

# A taste for adventure drives this man of the world

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Over the past two decades Stephen Wright has honed his skills as a consultant to many of the most recognisable names in the global F&B industry.

He spent two years in Hong Kong from 2004 and was lured back earlier this year to help develop the latest venture for Staunton's Group, Nico's Spuntino Bar and Restaurant.

## How did you start in the industry?

It was a roundabout route. I studied politics and economics at university, took a master's in economics and was about to start a PhD when I realised it wasn't for me. My family was involved in food. Contacts introduced me to Raymond Blanc and his Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons was a great place to start.

Then I moved to London, where I joined the opening team of Nobu at The Metropolitan on Park Lane. This was a steep learning curve as I did all the food and beverage purchasing for the hotel's bars and restaurants.

Then I joined Selfridges as the group's head of buying. It was a wonderful job in many ways: for 3½ months a year I travelled everywhere – Asia, Africa, even Alaska – checking out food and beverage trends.

## What made you leave?

Around 2005 lots of new brands were starting up such as Yo! Sushi. I had learned a lot about market likes and dislikes and I realised I was making other people successful. So I set up my own company.

## What led you to Hong Kong and Nico's Spuntino Bar and Restaurant?

While I was doing a project for Lane Crawford in Hong Kong, I was approached by Hutchison to join as



Stephen Wright at Nico's Spuntino Bar and Restaurant. Photo: Dickson Lee

head of its international fine food division. A couple of years ago the economic climate changed. Projects slowed down as investment dried up. My long-time business partner, Monica Yao, and I had been talking about a base in Asia and this seemed the right time. I met Nick Bryan [managing director of Staunton's Group] and we seemed to have similar ideas so Monica and I joined the group at the beginning of the year. Nick is good at knowing what sites work and, even before we were on board, he was looking at the site [on Elgin Street, formerly occupied by Fat Angelo's].

Nick wanted Italian but it had to be in tune with global trends, which meant regional. Once we had agreed

on southern Italian, it was easy. I wanted Calabrian specialities which are less well known.

## You are also working in Mongolia?

It's funny how things come around.



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I'm increasingly drawing on my original field of study – economics. In challenging territories it's a mistake to build things without supporting infrastructure. The barometer for me is CNN business news to see who's investing where. Late last year there was a lot of interest in Mongolia. And we were approached to work on a bar and restaurant in Ulan Bator. They want what they have seen in Hong Kong, Singapore and Europe. The local partners spent a week in Hong Kong experiencing the eating culture. Supplies are presenting some challenges, but hopefully the place will open early next year. It's not about numbers, but privacy and the dining experience.