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LIFE

FIRST BITE
JOHN LETHLEAN

Expat returns to run Aussie first

Australia's first Jason Alberton restaurant, Kensington Street Social, will be run by an Aussie with extensive experience in the Alberton-Gordon Ramsay fold, Robert Daniels, running the kitchen at Alberton's Singapore restaurant Equus. It will be home next week to open social at the Old Clare, the new boutique hotel development in Sydney's Chippendale by Singapore hotel entrepreneur and restaurateur Peng Lok. The businessman already has ties with Alberton in Asia. Daniels apprenticed in Sydney with Colin Fassnidge and Peter Doyle before moving to London in 2003 to work with Ramsay at Boulevard Cafe. He then joined Maze working under Alberton and went on to Maze in Pompeii, then Maze Doha, Qatar. In 2011 he returned to Australia working at Equus in Brisbane. Kickstart in Wollongong and the Merivale group at Felix, Uccello and Coque Pavilion, Kensington Street, indeed the entire cluster, in the Old Clare that includes Silvereye and Automata, is not expected to open before September.

Melbourne Cantonese institution Red Emperor, in Southbank, has been on a recruiting spree, bringing back several chefs from the restaurant's glory days. Hon Kau Hau, who first came to Australia in 1984 to work at the Drum, was at the helm of the Emperor from 1993 until 2013. He has been hired back to the head chef role by owners John Lau and Linda Gao, along with two more alumni. Man Tim Ng was head chef before Hau, subsequently moving to Japan, while Kam Tai Ho, the restaurant's executive chef until 2013, is also back. It bodes well.

On one of Australia's most vibrant food strips, Gough Street in Adelaide, the boarding has gone up for the Mexican Society in the premises known by many, for many years, as Mesa Langa. We've lost track of the different ventures local entrepreneur Walter Ventura is involved in, or not. Ventura's interests are a mercantile commodity. But Society is to be his latest, on the corner of Morphett, and will focus on the food of Central and South America, with chef Gregory Hill (Lucky Lapins) running a kitchen working on relaxed, long-session dining rather than street food. The matrix is always hard to follow, but ... Another Ventura venture, the aforementioned Lucky Lapins, with its tacos and other Mexican street food, is also moving to Gough Street from Bedford Park. As an executive chef, Hill will oversee this kitchen too, as well as another newly opened project on Glen Osmond Road, Freville, at the Old Clara de Mesa site. This, too, has Latino theme and kitchen oversight from Hill. Hispanic mechanics — where does he get these names? — has a roster of chefs from Brazil and Colombia and, like all of Ventura restaurants, looks very quirky, does branding brilliantly and probably has decent food, too.

As if the Sydney CBD coffee market isn't competitive already ... Barry Hills institution Single Origin opened a city branch last week, Single O, in York Street, focusing solely on one-of-a-kind customers and with food similar to the Reserve Street base. The new site has been designed by Lachetti Kreffe, a practice responsible for many noted Sydney restaurants.

A last-minute hitch with finance for buyers means Adelaide's spiced Indian food, Ragini Day, will be cooking at her Spice Kitchen restaurant just a little longer. Day, 52, an author and hands-on chef, was supposed to settle on the sale of her business last week, but backers for the young trio of two chefs and a front-of-house partner fell away at the 11th hour, she says. "It all came as a bit of a shock," she says, "but they've actually given us a good chunk of money [as a deposit] already, so I'm confident it will proceed." An offer to stay on and partner the would-be purchasers of Spice Kitchen has not been entertained. "I don't want to be tied down to a restaurant any more," Day says. Instead, she has plans that include leaving a hand to son Chirag, who just opened Nava, a bar in Wynnmore Street that will serve street food from a diverse cultural mix, including India. Day says she's hoping to settle on July 1.

The next generation Neil Perry restaurant, in Sydney's Pitts Point, should be open by mid-August. Missy French is under construction by Perry's daughter Josephine, and a serious irony into the restaurant world for the 21-year-old first timer. The format is relaxed classic French food.

