



BEEFED UP

From the military to Michelin stars, Hawksmoor head chef and founder of next month's Meatopia, Richard H Turner speaks to **Hugh Francis Anderson** about his ever-expanding meat empire

I meet Richard in the basement of Blacklock, the most recent of his meat-themed hangouts. As a former British soldier and security man, Richard has carved an unconventional path through the thick wall of haute cuisine to get where he is today.

I ask him how it all started: "I was doing some security work and the clients were always eating in good restaurants; seeing all this great food I thought, 'I'd quite like to become a chef,' even though I couldn't tell the difference between a carrot and a parsnip," he chuckles. "So after a lot of annoying the Roux brothers, they finally let me in as a commis [chef]."

From there, Richard went on to work for Pierre Koffman at La Tante Claire (a three Michelin star restaurant in Chelsea that closed in 2004), before spending five years with Marco Pierre White, who he helped establish The Canteen, Harveys and Restaurant Marco Pierre White. Jobs with Joel Roubuchon in Paris and Alain Ducasse in Monte Carlo followed.

Returning to home soil, Turner opened the Albion pub in Islington, a move that drew him away from fine dining and into the realms of more masculine cuisine. "I worked in five Michelin-starred restaurants because it was trendy, it was cool, but I really can't bear eating Michelin food, it turns my stomach," says Richard, perhaps surprisingly. "So I set about opening

the pub doing shepherd's pie, brazed ox tail, puddings and English cookery. I found my own style and started thinking about steakhouses."

Having already cooked for the likes of Tom Cruise, Angelina Jolie, Dustin Hoffman, and a couple of presidents he won't name, Richard finally became involved with the food that would bring him fame: meat.

"Hawksmoor had already opened and as I wasn't going to compete with them, I joined them. That's when I started to work a lot with meat." With six outposts, Hawksmoor is now hailed by many as the best steak restaurant in London.

"Following Hawksmoor, I opened Pitt Cue, the barbecue restaurant, wrote a couple of books, and opened an online steak company that became a butchery called Turner & George. I think that's about it," says Turner. "So far."

Physically, Richard cuts an imposing shape; personally, his disposition is direct yet humorous. London was where he was born and bred, and despite leaving, it's where he "keeps coming back to".

In honour to the carnivore lovers of London, September will see Richard host Meatopia for the second year running. The concept started 10 years ago in the United States; think great steak, good music, ☺



☉ craft beers and cocktails, all served in a communal space. In Richard's words: "It's pretty much everything you could possibly want in life, all under one roof"

This year's event takes place at Tobacco Dock, Wapping, and is expected to be huge. "The initial idea was to throw a BBQ, get very drunk and have as many of my mates over as possible," he says. "But 4,500 people turned up so I was like, 'Oh, ok, this is more than just a party'."

"This year we're bringing over loads of chefs from the States, Brazil, Australia, Singapore – from all over the world. Twenty chefs on Saturday, 20 chefs on Sunday, all cooking barbecue or grilled meat."

For many, the concept of a meat-fuelled weekend ranks highly on their 'time-well-spent' list. Attendees at Meatopia 2015 expect to number some 6,500. Richard is now considering expanding the concept globally. "I want to do one in Ibiza or



Madrid, we're not sure; we're definitely going to start doing European ones."

For a man whose life revolves around meat, I wonder what opposition Richard has come across to his ingredient of choice. "We're the good guys – Meatopia's about ethical meat, it's all free range, there's nothing intensive about it."

Richard proudly adds that even the charcoal used is recycled: "We get all our charcoal from reclaimed wood in the UK, so it's all environmentally friendly, even to that degree."

You could call Richard something of a hero in the industry, a man who lives life by the motto 'steak to plate' and enjoys every minute of being a carnivore. ☉

Hog: Proper pork recipes from the snout to the squeak by Richard H. Turner, £25, Mitchell Beazley, octopusbooks.co.uk; Meatopia, tickets from £30, 19-20 September, Tobacco Dock, E1W, meatopia.co.uk

RICHARD'S OTHER MEATERIES...

After cutting his teeth under the world's best chefs, including the Roux brothers, Marco Pierre White, Joel Robuchon and Alain Ducasse, Richard Turner spurned the Michelin star set in search of the world's best steak...

HAWKSMOOR

Undoubtedly London's best steak-based restaurant chain, Hawksmoor might just be one of the country's best restaurants, full stop. You can't discuss steak with any sense of authority until you've paid a visit.

thehawksmoor.com



PITT CUE CO., SOHO

The Pitt Cue Co. is the permanent premises of what started life as a barbecue shack on the South Bank in summer 2011. The Soho barbecue specialist now serves the smoky flavour of the Deep South all year round.

pittcue.co.uk



FOXLOW, CLERKENWELL

A homely, unpretentious establishment situated 100 metres from Smithfield Market, Foxlow has won acclaim among restaurant critics for its honest yet imaginative food. The perfect place to placate a stinking hangover.

foxlow.co.uk



TURNER & GEORGE, CLERKENWELL

Following the success of the East London Steak Company, Turner again teamed up with co-founder James George to become the new butchers on the block in 2013. Delivering Londoners rare and native breed meats, the pair's first artisan butcher shop is located at 399 St. Johns Street.

turnerandgeorge.co.uk



BLACKLOCK, SOHO

Turner's latest enterprise focuses on beef, pork and lamb chops cooked over charcoal and scorched with vintage irons. The result of the intense heat are chops that are hot and crispy on the outside but perfectly pink and juicy in the middle.

theblacklock.com

