London – delivering as far afield as North Yorkshire – its units at NCGM and its Banstead site are still core to the business. Banstead has continued to grow as a wholesale nursery over the past seven years. Recent investment includes a new quarantine area and facilities for waste plant material, reflecting the increasing importance of plant health and biosecurity.

And soon the Market itself will be changing again – in Q4 2028 – bringing the wholesale operation closer to Nine Elms Tube station and providing a larger trading space.

“We’ve had an amazing journey from a tiny plant stall to multi-million-pound business,” says Thea. “Yet our fundamentals remain much the same. You’re not really anyone without your staff and your offer. It’s simple really, good plants, good service, quick turnaround and meaningful relationships that last.”

Pictured: The Banstead nursery, the team on the ground at the Flower Market, and one of the first trucks in a fleet that has expanded to serve a nationwide customer base



ON THE MAP

A life Supreme

Our latest operators putting the Market on the Map are Stephen Darby (SD) and Bart Conway (BC), founders and co-owners of Supreme Salads Ltd

When was the first time you visited New Covent Garden Market (NCGM)?

SD: I first came to NCGM in 1977. I was eight and visited with my dad and my uncles. I wasn't thinking about a career, I was just tagging along, sitting on the side of the truck. The Market was a completely different place with a real buzz and something always happening. Those early visits probably laid the foundations for the rest of my life without me even realising it. By the time I was 19 I was working at the Market myself and, from that point on, it became my career, my livelihood and a huge part of who I am.

BC: My Market connection goes back through my family. They worked in the trade for generations, including at the old Covent Garden, so it was always part of my life. I started coming to NCGM when I was around 18 or 19 years old. Although my dad perhaps hoped I'd go into something different, the Market was a natural progression. I quickly realised how much opportunity there was and the different paths within the industry.

What was your first business?

BC: I ran a fruit and vegetable stall in Walthamstow Market, which I took over when I was 17 years old. It was a huge challenge because I was young and probably didn't fully appreciate what it took to run a business. Walthamstow was an incredibly busy market in those days and there was a lot of trade to be had if you worked hard enough. Unfortunately, the business only lasted about a year before circumstances changed and things didn't work out. Although it wasn't a long-term success, it gave me experience that proved invaluable when it came to starting Supreme Salads.

What was your first job at the Market?

BC: When the fruit and vegetable stall came to an end my dad told me to get a proper job at NCGM, and I started working with Jenkinson's. My dad worked in the trade himself and helped me get started here. He used to say this was a 'clean market' compared to some of the others and felt it would give me more opportunities. It taught me the fundamentals of the produce business. It was hard work, long hours and a steep learning curve, but it gave me the experience that I would build on throughout my career.

SD: I joined a catering company called Linkclass in 1992 and worked my way up, starting in the warehouse and I learned by doing. From there I became a van driver, then



a lorry driver, before gradually moving into sales and the commercial side of the business. Every role taught me something different about how the supply chain works. Looking back, I'm glad I came through the ranks because it gave me an appreciation of every part of the business and the people who make it work.

How did Supreme Salads start?

BC: Supreme Salads was born out of necessity as much as ambition. In 2010, both of us found ourselves out of work after being made redundant. We'd spent years working for other people and reached a point where we thought, 'let's back ourselves' and do something on our own.

SD: We didn't start with a lot of money or years of business experience behind us. What we did have was knowledge of the trade, a strong work ethic and a willingness to take risks. In the early days it was just the two of us, a tiny team and one person in the office. We specialised mainly in salads at the beginning, which is where the company name came from.

BC: The first five years were a struggle and there were times when money was tight and the future uncertain. But we kept going. We naturally divided the business according to our strengths. I concentrated on sourcing produce and selling it, while Stephen focused on logistics, transport and the operational side of the business. As the company grew, what began as a salad business expanded into vegetables, exotics and fruit. We brought in talented people who helped us broaden our offer and reach more customers. Over time we grew from a handful of people working in a small unit to a much larger operation with a dedicated team and a reputation we've worked hard to build.

What's been the secret to your success?

BC: The biggest lesson we've learned is not to be greedy. A lot of businesses make money but then take too much out of the company when times are good. We never did that. Instead, we've always tried to leave money in the business and build a safety net for difficult periods.

SD: We've faced plenty of challenges. The first decade was tough and, more recently, we faced the pressures of expanding the business, moving into the new Buyers' Walk and investing heavily in our future. If we hadn't been disciplined financially, some of those challenges could have overwhelmed us.

BC: Success isn't just about money; it's also about having the right people around you. Our families have made enormous sacrifices because working nights isn't easy. When you're leaving the house six nights a week and missing family time, you need people at home who understand and support what you're trying to achieve. Ultimately, the secret is simple: work hard, stay humble, reinvest in the business, trust the people around you and keep going when times get tough.

SD: We've also been fortunate to work with loyal and dedicated staff. Jackie has worked in our office for years and been with us through thick and thin. She's helped steady the ship during difficult periods. Building strong relationships, treating people fairly and surrounding yourself with a good team is as important as any business decision you'll ever make.

And finally, what does NCGM mean to you?

BC: It's difficult to put into words because it has been such a huge part of our careers. Quite simply, it's our life. We've spent more time here than almost anywhere else. Over the years we've worked incredible hours, built friendships, developed careers and created opportunities for ourselves and our families.

SD: The Market is where we've grown up professionally and personally as well. It's where we've met people who have become lifelong friends, where we've experienced successes and setbacks, and where we've built a business from the ground up. The investment we've made in our new unit wasn't just about today, it was about the future. We've created something that can continue beyond us. Our children and younger members of the team are now part of that story.