

An Individual Research, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in Management with expertise in Hospitality and Guest Experience from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

**“PERSONALIZING EXPERIENCES: HOW MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANTS
OPTIMIZE GUEST EXPERIENCES FOR SUCCESS”**

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how Michelin-starred restaurants optimize guest experience through personalization, balancing innovation with guest privacy. Drawing on interviews with elite experts, the research examines practices across the guest experience – pre-arrival, during the experience, and post-experience. Findings reveal that personalization fosters emotional connections and loyalty, distinguishing these establishments in a competitive market. However, it highlights privacy as a critical concern, necessitating transparency, ethical data use, and cultural sensitivity. While technology enhances personalization, the human element remains central to success. This research offers a framework for understanding personalization as both an art and strategic tool in fine dining.

KEYWORDS

Guest Experience | Michelin Guide | Fine Dining | Customer Loyalty | Personalization

LIST OF ACRONYMS

MG – Michelin Guide

MS – Michelin-starred

GDPR – The General Data Protection Regulation

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Michelin Guide began in Clermont-Ferrand in 1889, when Andre and Edouard Michelin founded their tire company. To assist motorists, they developed a compact red guide packed with practical travel information. Driven by the idea that "people only truly value what they pay for," they introduced the first paid edition of the Michelin Guide in 1920 (Michelin Guide, n.d.). Today, the MG is one of the most recognized and influential guides in the hospitality sector. Any restaurant gains immediate recognition and prestige upon it is recommended by the MG (Chun-Fang Chiang, Hung-Wen Guo, 2021). The luxury hospitality industry, especially within Michelin-Starred restaurants, operates in an increasingly competitive environment, where standing out requires unique approaches. Personalization has emerged as a potential differentiator, with many restaurants already investing in tailored services and experiences to attract and retain their clientele.

However, while personalization is widely recognized as a key differentiator, it also raises concerns about guest privacy, particularly in an era of heightened data awareness and privacy regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation in Europe. This is reflected in the need for restaurants to navigate the fine line between creating tailored, memorable experiences and respecting their guest's privacy.

Research Problem

The focus of this research aims to understand how Michelin-starred restaurants can personalize their guest experiences without invading their privacy. Balancing between personalized service and privacy constraints creates a challenging environment in which restaurants must skillfully manage guest expectations, handle data responsibly, and adhere to privacy regulations.

While extensive research has been conducted on personalization in the hotel industry, there is a noticeable lack of studies and literature focused specifically on personalization in restaurants, particularly in the fine-dining sector.

Thus, there is a clear gap in understanding how fine-dining restaurants, particularly Michelin-starred establishments adeptly manage the balance between personalization, guest privacy, and the operational complexities of providing high-end customized dining experiences – key factors essential for maintaining their esteemed reputations and achieving sustained success.

Research Question

How do Michelin-starred restaurants balance the demands of personalization, guest privacy, and operational efficiency to create exceptional guest experiences and maintain their competitive edge?

Objectives of the Research

The main objectives of this research are to explore and understand how personalization can enhance guest satisfaction within Michelin-starred restaurants. First, the research will draw on insights from expert interviews and an analysis of best practices to explore the role of personalization in creating memorable dining experiences.

Furthermore, the study will investigate the challenges that Michelin-starred restaurants face when collecting and using guest data to create personalized experiences. These challenges include balancing the need for personalization with the privacy expectations of guests. This research will also contribute to the lack of research that exists about this topic.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the research context and findings, a literature review was carried out, focusing on guest experience, with a particular emphasis on its application within the hospitality industry, mainly on Michelin-starred restaurants.

Distinguishing Guest Experience from Customer Experience

To fully grasp the concept of guest experience, it is essential to understand how it differs from customer experience, despite their interconnected nature.

Guest experience is a multifaceted concept that lies at the heart of any successful hospitality business. While various authors have defined it differently, there is a consensus that it encompasses all interactions and perceptions a guest has throughout their engagement with a service.

According to the Glion Institute of Higher Education (2024), guest experience reflects the overall impression and satisfaction a guest derives from their interaction, whether staying at a hotel, shopping at a luxury shop, or dining at a restaurant. The guest experience is a fundamental determinant of guest loyalty, significantly influencing whether individuals will continue to engage with a service provider or seek alternative options. It is predicated on the creation of immersive and emotionally impactful interactions, emphasizing the strategic importance of personalized and meaningful connections in fostering long-term engagement and satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction functions as a mediating variable, demonstrating that, although service quality exerts a direct influence on satisfaction, its effect on loyalty is indirect and contingent upon the degree of satisfaction derived by customers from the provided service. Enhancing service quality leads to increased customer satisfaction, which in turn fosters stronger customer loyalty (Hidayat, M. A., Rasyid, A., & Pasolo, F., 2024).

In contrast, customer experience is a broader term applicable across various industries. It refers to the overall relationship between a customer and a brand, or service, encompassing every touchpoint through the customer journey.

Over the past years, customer experience has become an increasingly critical focus for all type of businesses, with growing recognition of its role in handling customer satisfaction and loyalty (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020).

In the article, “What’s the Difference between customer experience & customer satisfaction?”, customer experience is shaped by the impressions formed throughout the entirety of the sales

or purchase process, as noted by Worick (2019). While customer experience operates independently from customer satisfaction, the achievement of satisfaction is intrinsically linked to delivering a meaningful and positive experience. Similarly, guests' perceptions and satisfaction are influenced by a confluence of elements, including service quality, the ambiance of the environment, and the emotional connections cultivated during their interactions. This concept is inextricably linked to the delivery of meaningful and positive experiences, underscoring its significance in fostering loyalty and success within the hospitality industry, particularly in the fine dining sector.

Guest experience challenges for MS Restaurants

In the context of Michelin-starred restaurants, the concept of guest experience is even more critical, as these establishments are held to exceptionally high standards due to their prestigious status. However, this elevated positioning reflects unique challenges that MS restaurants must address to meet – and exceed – guest expectations.

Through the assessment of “Consumer perceptions of the Michelin Guide and attitudes toward Michelin-starred restaurants”, (Chiang & Hung-Wen, 2021) identify several key challenges related to customer experience performance in MS restaurants. A significant challenge lies in addressing perceived financial risks, as dining at a Michelin-starred establishment is frequently correlated with high costs. Some guests may perceive the experience as overpriced, particularly if the value delivered does not align with their expectations. This perception can deter potential customers who might otherwise be willing to explore the offering. Overcoming this challenge requires Michelin-starred restaurants to ensure that every element of the guest experience justifies the cost, delivering unmatched quality and value at every touchpoint.

Another major challenge stems from the heightened expectations associated with the Michelin brand. Being a MS restaurant often serves as a marker of distinction, leading guests to expect an unparalleled dining experience. However, if these elevated expectations are not met, the

result can be dissatisfaction and negative word-of-mouth, potentially damaging the restaurant's reputation. Meeting or exceeding these expectations demands constant innovation, impeccable attention to detail, and seamless execution across all aspects of service, ambiance, and cuisine. Michelin-starred restaurants also face challenges related to their diverse and international clientele, as their guest base often includes individuals from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This diversity demands a highly skilled workforce, but also with cultural competence, and in many instances, multilingual capabilities. Recruiting staff with these attributes or investing in their training adds complexity to operations and significantly increases costs. Despite this, delivering a personalized and culturally sensitive guest experience is crucial to maintaining the restaurant's global appeal and reputation.

