

The Kitchin Group and Allied Irish Bank (GB): A Recipe for Success



Edinburgh-based Kitchin Group is undoubtedly one of Scotland's most successful and recognised groups of restaurants. In the 12 years since The Kitchin restaurant opened in Leith, the group has grown from one small restaurant with seven staff and 30 bottles on the wine list to five businesses, 250 staff and a multi award-winning wine inventory to match the best in the world.

News of Kitchin Group's plans to open Southside Scran, a bistro style restaurant in Bruntsfield, and The Bonnie Badger, a gastro-pub with rooms in Gullane, generated a huge buzz not just across Edinburgh but throughout the UK and internationally.

Flair, creativity and excellence in cuisine and hospitality, carefully-cultivated relationships with suppliers as well as sheer hard work and determination have been behind the Kitchin Group's success to date.

So too has the group's relationship with Allied Irish Bank (GB)*, which Tom and Michaela describe as having become "a true business partnership".

In 2006, the Shore in Leith was not the restaurant and bar hot spot that it is today. The premises were described as 'the graveyard of Edinburgh restaurants', where five previous businesses had gone under and the area was deserted.

Customers who ventured to newly-opened The Kitchin in 2006 would greatly appreciate the dining experience- and then request a taxi uptown immediately.

The Kitchin restaurant was at the forefront of putting Leith on the eating and dining map, although the team's vision of a Michelin star restaurant was not understood by many bank managers they initially approached as potential backers of the new business.

"One bank manager asked us what a Michelin star was", recalls Michaela. "We needed a bank that understood our ambition, the kind of restaurant we wanted to open, how we wanted to approach hospitality and bring something new to Edinburgh."

When they finally met with a relationship manager from Allied Irish Bank (GB), the Kitchin team was immediately taken by how he listened, considered and then asked lots of relevant questions.

"He eventually said "I believe in you all and want to support you completely", recalls Ron Kitchin, Tom's father. Ron assisted in the early development of the business and remains as chair of Kitchin Group.

"Our understanding of each other's business agenda developed into a healthy business partnership that has grown through mutual trust and understanding over the years."

"The bank understood our ambition and was genuinely interested in supporting us and our vision", agrees Tom.

The Kitchin Restaurant gained its Michelin star within six months of opening, making Tom Scotland's youngest ever Michelin star proprietor.

In 2010 the team went on to open the award-winning restaurant Castle Terrace followed by The Scran & Scallie in 2013. The gastro-pub was quickly awarded a Bib Gourmand in the Michelin Guide, putting it on the map as one of the best pubs in the UK to dine.

Each of the new ventures was supported by a dedicated team at Allied Irish Bank (GB), which is known for its hospitality banking expertise.

Tina Crookston, relationship manager at Allied Irish Bank (GB)'s Edinburgh office, has worked with the Kitchin team for around three years and her enthusiasm for the business is obvious.

"Kitchin Group from day one provided very strict financial control, day-to-day cash flow projections, regular communications.



They came to us very early with plans for Southside Scran and then, when the possible purchase and development of Bonnie Badger was suggested, we knew it made absolute sense to support both ventures.

Operators and banks wouldn't normally choose to work on two refurbishments and openings at once, but the Kitchin team knew, and we agreed, that the opportunities were too good to miss.

I think the long partnership and trust with Allied Irish Bank (GB) and Kitchin Group does come down to our relationship, and the way that we operate as a bank.'

If we need to speak, the team phones me on my direct line. If we need to meet face-to-face, we quickly organise something at our offices in Charlotte Square, or down at Kitchin Head Offices in Leith. Unlike other banks, our clients aren't directed to an obscure phone number and faceless person who doesn't know their business.



Kitchin Group's approach to training and staffing is very reassuring to the bank. By investing in their team and developing their talents, they're ensuring a pipeline of qualified chefs, front of house and bar staff who can open new locations or step in to cover unexpected events.

As a bank we are really proud of our expertise in the hospitality sector, and we're especially proud to have worked with Kitchin Group and supported its success over all these years."

Kitchin Group had been looking for a south side venue for over 10 years when it finally found the right location for Southside Scran, although intense structural and refurbishment work was required. As work commenced, the team signed up to take over the former Golf Inn in Gullane, which will herald a new era for the Kitchin Group.

Ron, Tom and Michaela Kitchin, together with the directors of Kitchin Group, all respect and fully understand the meaning of partnership



development with their suppliers in the same way as the Allied Irish Bank (GB) partnership has developed. The group and the bank's commitment to sharing their business objectives and having respect for customers has led to one of the biggest hospitality success stories in Edinburgh's history.

Southside Scran in Bruntsfield opened in early November 2018, and the Bonnie Badger in Gullane was set to open in mid-December 2018.

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