

Atique Choudhury

The latest generation of British-Asian entrepreneurs aren't afraid to innovate to keep ahead of the game. **Amar Singh** meets the founders of five companies helping to shape the new business decade

OWNER and manager of three eclectic restaurants in Stoke Newington, east London – the award-winning Thai, Yum Yum; Mexican “cantina”, Mercado; and Japanese eatery, Oishi.

What's the big idea?

The idea is to have three totally different restaurants offering different types of cuisine within a specific area, with the common denominator being quality of service, food and brand.

Why is it important to innovate?

It's very important in these changing markets. We need to be ahead of the game and bring on board new ideas and concepts or else we become stagnant and boring.

What will be the key trends to shape your sector over the coming decade?

I believe that within the next decade the boundaries of hospitality and cuisine will be lifted as travelling and experiencing global cuisine come to the forefront. A common currency and similarly a common culinary experience will become more globalised.

What's a typical working day for you?

Sky News is on at 8:30am with the daily events. I crosscheck the headlines with

other major news channels. At 9am on the dot my BlackBerry is on and I begin downloading my messages and emails – this helps me to plan the day and clear actions from my previous day. Come 10am I am out and about. I pass my flagship Thai restaurant on the way to my property business. The day there is pretty much as it comes and goes, but it's always a busy one. In the evening, generally from 7pm onwards, I am helping with service and taking care of my customers at my restaurants. I log off at around 1am or later, depending on the scenario.

What goals have you set yourself for the next few years?

Nothing less than a Michelin star for one of my restaurants would set the mark and give me a real sense of achievement in this highly competitive industry.

Which business people do you admire?

Richard Branson is my inspiration for his tireless commitment towards innovation and diversity in everything he does.

What advice would you give to young, would-be entrepreneurs?

Be very persistent and focused in striving to achieve your goals. Prepare to go the extra mile to achieve them and always have a killer instinct towards success.

Go to yumyum.co.uk; mercado-cantina.co.uk; oishiirestaurant.co.uk ▶

Fresh ideas for the future



Alok and Melvin with wine-maker, MP Sharma

Alok Mathur & Melvin D'Souza

TWO Oxford MBA graduates who have recently founded Soul Tree, a company tapping into the Indian wine-making boom and supplying the subcontinent's finest reds and whites to the curry-house trade.

What's the big idea?

To bring Indian wine to the rest of the world. We aim to give the British consumer a taste of the flavours, colours, and spirit of the Indian subcontinent. Indian restaurants in the UK sell around £200million worth of wine a year, but customers are drinking French, Portuguese, and Californian wine – we want to change that.

Why is it important to innovate?

Originality is appreciated and rewarded in every field – particularly the wine trade. The last big phenomenon, Chilean wine, is now over a decade old, and consumers are already restless. The climate of India's grape-growing region combined with a great agricultural legacy and an emerging wine-making style give Soul Tree wines a character that will be adored by lovers of Indian food and casual drinkers alike.

What will be the key trends to shape your sector over the coming decade?

The economic downturn has affected the wine industry and after several years of growth, it's slowing down. Interestingly, the total volumes have not been hit as hard as revenues, since people have taken to drinking in rather than out. The global industry is being buoyed by growth stories like that of India, though the Indian wine industry has also experienced hiccups in recent times. But things are sure to look up again as people emerge from the recession and have a greater proportion of their disposable income to spend on drinks.

What's a typical working day for you?

We often spend 12 hours at a stretch plugging away at the challenges that the business, and life, throw at us. A typical work day stretches from 16 to 18 hours and starts early in an effort to keep up with Indian working hours. Lunch is eaten at the desk while researching the wine industry, registering for an event, or checking out the daily dose of Google alerts. Afternoons, when India closes shop, are more relaxed and that's when we move into our creative mode, working on development strategy, material for the website or a brochure, or the business plan. The afternoons usually stretch into late evenings.

What goals have you set yourself for the next few years?

We want to see Soul Tree become a global brand. This can't happen without Indian wine simultaneously finding its place on the wine map, and if we can help make that happen, it would be incredible.

Which business people do you admire?

The ones who are self-made, such as Steve Jobs, Narayana Murthy, Dhirubhai Ambani, and JRD Tata. Over here, British Asians such as LG Pathak and Karan Bilimoria have built global empires from nothing and are worthy of admiration.

What advice would you give to young, would-be entrepreneurs?

Have an unflinching commitment to the cause, regardless of the challenges that come your way. If in doubt, do not start the journey. Once on it, ride out every wave, however big. Know your market and industry inside out – passion and enthusiasm are not a substitute. Consider even the smallest of opportunities, as big things often come from the most unexpected quarters. Surround yourself with people you trust to give you sound advice – trust us, everyone needs such people.

Go to soultreewine.co.uk ►