Additionally, the investment in staff development poses an ongoing challenge for Michelin-starred restaurants. Achieving the exceptional standard required for Michelin recognition demands a high level of training, skill, and commitment from employees (Will Guidara, 2022).

Personalization in Hospitality Industry

Personalization is no longer just a hospitality trend but a fundamental cornerstone for creating meaningful and sustainable relationship with guests and hospitality business. Personalization facilitates the co-creation of experiences by delivering products and services meticulously tailored to align with the customer's individual context, preferences, and tastes (Fan & S., 2006). This approach is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of guests' needs and circumstances, which is informed by personal information, engagement, and behavioral insights (Montgomery & Smith, 2009). It involves personalizing offers through products and services adapted to meet the specific needs of customers (Shen & Dall, 2009).

Will Guidara's *Unreasonable Hospitality* (2022) provides a compelling exploration of the transformative potential of exceptional service within the hospitality industry. Drawing on his extensive experience as the former general manager of Eleven Madison Park, Guidara

emphasizes the profound impact of going beyond guest expectations to create memorable, personalized experiences. His philosophy aligns closely with the concept of fostering emotional connections, reflecting the importance of cultivating a culture of service that empowers teams to deliver highly personalized and meaningful interactions.

Challenges for handling personal data

Handling personal data presents substantial challenges for companies operating in data-driven environment. Regulatory compliance is a key concern, with rigorous frameworks such as The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requiring transparency, systems for accessing or deleting data, and explicit consent.

Data security is equally crucial, as business must protect sensitive information from breaches and unauthorized access through advanced cybersecurity measures. The GDPR's principle of data protection by design and by default requires integrating privacy safeguards into all stages of data processing. Organizations must implement proactive policies to ensure data minimization, restricting collection, processing, and storage to what is strictly necessary. These measures must align with current technology and be cost-effective. Regular reviews ensure compliance, and the GDPR extends security obligations to processors, reinforcing shared responsibility for data protection (Tikkinen-Piri, Rohunen, & Markkula, 2018).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design adopts a qualitative methodology, focusing on obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the processes and strategies involved in personalizing guest experiences in Michelin-starred restaurants and renowned luxury hotels. These individuals represent a group of elite experts whose knowledge and perspectives are invaluable for understanding the role of personalization and privacy in high-end dining. However, accessing these professionals posed

significant challenges due to their limited availability, demanding schedules, and the exclusivity of their work environments.

The primary data collection method consisted of interviews conducted with elite experts, including an executive chef, general managers, staff members and management team and department heads. Participants were purposefully selected based on their expertise, professional standing, and extensive experience in crafting exceptional guest experiences within Michelin-starred restaurants and internationally recognized luxury hospitality establishments.

Additionally, snowball sampling was employed, as some participants were identified and recommended by others within their professional network. This combination of purposive and snowball sampling ensured that the data collected was both relevant and reflective of best practices in high-end hospitality contexts.

The semi-structured format of the interviews facilitated an open yet guided discussion, ensuring that critical themes were addressed while providing the flexibility to explore emergent insights.

The interview guide was designed to investigate key areas such as:

- The role of personalization in enhancing guest satisfaction and loyalty.
- Strategies for balancing personalization with ethical considerations, such as privacy and cultural sensitivity.
- Challenges encountered in delivering consistent and exceptional service in high-pressure environments.
- Innovations, including technological advancements, that support the customization of guest experiences.

By engaging with these experts, the research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications. The qualitative nature of the research also allowed for the identification of nuanced perspectives and practices that may not be evident through quantitative analysis alone.

This research design ensures the reliability and relevance of the findings by capturing the lived experiences and strategic insights of professionals at the forefront of luxury hospitality.

Data Collection Methods

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on professionals with extensive expertise in the luxury hospitality. This was complemented by snowball sampling, as some participants were recommended by others within their professional network.

Access to these professionals is highly limited, as their roles demand significant time and attention, making them rarely available for such engagements. The ability to secure their participation highlights the unique reach of this research, offering insights from individuals whose perspectives are seldom captured in academic studies.

The sample for this research comprised a carefully selected group of highly experienced professionals from renowned establishments in the hospitality and fine-dining sectors. Their diverse roles and expertise provided valuable insights into the personalization of guest's experiences addressing both operational and experiential dimensions with Michelin-starred restaurants and luxury hotels and communities.

The participants included Ms. Célia Dinis, Guest Relations Manager at *Hélène Darroze at the Connaught*, a prestigious three-Michelin-starred restaurant in London. Her expertise in managing guest relations within one of the world's most acclaimed dining establishments added significant depth to the research.

Similarly, Ms. Andrea Masset, Maitrê at *Mirazur*, another three-Michelin-starred restaurant, in Menton, ranked in 2019 the n°1 in *The World's 50 Best Restaurants*, contributed insights into the front-of-house dynamics of a globally celebrated dining destination.

The sample also included Mr. Francisco Castro Fernandes, a former Assistant Development Chef at *The Fat Duck*, a three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Bray, who provided a unique

perspective on culinary innovation and guest personalization from a back-of-house perspective. Mr. Luis Miguel, Head of Concierge at the *Lisbon Ritz Four Seasons*, brought expertise in luxury hotel operations and engagement at an international level, complemented by Mr. Alex Wilson, Front Office Manager at *The Goring Hotel*, a historic luxury property in London, known for its exceptional service.

Additionally, Mr. Luís Fernandes, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of *CostaTerra Club*, a luxury resort development project in Melides, part of the *Discovery Land Company*, provided strategic insights into the operational challenges and opportunities of delivering personalized experiences in an exclusive hospitality setting.

Chef José Avillez, owner, and Executive Chef of *Belcanto – Relais&Châteaux*, a two-Michelin-starred Restaurant, currently ranked as 31st position among the 50 Best List, *Encanto*, a one Michelin-starred restaurant, both in Lisbon, and *Tasca*, one-Michelin-starred restaurant in Dubai, shared his expertise on crafting personalized culinary journeys and managing Michelin-starred kitchens in multiple international locations.

In addition, Mr. Duarte Coelho, Director at *Alma*, a two-Michelin-starred restaurant in Lisbon, shared how the restaurant balances personalization with maintaining a seamless operational flow and shared insights about adapting services for special occasions or guests with specific needs.

Mr. Franco Joaquin Cufre, a headwaiter with over eight years of experience at *El Celler de Can Roca*, a three-Michelin-starred restaurant, considered the n°1 Best in the World two times, in 2013 and 2015, by *50 Best List*, in Girona, added a unique perspective on how the team personalizes experiences by adapting service styles and ensuring a tailored approach for every guest, emphasizing cultural and linguistic considerations.

Furthermore, Ms. Raquel Esteves, Operations Director of *José Avillez Group*, which includes *Belcanto* and *Encanto*, offered insights into operational strategies and the implementation of

personalization across a portfolio of high-end restaurants and branding efforts that support guest personalization and loyalty.

Interviews Structure

Most of the interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, given that many participants were based outside of Portugal. These virtual interviews allowed for flexibility in scheduling while maintaining the quality and depth of the discussions.

Additionally, in-person interviews were conducted with Chef José Avillez, Mr. Luís Fernandes, Mr. Duarte Coelho and Ms. Raquel Esteves. These were held at the participant's respective workplaces, offering a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their professional environments. Conducting the interviews in these settings provided valuable contextual insights, enriching the data by grounding their perspectives and experiences within the operational realities of their roles.