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Cambodia's Song Saa resort owners Rory and Melita Hunter, with their son Naryth, in their pool villa below, a pool villa

PEOPLE, PLANET & PHILANTHROPY

An Australian couple has built a resort in Cambodia that's become a showcase of environmental excellence

HELEEN ANDERSON

They're the accidental botanists. In their late 20s, Rory and Melita Hunter went sailing in the remote Koh Rong archipelago in southeast Cambodia and bought an island on impulse. A decade later, the former Sydney couple have built a \$30 million resort unlike anything else on earth.

It's not just that the place is beautiful and luxurious: 27 pool villas on twin forested islands named collectively Song Saa ('the sweethearts' in Khmer), designed by Melita with a modest environmental footprint and in a relaxed, here-fool-here style inspired by the landscape and using local, mainly recycled materials. It's the ambitious 'triple bottom-line' business model on which the Hunters have built their retreat that has drawn global attention. The term refers to the framework to assess and manage a company's impact on the "three P's" — people, planet and profit. "It's about making sure the environmental, commercial and community bottom lines of a business are equally important and truly interdependent," Rory says during a recent visit to Sydney. "The sum of the whole becomes far more than its parts."

This year the World Economic Forum admitted Rory, 39, to its prestigious Young Global Leader forum, a powerhouse of under-40 dynamo recognised for their achievements and potential to tackle global challenges, with the aim of grooming the next generation of world leaders. The other 67 entrepreneurs in this year's



"The year they focused on dental health, the dentists were pulling 200 teeth a day," says Rory. Last year, the medical found a woman haemorrhaging after childbirth and saved her life.

Rory was an advertising executive on his way to start a job in New York when he and Melita, a designer and artist, decided to visit Cambodia on route. They didn't make it to Manhattan, he took a job managing an ad agency in Phnom Penh and together they started restoring French colonial villas for sale to expats. A sailing holiday in the Koh Rong in 2006 changed their lives.

"We stopped at an island to buy lunch one day and got chatting to the family who lived there. It turned out they wanted to move back to the mainland, and asked if we wanted to buy the island." The Hunters returned a week later with a brown paper bag full of money and asked the local navy to witness the sale.

The creation of the resort and foundation has been a decade-long process of evolution, gut instinct and chance. "We didn't set out to buy the island, or to build a hotel," says Rory. "We were just excited about the philanthropic opportunities as the commercial ones." Being the first company to develop an island in Cambodia came with "a sense of responsibility" to local people, he says.

try to understand their challenges," they began "humbly and simply" by cleaning up their island, which sparked discussion in nearby villages about the need for a rubbish disposal system. Within a year, the scheme was being managed by participating villagers.

An avid diver, Rory could see the damage from overfishing and thought part of the solution lay in working with communities to preserve the marine environment and develop an alternative income from tourism. The resort employs about 100 staff, most from neighbouring islands. "It seemed common sense that we should be out there helping people who would help us," he says.

There's a story behind everything at Song Saa, including the weathered timber (recycled from fishing boats), the sole variety of rice served (sourced from farmers in northern Cambodia who participate in a scheme to protect water-

cow habitats) and the bamboo drinking straws (crafted by a local family as a new source of income). Up to 90 per cent of produce prepared in the resort is sourced from small-scale farmers and local and-line fishermen. Every supply-chain decision is weighed with environmental and community welfare in mind.

Rory finds it hard to label the nature of Song Saa's entrepreneurship. He tells me, only half-joking, that the overseas friend and green architect from the

company's vernacular. And he questions the notion of sustainability. "Business needs to figure out how to make things better, not just sustain the status quo."

Luxury is a label he struggles with, too, although he believes it's possible to offer "experiences of a lifetime for which people don't need to feel guilty ... We love the work we do, and to be able to do that work we need to provide a resort environment like no other, where our guests can engage as a facilitator as much as they can as a broader work."

