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Mamma's boys: Co-founders Victor Lugger (left) and Tigrane Seydou. Below: Gloria



VICTOR LUGGER, CO-FOUNDER OF ITALIAN RESTAURANT GROUP BIG MAMMA, ON HIS FIRST LONDON OPENING, GLORIA, THE PERILS OF BREXIT AND WHY EVERYONE NEEDS TO TRY HIS BIG BALLS... BY **LAURA MILLAR**

You already have several successful restaurants in France so why did you choose to launch one in London?

It was more a case of coming here because it was such an exciting prospect for us. I definitely don't think London needed us! But we need London because we love the city - it's always been a huge inspiration for us.

How's the response been in London so far?

In Paris, for the past six years, we've been very lucky. We have queues an hour long every day so you kind of get used to it. But on that first Friday [February 22] when we were due to open here, I was s***ing myself - what if no one turned up? Thankfully, 40 minutes before, one guy appeared, and by the time the doors opened there was a queue around the block. London has been incredibly welcoming and that applies not just to customers but to other people in the industry.



Food, Gloria's food: Pizzas and profiteroles get the Big Mamma treatment

So what would you say is the secret of your success?

To me, it's really about the simplest things. If you have all of the following, you should find you're packed out wherever you are: good food, cheap prices, service with a smile and nice design. That's what I look for when I go out to eat. But the most important thing is the prices. At the moment, with Brexit and people not knowing what's happening, there aren't many who

can afford a £60 lunch - but £16/£18 is doable. And if you can do dinner for around £23, with wine and coffee, then more people will come.

Ah, yes, the B-word. Did the uncertainty of that not put you off coming to the UK?

Well, people did ask me why I wanted to open a restaurant in London knowing Brexit was coming. But, to me, you don't not date a beautiful woman just because in



a few weeks she might run off with someone else!

The menu is, shall we say, slightly cheeky - you offer things like Filippo's Big Balls. Are the names your idea?

No, it's the whole team. One of us, Celeste, came up with the Youporn Pizza. I said it was a bad idea but we put it on the menu during our soft opening. Then the Eater website got wind of it and the next day

announced the Youporn Pizza was coming to Shoreditch - so it became permanent. But we don't take things too seriously...

What are your personal favourites on the menu?

I love the carbonara. We do it very authentically, it's made the Italian way - no cream! And it's very experiential. It serves two and comes to the table in a big, hollowed-out wheel of pecorino.

I recommend our profiteroles too - they are typically Neapolitan and come with infinite amounts of hot chocolate sauce and ice cream, which we make fresh every single day.

The vibe is fun, the decor is cool, people are queuing to get in... do you think we need a bit of fun at the moment?

The design is a result of the team reimagining Capri, off season, with lots of flowers, pink and yellow

fabrics, green and peach Carrera marble. If Gloria was a person, I'd say she'd be like Frida Kahlo - but Italian and with a smile! And when it comes to fun, yes, we all need it, but once you walk through our door, you're in a completely different world for a couple of hours. And I believe that's always been the whole point of a restaurant.

Gloria, 54-56 Great Eastern St, EC2 bigmammagroup.com

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padella.co

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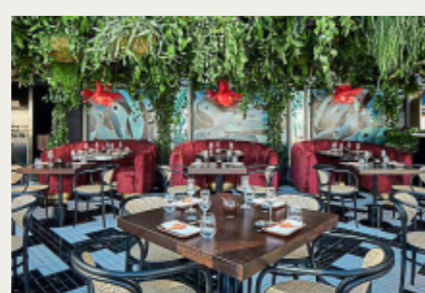
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▲ SUSHISAMBA, COVENT GARDEN

The Greenhouse Effect is truly alive and well at this airy, black-and-white-tiled offshoot of the popular City branch. @sushisamba



▲ BRASSERIE OF LIGHT, SELFRIDGES

What's not to love about having a Swarovski-crystal-encrusted sculpture of Pegasus hovering above you as you dine? That's if you're not distracted by the electric blue banquettes and the pink marble bathroom... @brasserieoflight



SKETCH ▶

Be pretty in pink in the marshmallow-hued Gallery, where the seating is velvet-soft and artworks by David Shrigley decorate the walls. Perfect for a Mayfair afternoon tea. @sketchlondon



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