The interviews varied in duration, ranging from approximately 30 minutes to two hours. The length of each session depended on the participants' willingness to share insights and the complexity of the topics discussed. This flexible approach ensured that the conversations were comprehensive and tailored to the expertise and perspectives of each interviewee.

Each session started with an explanation of the purpose of the study and offered to ask understanding questions. Then a brief introduction to the career path of the interviewee were asked, allowing participants to share relevant background information and establish their expertise in the field. This approach helped create a comfortable atmosphere and encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences.

The conversation then transitioned to the core theme of the research with the key question: "How do you make your guests feel special?". This question serves as an entry point to delve into the strategies and practices employed in Michelin-starred and high-end hospitality settings

to enhance guest experiences. Depending on the flow of the interview, this question was posed either at the beginning or at the end of the conversation.

If asked at the end, the interview typically began with a broader question such as, “how do you personalize your guests experience?” or an invitation to describe the guest experience journey, starting from the moment a reservation is made.

This approach allowed participants to provide an overarching view of their processes and practices, setting the stage for a more focused discussion on making guests feel special. By adjusting the sequence of questions to suit the context of each interview, the conversation facilitated a comprehensive exploration of personalization strategies and the guest experience.

An interview structure was developed to guide the discussions while allowing room for flexibility. The structure included open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives, focusing on key areas such as:

- Strategies for personalizing guest experiences in luxury dining and hospitality.
- Ethical concerns, including privacy and cultural sensitivity, in the context of personalization.
- Challenges related to maintaining consistency and addressing guest expectations.
- The role of technology and innovation in enhancing personalized services.
- Their personal and professional experiences and views on the subject.

The structure ensured consistency across interviews while encouraging participants to elaborate on areas they found most relevant, resulting in a rich and varied dataset.

Not all interviews conducted for this research were recorded. While recording was proposed to all participants to ensure accuracy in capturing their insights, some declined due to concerns about confidentiality or personal preference. In such cases, detailed notes were taken during the discussions to document key points and preserve the integrity of the information shared.

This mixed approach ensured that participants felt comfortable and respected throughout the process, while still enabling the collection of valuable qualitative data. For recorded interviews, transcriptions were created for thematic analysis, whereas notes from unrecorded interviews were carefully reviewed and integrated into the analysis to maintain consistency and comprehensiveness.

Data Method of Analysis

To analyze the interview data, a systematic approach was employed to ensure accuracy and depth of understanding. This process involved listening to the recorded interviews and thoroughly reading the transcripts, which were generated using *TurboScribe*, to become familiar with the data.

In cases where recording was not permitted, detailed notes taken during the discussions served as the primary data source. Key topics, patterns and insights were coded with a particular focus on topics such as personalization strategies and ethical challenges.

The coded data, derived from both recorded and unrecorded interviews, were subsequently grouped into broader themes. These themes were carefully reviewed, refined, and organized to ensure coherence and alignment with the research objectives.

This rigorous process-maintained consistency across all collected data, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the finding while respecting the preferences and confidentiality of all participants.

To provide additional context and support, secondary research and reports were considered. Academic articles and the book *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara, a renowned restaurateur and former general manager of Eleven Madison Park, offered a broader perspective on the theme, enabling the research to go beyond the insights gathered from the interviews and consider a more comprehensive understanding.

Positionality Statement

With over two years of experience as a hostess in a two-Michelin-starred restaurant and over four years working in high-end hospitality industry, I bring a well-informed perspective to this research. My professional background has provided invaluable insights into the complex dynamics of personalization, guest experience, and privacy – key themes that form the foundation of this research. This statement aims to articulate my position within the research and demonstrate how my lived experience contributes to the academic exploration of these issues.

In my current role, I am actively involved in various stages of the guest experience, including pre-arrival communication, in-service engagement, and post-dining follow ups. These responsibilities require a deep understanding of how to create personalized experiences while safeguarding guest privacy and fostering trust. Working in a Michelin-starred environment has also provided a firsthand view of the operation challenges and ethical considerations associated with tailoring guest experiences to meet the exacting standards.

Furthermore, my broader experience in hospitality has allowed me to observe the increasing emphasis on data-driven personalization and the corresponding need for transparency and ethical practices. My dual role as a practitioner and researcher enables me to approach the research with a unique lens, blending practical insights with academic analysis.

CHAPTER 4: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD - A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF EXPERT TESTIMONIES AND BEST PRACTICES

The interviews conducted across Michelin-starred restaurants and luxury hospitality establishments reveal an intricate balance creating exceptional guest experiences through personalization and addressing the inherent challenges of guest privacy. By deeply analyzing the pre-arrival, during the experience, and post-experience phases, several nuanced themes

emerge, highlighting the strategies, implications, and tensions in optimizing guest experiences. These insights are essential for understanding how personalization shapes the guest experience in high-end hospitality.

Pre-Arrival: Establishing foundations for trust and connection

The pre-arrival phase is critical not only for gathering guest information but also for setting the tone of trust and mutual respect. This stage often involves a direct intersection between personalization efforts and privacy considerations.

Data Collection and Guest Profiles

The ability to deliver a personalized experience starts with gathering detailed information about their guests. Michelin-starred restaurants use various tools and methods to build guest profiles, balancing depth with description.

At The Fat Duck, the process of detailed information gathering stands out as a hallmark of its personalization strategy. Guests are asked to provide specific details during the reservation process, including nostalgic childhood memories, which are later highly tailored and emotionally resonant moments that set it apart in the fine dining industry. However, this raises potential privacy concerns - the question of how much is too much. The depth of questioning, while intended to enhance the guest experience, could lead to some individuals to feel uncomfortable or hesitant about sharing such personal information. Interviewees emphasized the need for discretion, noting that overly specific inquiries could risk alienating guests if they are perceived as intrusive.

Regarding operational barriers, *Hélène Darroze at The Connaught* faces challenges when reservations are made through third-party platforms or hotel concierges. Limited access to guest information can hinder the level of personalization achievable. To address this, the team often supplements their knowledge by conducting discreet online research, such as reviewing social

media profiles. It was concluded that this is common practice in Michelin restaurants. While effective, this practice necessitates clear ethical guidelines to prevent overreach.

Transparency and Consent

The concept of transparency emerged as a recurring theme, as it is critical to ensuring that guests feel comfortable sharing personal information. The interviews underscored the importance of clear communication about how data will be used. At *The Goring Hotel*'s, personal pre-arrival phone calls replace automated emails, providing a human connection while explaining the purpose of data collection. This not only personalizes the guest interaction but also fosters trust by reassuring guests about the ethical use of their information.

Transparency also ties closely to consent. For instance, *CostaTerra Club* employs a subtle strategy that guests are aware of how their information is utilized to enhance their experience. This practice aligns with ethical considerations, ensuring that guests remain in control of their personal data. Data collection is framed as a tool for enhancing the guest's experience rather than a transactional exchange, maintaining a balance between personalization and discretion.

Cultural and generational sensitivity

The pre-arrival phase also highlights the importance of cultural and generational nuances in personalization. Mr. Wilson mentioned how younger guests, mainly GenZ and Millennials, often welcome deeper personalization, viewing it as a hallmark of thoughtful service. In contrast, older guests may favor traditional approaches that emphasize understated gestures.

During the experience: Personalization as an Art Form

The actual guest experience represents the culmination of personalization efforts, where service team translate data and observations into meaningful interactions. This phase highlights the tension between personalized service and maintaining guest privacy, as personalization requires a high level of engagement while respecting boundaries.

