Case Study

The Darwin Brasserie

Meeting Elevated Expectations

QSR
AUTOMATIONS

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RESTAURANT PROFILE

Restaurant Type:
Fine Dining

Number of Units:
1 site, Sky Garden
London, UK

Year Established:
2014

THE CHALLENGE

To more efficiently handle their enormous volume, while maintaining high guest expectations and a robust menu.

The Darwin Brasserie, seated high on top of London's famed Sky Garden, strikes a majestic figure across the city. Like a flame, deftly dancing atop a picturesque candle, the acclaimed restaurant staxacon to London's visitors and resident foodies, offering them great food and unforgettable dining experience. Serving 200-400 guests per day, one need only step inside the Darwin Brasserie to learn that it's far more than a unique hunk of modern architecture.
"It's a full-on kitchen," says head chef David Darnborough. "The kitchen systems we put in place have to be very tough to match that."

Perched above the bustling city, guests naturally walk off the elevator and into the restaurant with heightened expectations. They anticipate a superb experience which borders on fine dining, something sensory and relaxing, set apart from that of the world below. It's a standard the restaurant satisfies with aplomb.

Of course, beyond the décor and striking city views, guests marvel at the Brasserie's menu - an undeniably English construction that draws additional influence from France and Italy's exquisite culinary creations. A robust a la carte menu during the week, a lauded brunch on the weekends, and a steady flow of foot traffic from open to close means the Darwin Brasserie must straddle the line between tight-service and guest satisfaction, exemplifying the proverbial high-traffic/high-performance restaurant.

Hard work and uncompromising vision create restaurants of this caliber, they aren't born, and the Darwin Brasserie wasn't without its initial hiccups, especially in their kitchen efficiency and morale.

"With our old system, I'd be on the pass calling on every single ticket that came in," says Darnborough. "With 400 covers a night? It absolutely ruins your voice!" He knew they'd need to employ technology in their back-of-house. Something which could automate these processes.

The old setup had each order coming through on a paper ticket. A host would have to run back to the kitchen, creating a cacophony of stress and confusion as staffers called out orders to one another, desperately trying to stay on top of their backlog as orders continued streaming in. A workflow this

wrought by tension and miscommunication, needed powerful technology in the kitchen, a back-of-house system which could automate these order processes and free up staff to focus on what's most important: the guest experience.

They'd been using Micros in the past, which worked but only in a limited capacity. With their service running at full tilt for 12 hours at a time, incremental changes in efficiency and streamlining would create a significant difference for them overall.

They opted to bring ConnectSmart Kitchen (CSK), QSR Automations' flagship product and industry-leading kitchen display system, into their operation. Citing QSR's veritable blend of experience and the bevy of clients already using their system, it felt like a no-brainer for the Brasserie.

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> *- David Darnborough*
> *Head Chef*

"It's completely changed the way our service functions," says Darnborough, noting the ease and smoothness of the implementation. And for his restaurant, the sense of calm is palpable.

CSK's capability of integrating with over 65 point-of-sale systems proved another factor in the restaurant's decision. Now, instead of calling each ticket order manually, CSK will push the order to the individual chef's screens. Instead of screaming himself hoarse every night, Darnborough need only confirm his chefs have received their order to their screens. He can work with the assurance they've got the pertinent information they need and stay in the moment.

At times, CSK's created such efficiency for the kitchen that they have to slow down their service;

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a "problem" Darnborough is happy to encounter. "I've never seen a kitchen function in this manner," he says.

To make this work, ConnectSmart Kitchen employs an innovative "order throttling" feature. This technology properly "courses" food to its optimal time metrics, accounting for kitchen bandwidth and cook times. Let's say there's a party of 2 at one table. One customer orders the lamb tagine, which takes 15 minutes to prepare while the other orders the potato gnocchi, which takes 7 minutes to prepare. ConnectSmart kitchen will determine the relative cook times of these disparate items and "stagger" them, notifying the chef when to begin the lamb tagine, and then again for when to start the gnocchi (a bit later) so they will finish at the same time. This kind of precision means guests always receive their food hot and fresh, and no dishes "die" under a heat lamp.

CSK can apply this throttling feature to multicourse meals too. Staffers directly input the entire order, and the software will automatically time each course to account for appetizers, main course, and dessert.

"There's no risk of confusion; there's no room for people to get lost in what they're doing. It makes things clear," says Darnborough noting the pressure it takes off his entire staff. Its alleviating aspects are present everywhere in the restaurant, from the back to the front-of-house.

CSK proves a blessing for their training and staffing efforts too. With such stable processes in place, along with QSR's TeamAssist, a full video recipe viewer, Darnborough knows everyone's trained on the same procedures and can maintain consistency everywhere.

"We don't have to focus purely on getting specially trained staff," explains Darnborough. "Instead, we can employ chefs at various stages of their career, and train them to our standard, ourselves."

CSK's capacity to streamline their operation presents a unique benefit for guests, whether they notice it or not. There's no question that the Darwin Brasserie's a busy place, a steady cross flow of staff, guests and unseen data crisscrossing the area. With a proven kitchen display system in place though, that busyness never impedes the guest experience. And that's the goal for these kinds of restaurants, isn't it? To craft a rich, novel environment that enchants them, inspires them and makes them forget you're even there.

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He notes the morale boost present across the entire restaurant, a function of an empowered staff and a calm working environment. He knows his team is never scrambling to keep up with orders; they can focus their energies on in-the-moment, pulling out every proverbial stop for their guests.

A staff that's enabled by real-time automation works with speed and precision but stays calm and relaxed in the heated moments. It's a wondrous dynamic the restaurant exudes, from the moment the lights go on till they lock the doors at night.

It's part of the decor. The intangible "vibe" of their restaurant that's so hard to nail down, but that keeps them streaming back in at a constant clip. At this point, with restaurant morale as high as can be, and productivity running entirely seamlessly, Darnborough couldn't imagine using anything else.

"If more kitchens got CSK," he says, "it'd make their jobs much easier."

Want to learn more about QSR Automations smart restaurant solutions?
Contact us at **855-980-7328, ext 1** or email us at **Sales@QSRAutomations.com.**

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