"Our guests come first because it's beautiful, an incredible place, but we've found that once they see the work we do and visit a local community ... they love feeling more enriched and more engaged and it's more than just a holiday. They feel they've connected and contributed."

With a management team in place on the island, the Hunters and their six-year-old son, Naryth, moved to Hong Kong last year to set up a head office. They're planning a second resort in Cambodia and are investigating expansion in "frontier" destinations in Southeast Asia, including northern Myanmar, northeast Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Rory believes the conditions are right for expansion. "You've got travellers who want to experience more than just a hotel and a relatively under-served place ... and there are governments talking much more now about the kind of responsible tourism they want to develop."

He describes Song Saa as "the public", the foundation "the rippling". "We're really believing there's an important role to play in showing that tourism can be a really powerful and positive change agent, particularly in remote parts of the world."

songsaasaa.com

It's more than a holiday. Guests feel they've connected and contributed

ROBY HUNTER
CO-OWNER, SONG SAA RESORT

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When less choice means more style

Overwhelmed by wardrobe options? Armani is leading a trend back to small collections of key pieces

HARRIET WALKER

FASHION

Ask a fashion editor how many clothes she has and she will look pained. She may just tell you the number of wardrobes she has instead of how many. But she will look at the charity shop last year. I once met an editor who told me that she wore only 20 per cent of what she owned.

Last month an article in the US edition of Harper's "Bazaar" titled "Why I wear the same thing every day" went viral. In it, art director Mariela Kall explained why life was simpler with fewer clothes.

US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton has her "everyday pantsuit". The founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, also admits wearing the same grey T-shirt every day to limit time spent on "frivolous" decisions.

As the internet makes more fashion available to us, all we seem to want is less of it, to declutter our wardrobes as do our homes and

minids. Look at the success of Japanese organising consultant Marie Kondo's book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, which has inspired a movement.

We've changed our shopping habits accordingly. Call it the "narrow-jumper" revolution. In my 30s, I bought fewer items, but I bought better quality, made-to-order, made-to-measure, made-to-last items. I bought fewer items, but I bought better quality, made-to-order, made-to-measure, made-to-last items.

Actually, Giorgio Armani is calling it New Normal. As the designer who set about simplifying women's clothes in the 1980s and '90s, deconstructing them into something which they could live comfortably, he knows what he's talking about.

Fashion has taken a direction that is too flashy and extravagant, he says. "I'll forget about the every-

day needs of women. By normal, I don't mean obvious and predictable but something that is always fashionable."

New Normal is Armani's selection of key pieces from the label's main autumn collection: cashmere, navy, navy jackets and silk, shell-top blouses and trousers, all created with the precision and ease that the brand is famous for.

Some pieces are already available in Australia, with more arriving in the next weeks or so. They are intended to be worn together in various combinations, but are also the foundations for a well-edited wardrobe.

Working in the tradition of the classic capsule, Armani's aim is to make life easier for women who say they have too much. The term capsule wardrobe was coined by Susie Faux, owner of The Emporium Wardrobe, who was referring to shops on to which shoppers would layer new



Zuckerberg wears the same grey T-shirt to limit time spent on frivolous decisions



'Uniform' lovers Clinton and Zuckerberg: Armani's New Normal collection

purchases. Donna Karan was the first designer to offer a capsule collection. In 1985 she launched her Seven Easy Pieces of workwear, jersey, footless with mid-length, trousers and jackets.

A capsule wardrobe is a lifesaver in theory but often proves frustratingly mathematical and inflexible in practice. It has no answer to the question: how do you handle laundry cycles or your mood on any given morning?

That's where Armani's New Normal differs. It comprises building blocks rather than a rigid system of dressing. Pieces feel current, with sporty touches and tech fabrics, rather than staid. What's more, the selection will be updated every season.

style icons like the opposite of passing fads," Armani says.

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