Tailoring Service

Personalized service requires a dynamic approach, adapting interactions to each guest's preferences and comfort levels.

Restaurants such *El Celler de Can Roca*, staff are trained to observe guests' body language, verbal and behavioral cues, allowing them to adjust their level of engagement and service style in real-time accordingly. Reserved guests may prefer minimal and formal interaction, while others might appreciate a more conversational approach.

This approach minimizes the need for extensive pre-arrival data collection by relying on the emotional intelligence of the staff. However, it places significant pressure on team members to interpret guest signals accurately, requiring extensive training and experience. It is expected that in Michelin-starred restaurants, staff can anticipate needs and preferences without intrusive questioning. For instance, *The Fat Duck* hired a group of psychologist and magicians to support the training of the staff in this regard. At *Alma*, the staff avoids scripted presentations, instead their interactions are based on each table's interaction. This adds an authentic touch to personalization, fostering a genuine connection with the guest, however it necessitates staff agility and cultural sensitivity.

Balancing inclusivity and exclusivity

Beyond interactions, personalization extends to creating moments to cater the diverse needs, while preserving the high standards of Michelin-starred dining. For instance, *Alma* introduced braille menus and accommodated guide animals, reflecting a commitment to accessibility without compromising the exclusivity of the dining experience.

Navigating privacy during high-engagement moments

Establishments like *The Fat Duck* and *Mirazur* incorporate multi-sensory and interactive elements that require a deeper level of guest participation. These high-engagement moments demand careful navigations to ensure guests do not feel coerced or exposed. *The Fat Duck*

leverages personal details to craft unique dining experiences, such as recreating a guest's childhood memory through a specific moment. At *Mirazur*, garden tours are designed to be optional, allowing guests to choose their level of participation. Similarly, at *Hélène Darroze at The Connaught*, personalize gestures such as Polaroid photographs, allowing guests to appreciate these touches without feeling overly scrutinized.

Post-experiences: Building lasting relationships

The post-experience phase focuses on sustaining the connection between the guest and the establishment, which extends personalization beyond the immediate visit, focusing on feedback, continued engagement, and fostering loyalty.

Feedback Mechanisms

Post-experience feedback mechanisms are a valuable tool for refining personalization strategies and maintaining guest engagement. Most of the establishments, such as *The Goring Hotel* and *Alma* collect feedback through unobtrusive follow-up emails. These tools are designed to be optional and non-intrusive, ensuring that guests feel no obligation to respond. The feedback not only helps refine future experiences but also contributes to building a database of guest preferences for long-term personalization.

Memorable Keepsakes

To enhance the guest's memory of their visit, high-end hospitality establishments provide personalized mementos. *The Goring Hotel* offers bespoke leather luggage tags, while *Alma* and *Belcanto* provide customized menus. At *The Fat Duck* and *Hélène Darroze at The Connaught*, regular guests are given the unique privilege of storing their personal mementos within the restaurant, fostering a sense of exclusivity and reinforcing their connection to the establishment through personalized and special treatment.

These gestures are thoughtful and subtle, reinforcing the emotional connection without appearing transactional.

Ethical Data Retention and Use

Data retention policies are critical in maintaining guest trust. A key concern in this phase is how guest data is stored and utilized for future visits. Interviewees consistently emphasized the importance of limiting data access to internal purposes only, ensuring that the guest information is never shared externally. This commitment to data security and transparency about data usage helps build trust and reassures guests that their privacy is respected.

CHAPTER 5: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION - ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This final chapter synthesizes the finding of this research, integrating insights from interviews, personal experience, and academic literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of personalization in Michelin-starred restaurants. The research critically examines the intricate balance between personalization, guest privacy, and operational challenges, offering recommendations to address these complexities while reflecting on future of dine dining personalization.

The findings underscore personalization as a pivotal strategy in Michelin-starred establishments, enhancing guest satisfaction, fostering loyalty, and distinguishing these restaurants in highly competitive market. However, this research highlights the tension and reveals the complexities between delivering tailored experiences and safeguarding guest privacy. While tools such as pre-arrival questionnaires and CRM systems facilitate personalized service, excessive data collection or intrusive practices risk breaching ethical boundaries and undermining trust. For example, while in-depth pre-arrival inquiries or social media research may enhance personalization, they must be conducted with transparency and restraint to avoid perceptions of intrusion. My professional experience has revealed that guests value thoughtful personalization but prioritize trust and discretion, particularly in how data is handled.

Operationally, the execution of personalization poses challenges that require significant investment in technology, staff training and infrastructure. Establishments must ensure that their efforts are scalable and aligned with operational realities without compromising the quality of service.

Furthermore, the need for inclusivity and emotional intelligence has emerged as a critical finding. Michelin-starred restaurants must tailor their services to accommodate diverse cultural, generational, and accessibility needs. Emotional intelligence is essential for interpreting guest cues, adapting service styles, and delivering interactions that are both personal and respectful of privacy.

To address these challenges, several recommendations emerge from this research. Transparency in data collection and ethical practices is fundamental; restaurants must clearly communicate the purpose and benefits of data use while obtaining explicit guest consent, ensuring that only essential information is collected to enhance the guest experience without crossing personal boundaries. Comprehensive staff training is also critical, equipping teams with the skills to deliver authentic, personalized interactions rooted in emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity.

Technological tools, such as CRM systems, should develop in a way to support deeper the human interactions but never be considered as a replacement. This alignment requires integrating new advancements and adapting to emerging realities to remain affective and relevant in addressing modern challenges, such as leveraging Artificial Intelligence.

To ensure that AI is a solution-driven tool rather than an isolated technology, it is important to approach its integration strategically. Discussion about AI should move beyond its generic potential and focus on targeted problem-solving. For instance, it can improve operational efficiency and enhance customer communication. Resistance to AI was very evident through the research, often raised from misconceptions about losing the “human touch”. However, the

adoption of AI in high-end hospitality, especially in Michelin-starred restaurants settings, should begin with a thorough analysis of existing best applications and real-life examples, filtering which most applicable for each business, demonstrating how AI can enhance rather than replace human roles.

By following a use case-driven methodology, engaging stakeholders effectively, and maintaining a clear focus on business priorities, Michelin-starred restaurants can harness AI's potential to enhance operations and personalize customer experiences while preserving the "human touch" that defines their unique offerings.

The future of Michelin-starred hospitality lies in harmonizing personalization with privacy through interactive processes that adapt to evolving guest expectations and regulatory landscapes. Regular assessments and feedback mechanisms will ensure that initiatives remain aligned with guest need and industry trends.

Michelin-starred restaurants must continue to innovate, pushing boundaries of what personalization can achieve, while upholding the foundational principals of trust, respect, and excellence. This is particularly critical given that, for most of the guests, a visit to a Michelin-starred restaurant is a once-in-a-lifetime event, making the stakes for delivering a flawless and memorable experience even higher. By addressing privacy concerns, fostering inclusivity, and embracing authenticity, these establishments can redefine guest experiences, setting a benchmark for the hospitality industry. Ultimately, the research clearly demonstrates that personalization extends beyond merely meeting expectations; it is about creating moments that leave a lasting impact, transforming dining into an experience that is both meaningful and extraordinary, ensuring it resonates with guests long after the meal concludes.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Drawing on the principles of personalization and guest privacy explored in this research, Michelin-starred restaurants are uniquely positioned to enhance their competitive advantage

through innovative and highly tailored guest experiences. Personalization, as revealed in the findings, functions as a crucial driver of guest satisfaction, creating memorable moments that differentiate these establishments in an intensely competitive market. For instance, the ability to deliver deeply personal experiences – such as crafting meals based on nostalgic memories – can serve as a point of distinction, provided it is executed with respect for guest privacy and ethical data handling.

