



# How I Got Here: Richard Green

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**The owner of London-based wine bar and restaurant group 28-50 reflects on his career to date, which has seen him establish a portfolio of hospitality businesses across the UK and Europe.**

## Why restaurants?

Because, at the very start it was too obvious and too easy – my first venture was a pub, high-up in a French ski resort in 1989. I was a young ski season worker and there was nothing for us broke youngsters. The bars were either rubbish or expensive. My pub – the highest in Europe at the time, rectified that: no rules, cheap beer and great music. We were complete amateurs but knew how to throw a party. We were packed from day one. And the locals were livid...

## Tell us something you wish you had been told at the start of your career?

That that was the easy part. It would get harder, much harder (to be honest, I probably was told, but I just didn't believe it). In hindsight, my first business was just beginners' luck. 32 years later I'm still working my nuts off, wondering when it will get easy.

## What's your favourite restaurant or group of restaurants (besides your own)?

There was a 24-hour diner on the junction of Espanola Way and Collins Avenue in South Beach, where we would have our first breakfast on family holidays in Miami. It was the most perfect, film-set diner imaginable, and then one year it was just gone. A little bit of our family story just disappeared! I often think of that when a lease ends for us and we're unable to tell all our locals that we have left.

## What motivates you?

A sense of responsibility. There are people who have worked with me since the beginning. Some have spent their whole career with us and many are highly skilled in their area, far more than I am. What I bring to the party is the road-map when things are looking up, and the fight when the chips are down. Most of my businesses run pretty well when I'm not there, but I've noticed that all of our managers, highly competent as they are, perform best when they know there's someone above them if it all goes to crap. I'm the bloke at the top of the pyramid and having that responsibility when the chips are down is my role on the planet.

**What time do you wake up?**

I don't set an alarm. I wake-up when I wake-up. I believe that one of the biggest gifts I can give my company is not being tired. Having said that, I am legendarily not a morning man...

**How often do you check your email?**

A lot, but never when eating with others. I now collect all the phones at family meals!

**How do you let off steam?**

For 30 years I never travelled without my skis and rugby boots. I've skied everywhere, did about 15 full seasons in the end, but rugby has been the big constant. I once pitched up in New York on Friday night and the next day I was playing for New York Blues! Knowing that I might have to play rugby at the weekend kept me fit until my early fifties.

**What's your signature dish to cook at home?**

It's always a BBQ in the end.

**What keeps you up at night?**

Cute cat and dog videos on YouTube.

**Which colleague, mentor or employer has had the biggest influence on your approach to the restaurant business?**

My favourite movie as a teen was Quadrophenia. I wanted to be the character played by Sting! He was the Ace-Face at the weekend and in the week he was a bell-boy. The movie was about teenage angst or something like that, but I just wanted to be Sting. So, I left school on 7 July 1984 and started as a bellboy at the Berkeley Hotel in Knightsbridge two days later. Bryan Goodberry was the head concierge and I knew instantly I'd arrived where I wanted to be. He was my first big influence in hospitality: charming with the guests, able to fix anything for them, and he dolled-out the tips to us minions like a boss.

**Worst business decision?**

For a long time I said that if I knew what I know now, I would never have gone into business in France. The state gobbles-up nearly every bit of profit you make - we were turning over 100M euros a few years ago and I was still driving a twelve-year-old Volvo. But I have gradually been converted - the French state helps in times of need too, and we've learnt how that works. It's just very tough getting started in France and you have to accept that it's not all about the money left in your pocket.

**Best business decision?**

1996 - buying a distressed villa company in South West France. We grew it to 220 villas with private pools and it transformed my company from a regional ski-resort player to a pan-European one with an international customer base.

**Typical Sunday?**

If in the UK, rugby. In France, chopping logs for our chalets in summer, or heading-out back country skiing if there's some snow.

**Favourite holiday destination?**

For years, South Beach Miami, but we now have a place just north in Fort Lauderdale. Absolutely love the easy life in the States.

**What are you currently reading?**

*The Precipice* by Tony Ord.

**What piece of advice would you give to those looking to climb the rungs in the business?**

If you are an ambitious employee, never, ever say 'yes but' when your superior asks you to do something. Just do it. And if you have ambitions to go into business yourself – do it. NOW.

**If you could change one thing about the restaurant industry today, what would it be?**

I surely speak for every restaurateur, in the UK at least: respect our profession, please. We work crazy hard. Every single service – 730 of them a year, or 1095 if you do breakfast also – is judgement day. Screw-up and it will be on TripAdvisor before midnight. People have no idea how much we care and how much effort and heartache goes into making it all work. All we want is for our guests to be happy. If we can make some profit, that's a bonus, but so much goes into getting it right – we are far more skilled than we get credit for.

**Bio**

Despite being born in Yorkshire, Green describes himself as a Londoner; describing his accent as 'more EastEnders than Emmerdale Farm'. Between 1984 and 1989, Green worked a variety of jobs across travel and hospitality, and eventually went on to open his first pub and restaurant in Val Thorens, France. In 1991 he founded Eurogroup SAS in France, which he remains a majority shareholder in. Eurogroup's UK subsidiary Riviera Restaurants and Luxury Ltd has launched a chain of wine-led restaurants 28-50, which currently operates sites in Marylebone and Covent Garden, with locations in in Chelsea, Kensington and Oxford Circus set to launch later this year.

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