

The Edinburgh Reporter chats to Chris Thompson of The Pantry



Chris Thompson is Owner & Head Chef of The Pantry in Edinburgh's New Town.

Who are you, and where did you come from?

We are a husband and wife team. Charlotte looks after front of house and I do the cooking. We opened the Pantry in December 2012 after five years of planning, saving and research. Charlotte's background is in Events; she previously worked for Edinburgh based company Heritage Portfolio for seven years. I was a Biology teacher with a passion for cooking. We are both passionate cooks and care about the provenance of the food we cook and serve and being respectful of every ingredient.

What is the business book you recommend that everyone should read?

Put the books down and get cracking... The best way to learn how to run a business is to ride the enormous learning curve that the first year will take you on.

What do you think are your business strengths and weaknesses?

I am awful for coming up with a million ideas and wanting to do them all at once. Charlotte is the sensible head who brings me back down to earth!! I think our strength as a couple is that we are a really good team. We know what the other would do or say in most situations and our personalities match perfectly. You might say good cop/bad cop!!

What was the defining moment on your career path that has got

you where you are now?

Walking past 1 North West Circus Place when Charlotte was trying to get her labour going with our first son Finlay. We noticed that it was up for rent and called the number on the door! I was negotiating rent free periods with a newborn in my arms.

How do you spend your spare time?

Spending time with our two boys Finlay and Teddy... and if we manage to find a babysitter we like to eat out. We particularly like Sushiya.

Do you think you achieve a good work/life balance?

Nearly there!! It has taken nearly 2 years but we are going on our first family holiday in July!

What makes Edinburgh the best location for you to live and/or work?

Edinburgh is one of the most beautiful cities on the planet. You have everything you could need in the city centre and you are surrounded by history, beautiful architecture and great people.

What is your special area of Edinburgh, or special place in Edinburgh and why?

Queen Street Gardens on Heriot Row. Charlotte grew up there and they are a little city centre haven. So many picnics, parties and dog walking memories!

What would you consider the pinnacle of your career?

Hopefully it's yet to come!

If you have a mentor then could you tell us who that is and about your relationship

Charlotte's dad, Alan Faichney. He has given us so much excellent advice in the first few years of the business. He is also the reason I love cooking. He has always been a keen cook and encouraged Charlotte and her siblings to eat out and experience new foods. He is integral in the Pantry's success.

Which networking groups in Edinburgh have you found particularly useful?

Guilty to say...none! We are so busy with The Pantry and the kids that we don't go to any. We do all our networking through Twitter to be honest.

Who are your business heroes?

Food heroes are Keith Floyd, Jamie Oliver and Nigella.

Business hero is probably Tom Kerridge. He has the first Michelin star pub in the UK!

What are your business goals for the next year?

We are launching office catering alongside our Pantry App. This will allow people to order sandwiches, pay on the app then pick them up for The Pantry. This will also allow people to order ready meals and 'brown bag lunches'

Pantry 2 is in the pipeline, which is very exciting. I am also keen to do more food education. I have been working with Chefs @ School and we are hosting some workshops at the Pantry for some local schools.

Describe your typical day for us.

Teddy, our youngest son, gets us up at 5.30am, then I cycle to the station and get the train to work at 8.30am when baking, sandwich prep for the day then prep for the restaurant service begins.

I run the kitchen 6 days a week and Charlotte works 2 days.

When she is in she will be upstairs doing admin, having meetings etc.

We finish up lunch service at 2.30pm then we usually have some time in the afternoon as a family so we might go to the Botanics, Jenns Den or even head over to Craigies Farm.

On a Friday and Saturday I have to be back for dinner service, while Charlotte heads home with the kids.

On nights when the kitchen is closed, we all head home and have the always fun combo of dinner, bath, teeth and bed with the kids! Once they are in bed we sit down for our 'Pantry Hour' where we take care of any leftover business from the day, look over the sales totals etc.

About 9pm we will sit down for dinner the two of us with a well-deserved glass of wine!!

Best job advice you ever received?

Take risks...be nice to the people you meet on the way up as you might meet them on the way back down...look after your health – your health is your wealth!

Your plan of attack for the next 12 months?

All the things I mentioned above....and NO MORE BABIES!