The findings also highlight the importance of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity in tailoring experiences. By understanding the diverse expectations of their clientele, Michelin-starred establishments can refine their strategies to meet individual needs without compromising service quality or ethical standards. The balance between personalization and privacy is particularly critical, as transparency and trust remain foundational to guest engagement. Missteps in these areas, such as overly invasive data collection, can undermine the very experiences personalization seeks to enhance.

Despite these promising findings, the research was subject to limitations, such as being based on a relatively small sample. While the size may appear limited, the access to such individuals, was inherently challenging due to their demanding schedules and the competitive environment they operate within. However, the small sample is compensated by the exceptional quality of participants, who work at the highest levels of the industry and provided rich and detailed insights.

Reflecting on my personal experience and observations, I truly believe that personalization is an essential cornerstone for every hospitality business, including the Michelin-starred restaurants. However, this presents a particularly significant challenge for Michelin-starred establishments since most guests visit them only once in a lifetime. It is a topic that deserves more attention and recognition within the industry, as neglecting its importance may hinder development and innovation.

As high-quality food becomes increasingly accessible and less exclusive, personalization will likely become the defining factor that elevates Michelin-starred restaurants above the rest. Unfortunately, there are still people who undervalue personalization, which can become an obstacle to progress. Restaurants must recognize that they are not only purveyors of exceptional food but also hubs of hospitality. Breaking certain traditional boundaries is crucial to success, and those who are more creative and open-minded often excel in exceeding guest satisfactions. Nevertheless, there is still significant room for growth in this area. By embracing this philosophy and addressing the challenges outlined, with. Commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and ethical innovation, these restaurants can continue to lead the fine dining industry, delivering experiences that are as unforgettable as they are exceptional.

Reflecting on my professional experience and through the insights and best practices of elite professionals and establishments, I conclude that the future of personalization lies in harmonizing creativity with integrity.

“Routine is not enough for the human heart. The great challenge is, every day, to look at everything for the first time, dazzled by the surprise of the days. It’s recognizing that this passing moment is the door through joy matters”- José Tolentino Mendonça, in “A Mística do Instante”

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APPENDIX

Interview with MR. Alex Wilson – The Goring Hotel

Beatriz Brandt: Hi Alex, nice to meet you. How are you?

Alex Wilson: Hello Beatriz, nice to meet you too. I'm great, what about you?

Beatriz Brandt: I'm great thank you. Thank you so much for your time and availability.

Alex Wilson: Of course. I am happy to help you.

Beatriz Brandt: To start, I always like to explain a little bit about what I'm doing and what is the goal of this interview.

I am studying for my master's in management with expertise in hospitality and customer experience, where I met Mr. Miller, who was so kind to connect us.

Currently, I am writing my dissertation about guest experience in Michelin-starred restaurants and how its personalization can be an important factor for its success, as well as a differentiator.

I know you don't work directly in a Michelin-starred restaurant, but you work in high-end hospitality, as The Goring is such a prestigious hotel. And I'm aware that there is a Michelin-starred restaurant in the hotel.

Could you share with me your career path?

Alex Wilson: Yes, of course. When I graduated from Surrey, I went to a very small family collection of hotels based in Hampshire and Surrey and I went on a management training program and I covered all different departments from the kitchen, to housekeeping, to back of house, to finance, restaurant, reception, the whole thing.

And then I finished my management training on front desk, and I felt that's where I could give the most, give the most and gain the most because you're not only looking after the guests, but you've got such a wonderful team as well, or teams that can integrate across all the different departments within a hotel.

So, I did that for, that role there for about 18 months and then I moved back to London in 2014 and I went to work for Browns Hotels at Rocco Forte property in Mayfair and I started there as a duty manager, and I worked my way up over five years and I became the front of house manager there in 2019. So, it was quite a nice steady promotion, taking on more people, more projects, more challenges with the hotel and I did a bit of traveling with the company as well. I did a pre-opening in down in the south of Italy, in Palermo.

So, I opened that with the hotel manager down there, which was lovely and then I took a little career break. My father was slightly unwell at the time, so he needed some help at home, so I went to look after him for a bit and then I went to the Goring, which is a very fine English hotel in Belgravia, and I've been there now almost three years as the director of front of house.

Beatriz Brandt: Wow, that is amazing!

Alex Wilson: So my career really in the last ten years has been predominantly focused within rooms division and covering all aspects, whether that be housekeeping, whether that be guest services, guest relations, concierge, reception, nights, that whole umbrella fits under me, which is something I'm very passionate about and I get a lot out of it and I've obviously worked with some amazing people in the time, both leaders and also junior members of staff that I've seen grow up the ranks. So, it's a good, I love being operational.

But I would love in the next year or so, I think I'm going to have to become a lot more strategic because like you, I've just done an equivalent of an MBA. So next year I will be moving probably a little bit more behind a desk and so there's a bit more promotion ahead of to be hotel manager. That's my experience in a nutshell.

Beatriz Brandt: That is truly amazing how much you have achieved.

From what I understood, your experience is really about the operational part and focused on guest experience, as well. So that's, I think, why Mr. Graham advised me to speak with you and why he believes that you would have valuable insights to share, which I totally agree with.

So maybe I would like to start with the first question: how you make your guests feel special? And how is it possible to make someone feel special when is your first time meeting them?

Alex Wilson: We have been working very hard over the last, I would say, 18 months about really trying to work out how to get the best information from our guests and I think that is one of the biggest things from a guest relations or a guest services perspective, is really trying to understand what the guest wants, what they like, what they don't like, but it might be quite easy to ask those questions but actually it's very difficult sometimes to really dig deep to get the information that you need. So, we put a lot of emphasis in the last 18 months on first-time guests and making them return guests or trying to captivate them into returning to the hotel.

So we set up this first-time stay project where every single guest would be contacted three days prior to arrival, not by email or by a mail shot going out, we would actually pick up the phone and speak to them because it's a lot more personalized and you can, just with a few questions, you can get such a lot of information. So we have a dedicated team now at the hotel, just two people that call every single guest, whether it be through a travel agent, direct, reaching out to Expedia or booking.com, other booking channels to try and obtain that information about getting their phone number and then we would make contact with the guests and ask them a few, you know, basic things and then we would, you know, go into more detail the more that they would give us. So then when they come to the hotel, we're able to absolutely deliver on all levels, whether it be what sort of feather they, pillow they want in the room, what wine they like, what water they like and all those basic things are there ready when they walk through the door.

And then with that first-time project now we give a leather gift tag which we clip onto the bag when the guest leaves in the taxi or the car with their initials or their name on the tag from the Gorin as a nice special gift when they leave. So that's a little element of surprise when they leave. But we are constantly, we have a bit of a competition going in the hotel where we call it

the spot card project where it's a lot of specific information from different departments comes into the front of house team and every department has

to Try and obtain as much information from the guests over a week or monthly period and then at the end of each month whoever gives us the most information for profiles wins a prize.

So just trying to stimulate, trying to obtain this information. So that's you know a couple of ways that we do it but we are, because we are such a small hotel we are really able to focus on those really fine details and we work with a company also called Forbes. Have you heard of Forbes travel guide?

