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TRAVEL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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BOUTIQUE

HOTELIER

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TREND ALERT
BOLD BATHROOMS
MAKING A SPLASH

TO BATH AND BEYOND

THE BOUTIQUE HOTEL MARKET IN BATH WAS TRANSFORMED WHEN IAN AND CHRISTA TAYLOR TOOK OVER THE ABBEY IN 2012. FOUR YEARS AND TWO HOTELS LATER, THE DUO HAVE ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF A NEW HOTEL COLLECTION SET FOR AMBITIOUS UK EXPANSION

ART ATTACK

HOTELS ARE BECOMING ART GALLERIES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

MARTIN BLUNOS

TOP CHEF REVEALS HIS PLANS AHEAD OF THE TALBOT LAUNCH

IN THE HOT SEAT

WHAT'S ON THE SCHEDULE FOR INDEPENDENT HOTEL SHOW 16?

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TALK / MARTIN BLUNOS

UNDER THE KNIFE

TOP CHEF **MARTIN BLUNOS** HAS JUST TAKEN ON A NEW GIG WITH BESPOKE HOTELS. NOT ONLY WILL HE BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE F&B OPERATIONS AT THE BRAND'S NEWEST RELAUNCH, **THE TALBOT**, BUT HE WILL ALSO OVERSEE THE CULINARY STRATEGIES AT A NUMBER OF OTHER BESPOKE HOTELS IN THE PORTFOLIO. WE GRABBED SOME TIME IN THE BUSY CHEF'S DIARY TO FIND OUT HIS PLANS FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER IN HIS CREATIVE CAREER.

In May it was announced that former two-Michelin star chef Martin Blunos was to join Bespoke Hotels' newest relaunch, The Talbot, as the hotel gears up to unveil the results of its recent £1m renovation.

The 43-bedroom hotel was taken over for the second time by Bespoke Hotels in 2015 and as part of his appointment, Blunos will now work alongside head chef Paul Turner to develop the new menus for The Talbot, which will be designed to a suit a 'variety of tastes and pockets'.

Speaking to Boutique Hotelier, Blunos says: "To put it simply, we plan to serve real food for real people! There's far too much fakery in the world so we plan to 'keep everything real'. We plan on keeping dishes simple and wholesome, getting back to basics (there's no molecular gastronomy at The Talbot, just good old gastronomy!)"

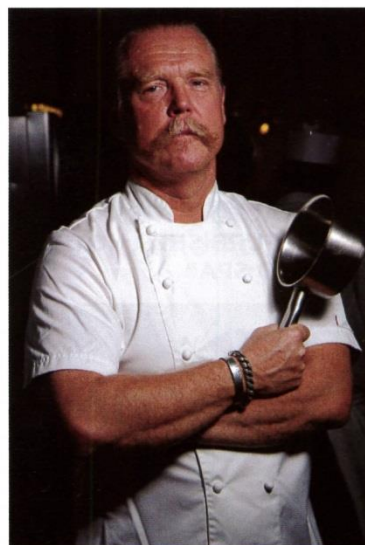
Once The Talbot reopens its doors – scheduled for July 28 when Boutique Hotelier went to press – Blunos will expand his role to encompass other properties within the Bespoke portfolio, overseeing the food and beverage operations across a number of top hotels in the Surrey area.

Blunos certainly boasts the right credentials for his ambitious role. As well as having held two Michelin stars at his restaurant Lettonie, which closed in 2001, he has worked in a variety of roles including head chef of the Lygon Arms in Broadway, executive chef of Crown Hotels and Restaurants and Seaham Hall.

He also isn't afraid of the limelight either, with stints on Channel 4 series Iron Chef UK and BBC 1's Saturday Kitchen cropping up on his CV.

Most recently he ran Blunos restaurant within the County Hotel, Bath. So what was it that attracted him to the role at The Talbot?

"It was the challenge of being involved with the team to re-establish the property as a premier hospitality destination in Surrey," he explains. "Having Bespoke at the helm, along with the substantial refurbishment



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they've implemented, means The Talbot is in very good shape to achieve this and continue moving forward."

Working to develop the menus in a kitchen that is yet to be completed posed its challenges for Blunos, as well as getting new chefs all thinking on the same wavelength, but, as the talented chef explains, he embraced the hurdles and quickly got the team working like clockwork.

"Working in and around the builders as they were refurbishing the property was a bit of a pain at times, but has proved worth it in the end," he says. "Likewise instilling new methods and procedures with the chefs is always challenging to an extent, as taking people out of their comfort zone is som-

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MARTIN BLUNOS / TALK

times seen as a threat. But once they realise that what I've suggested is for their benefit (and not mine!) it all ends up tickety-boo!"

While keeping half an eye on the latest food trends and the newest cuisine fads is important, at The Talbot Blunos ensures that quality is at heart of every menu concoction. And while the topic of local provenance rolls on, Blunos doesn't limit his menus depending on what's available in the surrounding area.

"I've found that local provenance is still extremely important to some guests, and not so much to others. My mantra has always been 'regional - seasonal' - because sometimes local doesn't always equate to the best in class.

"Under the umbrella of Bespoke, the head chefs use allocated suppliers for the nuts and bolts of their orders - which is fine by me as it helps with margins. The more specialised ingredients are able to be sourced locally, which gives the chefs the freedom to buy in what they want.

"It's swings and roundabouts. At the Talbot Paul and myself have, and are, continually looking to find quality on the doorstep, whilst being happy to order veal bones from Manchester for example. We try to be flexible."

BLUNOS ON....

Getting the balance and consistency right in a hotel...

Experience has taught me the value of playing to the strengths of the individuals in each and every team. For example, with regards to the kitchen, it's no good for the brigade if I go off the chart with a menu concept and dishes when some of the team are not even on the chart in the first place!

Approaching the process of creating new menus...

Within the Bespoke portfolio every property and team is unique. So my approach is just that - unique to each property, chef and team.

What first attracted him to a role as a chef...

I always wanted to be a superhero, but gradually realised there wasn't much chance of that happening, so I got into cooking!

In all seriousness, it started for me as just a job, a job that developed into more than the sum of its parts. I wasn't very academic at school, but was always arty (it runs in the family - my uncle was a famous Latvian watercolour artist 'Harijs Blunavs') so thought I could be artistic with food and earn a living at the same time.



The rise of casual dining...

Many guests are opting for a tapas style experience of a few smaller dishes to graze on, over a glass of wine for lunch say, rather than the formality of three courses. I also believe that casual food doesn't have to mean it's not fine dining. Try the Talbots fish finger sandwich and you'll see what I mean.

Top food trends...

Perhaps I'm biased (being a second generation Latvian), but Eastern European food would be what I'd like to see trending in the coming months. Having said that, I've been predicting this for a while and it still hasn't happened, so what do I know!



The new-look Talbot will be Martin's main place of work.