Beatriz Brandt: Yes, I do know.

Alex Wilson: You might want to have a look at them. They're an American based inspecting company and the *Forbes travel guide* is like a brand that sits under them, underneath them and they are the inspecting body for recommended four and five-star hotels around the world. And we work with them, but they give us a rating every year, but they are always pushing us and pushing the boundaries of what we can do more for guests. So, if we get a piece of information whether it be like you know if the inspector or potential inspector says oh we're gonna go to the theater I'm gonna go and see *Wicked* the musical, they want us to try and do a little bit more by okay let's go to the theater, let's buy them a program and then put it in their room before they go.

So they really want us to think outside the box. Another example I had was it was an inspector, and he left his suitcase open in the bedroom and he left his England cricket cap on the suitcase. So obviously we knew that he loved cricket, and he supported England. So, we went out we bought him an England cricket book and a cricket magazine just for him to read when he came back in the evening. And that took it from a good thing to a wow, highly emotionally engaged and he just couldn't believe it.

But they're the things that we do. We're always looking into our guests and trying to find out as much as we can all the time. And I'm constantly pushing my team to make sure that we are you know really on top of all these new and different things.

Beatriz Brandt: I mean that's amazing.

I think that, from a restaurant perspective, dealing with first-time guests can be more challenging. In this type of restaurants, most of the guests are first time and most of them might never come back - It's more a one-time experience - of course.

Of course, everything is more difficult in that way but definitely the focus of making the experience so good that make them come back or if they don't come back recommend and someone else will come to Belcanto because of them and be a first timer of course.

And I feel that it's more difficult to gather some information because - also in the hotel reality - there is a really fine line between personalizing to deliver wow moments and some of the guests feel maybe like their privacy it's being a little bit invaded. So how do you balance that?

Alex Wilson: It's a very good question actually.

I think it's you've really got to strike the balance well. I would say from my experience it comes down a lot to how you emotionally connect with the guest. If I'm talking from my perspective sometimes, I mean, sometimes I get it wrong and I don't read the guest as much as I should have done.

But sometimes it's very difficult you think well you know maybe I'll go a hundred steps very far and then it's wrong or you don't go far enough, and you don't really hit it.

But I think it's a lot about the emotional connection that you have with the guest, how you build that relationship and I think for the lot of the regular guests that I look after now it's all through that relationship building and getting to know them on a you know not a casual way but you want to build up that trust with them.

But I think when someone is celebrating an anniversary, a celebration, a birthday, when it's a special occasion, I think the guest has a certain expectation that you will deliver quite a lot.

Some people don't like celebrating their birthday which is fine but if they have got a big occasion they just had on their honeymoon, they just got married, it's the anniversary, they have an expectation that you will do something. Whereas there are other guests who are just coming for a weekend away and you try to find out a little bit more information and they're the ones that maybe will push back a bit more. But I think also it depends on the age demographic.

I think if you're a millennial, a Gen Z, you probably would like that sort of thing because you're a bit more innovative, creative and you like that sort of thing. But with a more you know the boomer generation, people in their like 60s to 80s now, you just must be very delicate on how you approach it. So, it all comes down to, for me, you've got to read the situation, how you emotionally connect with the guest because we all interact with guests very differently and it also very much depends on the age of the guests that you're looking after.

Beatriz Brandt: Okay, I mean that's a really good point. I feel that sometimes some guests, for example in the restaurant or even when I was in a hotel, the elder people maybe they don't open up so much and it's more difficult, of course. So yeah that's also like the point that I've been understanding with all these conversations that to read the guests it's the most important and how you balance all this privacy and personalization and also for example when I spoke with the Ritz, the concierge, the main focus he told me I think also that he's an older guy of course and so he has that really formal ideas, that's what I get it and that his main focus was like everything like in personalization depends on how much you want to spend like so his focus was like the money and there's always a point of that of course like it depends on how do the restaurant want to spend in personalization so that was his main like all the conversation was ending on that.

Alex Wilson: He is right, but I do think that concierge teams around the world are all there to make money from a hotel perspective, but you know we had for example, I'll give you an example, the other day we had a family of, there were six guests staying, grandparents, parents and the grandchildren. They were staying with us for eight days, their total accommodation was just over £30,000 so it was their granddaughter's eighth birthday but they wanted to not only celebrate her birthday, they didn't want the brother to feel left out either so they wanted to do a joint birthday celebration even though his birthday was in four months' time but they wanted us to go all out there and but money to them wasn't really an object about what they, they just wanted to make sure their kids and their grandkids were happy. So we split the cost, we charged half the guest for the amenities, the balloons, all the things we did for the children and the other half the hotel cupboard because you know their total bill at the end was about £55,000 so you have to weigh up also, we want to do a little bit to be able to get them back in the future because they booked to come back in December which is lovely and it's got to be a bit of a, again it's this balancing act about how much you do against what they spend and how we're going to get in return as well so it's a very, as you said earlier, it's a very fine line.

Beatriz Brandt: Yes I also think that these guests in like these type of hotels and restaurants like they have everything that they want basically so money it's not, it's never a problem, most of them sometimes for example in the restaurants I feel that there's the other guests that join a lot of for sometimes years to, to be there and have the experience so of course this is another type of guests and but it happens in restaurants mainly and so I think that money it's, it's not the issue of course it's something that helps to develop but in the end I don't, I mean I don't think that it will be like the, it will provoke the wowest moments in the experience because I feel that sometimes the guests will be more, will be, will be more the personal connection and like how they thought about this, they remember, other than like offering them something you know like the, how can I say, the intention is more valuable I think

Alex Wilson: so I think in luxury whether it be hotels or restaurants or the cruise industry or whatever sector you're looking at I really feel and I've got a lot of experience with this now is that the guests have got lots of money is and they love to spend it, some of them are still quite reserved and they have a limit and a line but it's this real, I don't think we're ever going to get away from the fact that people who have money will always want to have personalization and have human, human interaction with, with a person. With my career I've had, I mean I've worked, I've worked in, well in London now I've only worked in two hotels in the last 10 years of my time in London and the guests that I used to look after at Browns moved with me to the Goring because of that personal interaction and the things that I did for them and, and there's some of them are you know people who just come to London once every two or three months for a treat, others are multimillionaires and have lots of you time on their hands and others are CEOs of massive companies but, but they all have followed me, I mean there's nine of them I have now.

From Browns to here because of, because it is that, that personal connection and they also know that they're gonna get what they want.

Beatriz Brandt: Without the need of asking, right?

Alex Wilson: Without, yes.

And then you know, I know we were talking about, obviously a lot about first-time wow experience but for them I suppose in a little way it's a wow experience for all of them all the time with how much they have that, still that very close personal interaction with, with one person. And so, it's, it's a very interesting thought-provoking subject.

Beatriz Brandt: I'm always like thinking about this you know because for example honestly, it's a little bit difficult to work it, to write a thesis about this because this is really like a little bit of psychological and not like management as it's the, like the course overall you know. So that's

why I'm trying to like to find the balance but, in the end, the, it will come to human touch let's say like this.

So besides human touch like what do you think the role of technology plays in this? Do you have, like for example do you use AI already? Like most of the people I spoke with they are not using AI. Like how do you play with technology?

Alex Wilson: In terms of guests or just day-to-day work as well?

Beatriz Brandt: It can be day-to-day but, in the end, it will influence on the guests.

Alex Wilson: So, at the moment at the hotel, because we are a very traditional English old-school hotel, we don't use any AI at all. We've had a few AI workshops with people who have come into the hotel to try and sell us technology, different things that they've spoken about which has been very very interesting.

Obviously, it's gonna play a big part moving forward isn't it in the future. But in terms of what we do for guests, it doesn't impact guests at all now. But in terms of what we do behind the scenes, so I use it a lot and my team use it a lot for the dictation of guest correspondence and emails.

We do use it even though there is a margin of error with it. It does help with templates and writing and things like that.

So, we do use it from an administration point of view, guest services and front office. And I know that some of the secretaries to the GM and the MD also use it as well for different things.

And we've started to use it a little bit in the kitchen.

We've had a brand-new kitchen put in place in the last six months and we use, or the chef is using some AI in terms of his ordering and things like that for food and menus and that sort of thing. How he's using it I don't really know but I know, I know he's having some influence in the way that he works.

But in terms of guest usage and guest influence at the moment, it's nothing.

Beatriz Brandt: I mean I think that it's the future of course, but in the end there's a lot of guests still that when they're trying to have this information and experience, they don't want that.

Alex Wilson: I think it will still be in 10, 15, 20 year's time if you roll two decades on. I think people who are still paying, because I don't think the rates are going to come down in hotels around the world now. I think they're very set where they are at the moment. I think they're still going to want to have someone to book a restaurant, book a car, book this, book that.

I think there would still be a need in luxury for, and for restaurants as well. You're going to still want to have that. I mean going to a Michelin star restaurant when I go, yes it's a lot of it is about the food and the wine and the pairing and all that sort of thing, but I go to a restaurant wanting to talk and meet with the staff, with the team, because you want the story of the restaurant, the story of the food, the story of everything about how it all comes together.

You want it to be told to you, don't you?

Beatriz Brandt: Like how do you see in the future that the guest experience and personalization will evolve throughout the years, the next years?

Alex Wilson: I think if you really want to understand your guests and because ultimately, in my view, it's a very simple formula. If you don't obtain guest preferences and guest information and really delve into the detail, you won't get to that point of being able to turn that person into a repeat client.

So it's going to be this constant development and pushing over, you know, many years ahead. And I think it's going to be very important to continue really delving into guest minds and the psychology that goes behind it to find out what they really want. And also, the keeping up with lots of different trends as well.

Whether that be people moving to be more vegetarian or pescatarian rather than having meat or whether they don't want to fly by a jet that has a, you know, gallons and gallons of fuel and they want to travel sustainably by boat. I think all these things, the trends are a big thing too.

Especially in these younger generations now, and I'm noticing it in my team, because I've got a lot of students with me at the moment who are between the ages of 18 and 21 and they are very different to how I was 19- to 21-year-old.

You have to manage them in a very different way now and I think that's going to be the case also with guests as well. It's how do they mirror their expectations too. So it's going to be very interesting as time goes on.

Beatriz Brandt: I agree with you.

Alex Wilson: that's down to, a lot of it obviously does come down to your level of experience, how you're trained, the skill sets that you have, I mean that obviously does play a big part. But also, it's got to come from the individual that they really want to care and have passion about what they do, which is still a big part of being in hospitality, isn't it? You see that care, that empathy, that passion and some of those skills can't be taught. It comes from within.

I mean you can guide it, but it also has to come from the person, doesn't it?

But they do go hand in hand and if you do have the great skills and you have the great training from brilliant mentors and you've got all that, the right attitude, the care, the passion that goes with it, the level of engagement then goes from a 5 to a 10 instantly because you are super engaged, you're super memorable about what you're doing, you're able to obtain and secure all those preferences and those details of guests and then hopefully between you and colleagues you're able to bring people back. But I think psychology does play a big part in your project.

I know, I know, it's true and for me it's like really interesting to see that and how it also differs from the restaurant and the hotel but in the end it's all the same and I mean the guests are looking for the same but we deliver it a different way, that's the truth, right?

Beatriz Brandt: And so, I see that you have, of course, you have experience in a Michelin restaurant so can I ask you a little bit besides of the hotel which was the experience that made you wow the most in a Michelin restaurant or you never had that?

Alex Wilson: Oh gosh, I've been to a few now, which is the best one I've been to. I mean the first one I went to was when I was 18, still remember it now, and we went to Zafferano's Italian restaurant in Sloane Square.

The restaurant's still there now but the chef left so the star obviously was no more because obviously the star moves with the chef, doesn't it? Or they can lose the star depending on the quality of the food and service. So, it was my first time going to a Michelin star restaurant. I mean the welcome was outstanding and from the moment when you walk through the door to the table just that whole process was completely seamless and lots of engagement from the team and then I went with a family friend who took me there for my birthday and the table was exquisite, the cutlery was exquisite, the pristine linen tablecloths and napkins that had been beautifully pressed, the scent and the smell around the restaurant.

I think it was almond Jane candle scent that they had which is really, beautiful. It's a very luxurious still going candle shop in Mayfair and it was a Michelin starred fish restaurant. I remember having crab salad to start and I had lobster Thermador for main course and I still to this day say it was the best lobster Thermador I've ever had.

Beatriz Brandt: It's amazing how you remember all of that.

Alex Wilson: It was but it was just so, and I was constantly watching the waiters, the waitresses, the maître, how they interacted. And it was just like being on stage.

You could see, and I think that is what makes a good Michelin star restaurant, is that synergy between the team and how they connect without even speak.

All about synergies with FH and Back of the house team. How to use this in advantage for the guest.

Beatriz Brandt: Yes, that is true. This synergy is just incredible.

Well, thank you so much for you time and availability. It was such a pleasure to meet you and hearing your insights.

Alex Wilson: Thank you Beatriz. Just reach out to me if you need anything else.

Interview with Francisco Fernandes – Former Development Chef at *The Fat Duck*

Beatriz Brandt: Hello Francisco, good morning.

Francisco Fernandes: Good morning, Beatriz.

Beatriz Brandt: How are you?

Francisco Fernandes: I'm fine, thank you. And you?

Beatriz Brandt: Great, thank you.

Thank you so much for your time, Francisco!

Francisco Fernandes: You're welcome. So, how can I help you?

Beatriz Brandt: So, first of all, I think it's easier to explain a little bit what I'm doing and the goal. So, I was doing a master's degree in management with a specialty in hospitality and customer experience.

I've had some professional experience in hospitality specially in hotels, but more recently I've gained more interest in the fine-dining world.

And I thought I'd like to incorporate that into my thesis and do something that that gives me pleasure to do.

The theme will be how a Michelin restaurant personalize its customer experience.

And I've been doing interviews and thankfully I was able to meet with you.

Francisco Fernandes: Ok great! From where do you want to start?

Beatriz Brandt: I would love to know about your experience at The Fat Duck.

Francisco Fernandes: I worked at The Fat Duck from 2017 until the end of 2020.

I was part of the development team, and I was in the laboratory. The laboratory is basically where we do the test of the recipes. And try to put the new recipes in the group's restaurants.

But we also do the conceptualization. And it's where, basically, when there's a new project. Where it's created and where all the teams are involved.

I would be part of everything in the restaurant, the service, the kitchen, the guest relationships. Everything a little bit. And so, I was lucky to be able to see how everything worked.

This type of initiative, especially the personalization part, it's something that interferes a lot in the normal process of things.

The service is a bit the same. That is, in the kitchen part, you prepare the menu. You always have the same orders, the same ingredients.

You do your meal in place. You do the service. The person chooses the menu or not.

It depends on the type of service you have. And so, the service is also a bit the same. Present the menu, present the dishes.

Serve the dishes, serve the drinks. And that's it.

The personalization, in addition to entering this process, it's no longer an automatic process.

That's why only the Michelin chefs can do it. In addition to the economic power, they have.

They also have a number of staff to do it.

I can tell you how it was during when I was there. So, let's start from the beginning.

Beatriz Brandt Yes.

Francisco Fernandes: How do we personalize a menu? There are two types of personalization.

That you can have in the Michelin star.

I'll start with the first one. Which is the most general.

And it's what most restaurants do. And then I'll talk to you a little bit about the other type.

You have the guest relationships. You have the concierge. Everything you need to do for the client.

You have that person there. And you see in that series also that little side of... When you have guests coming to the restaurant, they are not clients, they are guests. When you have guests entering the restaurant.

I'll tell you a real story. We had a lady who came to the restaurant barefoot.

And we asked what happened. And the lady, very embarrassed, said... "Look, I'm sorry. But running to the train, to make sure we would arrive on time, I lost my shoe on the train's line"

Beatriz Brandt: I don't even know what to think about that..

Francisco Fernandes: We said "No problem. We don't have a dress code." We even tell people to come as comfortable as possible. Because it's an experience of almost five hours. And therefore, we don't have a dress code.

What did we do? That's where the customization of the services came from.

I go and buy shoes for the lady and gave a pair of shoes for her.

Or for example, has happened several times in Fat Duck, offering a dish or the entire lunch, or sometimes offering the drinks.

You can find at the Fat Duck all type of guests, from Millionaires to people who have saved money for 7, 8 years to be able to go to The Fat Duck.

Chef Heston Blumenthal, as he is famous in England. He was the first celebrity chef, and he is often in television.

People would cross the country, or even the world just to eat at The Fat Duck.

I remember we receive a a retired couple, who just chose the basic menu, and no drinks. And we spoke with the sommelier to offer them the drinks and we did.

You can call it personalization.

Beatriz Brandt Of course.

Francisco Fernandes: We would do everything for the guest. But we also have this connection with the person.

the fact is that there was a lot of that. And it was one of the restaurants that I enjoyed working the most. Because of that.

You went in there and it looked like you were at home. There wasn't that... That thing of being three Michelin stars.

That our restaurant was one of the best restaurants in the world. By the quality of the things. By the environment. But you weren't noticing in our formal attitude.

This is what helped to create those connections with the person, and then personalize their experience.

And then there are those little details inside the restaurant that already exist incorporated. That you can call "false personalization".

Which is, for example, if someone forgets the pair of glasses, at home, we had a box, that was made by the people who make Western glasses.

Which is a bit unrecognizable.

It was the same people who made it, the model was the same.

So, people could say they had a pair of Western glasses. In the various possible graduations.

If someone forgot the pair of glasses. We could get there. We presented the box.

We said, "What is your graduation?" And the person had a pair of glasses to be able to read the menu and read the things we were going to give them.

It's not a personalization, because anyone can wear glasses.

Beatriz Brandt Of course.

Francisco Fernandes: We had several small things implemented. So that people could feel as comfortable as possible.

And that they could feel as comfortable as possible. Because the truth is that it will be five hours with a person. You're going to be there for five hours.

And you want that the person doesn't notice that it's five hours. And that. He wants to be there.

At the Fat Duck we had an immersive experience.

The menu was already pre-programmed.

So now, going back a little bit, regarding the guest data. The fact is that with COVID, It has changed a little bit.

But for many years, it was at least a three-month waiting list.

Since 2005. Or even before 2005. It was already a three-month waiting list.

With three months in advance, they would take the opportunity to those people who would come every three months.

During these three months, they would gather as much as information about these people and to be able to excite these people to come to our restaurant.

When making a reservation, you will have the minimums: Name, date of birth, e-mail, and contact.

And with that. You can already customize, a little bit.

With knowing where the guests are from, we would then pair the best waiter to serve them, if possible with the same nationality.

You already have that customization, that the Michelin restaurants, also do.

Beatriz Brandt: Can you remember any specific memory?

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, once we welcomed a Portuguese chef, whom I do not remember the name, to celebrate his first prize.

The team came to talk to me about it.

I was not a waiter. So, what did I do? I spoke to the server who was paired. I tried to explain as much as possible the Portuguese experience and what are our types of experiences. We served some things, traditional Portuguese food.

And in the end, was the chef was from the industry, they asked me to give him a guided tour to the rest of the buildings: kitchen, pre-kitchen, laboratories, and so on.

Again, personalization of his personal experience.

Since he's from the area, he can see a lot more than a normal guest and in his own language because I was the one doing the visit and since I was from the laboratory and in Fat Duck there's a thing that only the laboratory workers can the laboratory tour.

He had the opportunity to go to the laboratory because he was with me. Because, if there was a waiter who spoke Portuguese and had taken him to the tour, he would never go to see the laboratory because they basically don't know what projects they can share, what they can say and what they can't say because there's a lot of secrecy in the laboratory and only the laboratory worker knows how to handle that information.

We were able to do a lot because we had a team dedicated to get to know the guests prior their arrival: the guest experience and the reservation's team.

There was a site with games that people who had a reservation had access where they could entertain, and this was aimed to create what is called positive feedback that is part of the experience. It's not so much personalization but I think it's interesting to understand where the beginning of the experience and where the personalization starts

The feedback went beyond that basic personalization, it was the beginning of that experience. Do you know that feeling that you're trying to remember something but you don't know what and you start getting irritated and suddenly feeling that pleasure you have when you finally remember? This is the positive feedback.

The goal is to give you clues.

So later when you are the restaurant having the experience, you will find that this clues you had, were related to the final experience.

You feel that you are familiar with that, but you don't remember from where you know that.

And then, when you remember it gives a huge satisfaction to remember and of course having that huge satisfaction inside the restaurant makes your experience much higher

And suddenly in 2014, The Fat Duck was closed for renovations and was the first restaurant in the world to take everything it had including pans forks, machines, staff - everything - to Australia for 9 months where lost the 3 stars because in Australia the Michelin Guide was not covered.

Basically it was a business opportunity because Western is very famous in Australia so much that they couldn't even sell tickets normally.

They had to do raffles and basically people had to candidate for a ticket. They didn't know if they'll be able to get it and he did that because there were a lot of people wanting to go and he was only open with The Fat Duck in Australia for 9 months and during that time they laid the restaurant down, in England, to rebuild the restaurant again because they needed to increase the space.

Beatriz Brandt: That is truly a marketing strategy.

Francisco Fernandes: Now, we already have the positive feedback. Then they thought about what they do more than just the experience. So, they went to talk to psychologists and with actors, people from the theater, with magicians and they made an experience completely out of the box in which they had the magic tricks without realizing that they were magic tricks. Chris Cox, who is a mentalist, helped our employees to understand and to read body language with the goal to understand what the person likes or doesn't like.

Chef Blumenthal wanted the waiters to be able to understand why the guest is reacting a certain way and being able to understand if they enjoyed the dishes without asking at the end of each dish "is everything ok?", "did you like it?".

He said, and I think he's right, "we're in a Michelin 3-star restaurant, if I'm paying this amount of money, it's good that things are good even if it's not to my liking"

It's good that things are good and then comes the personalization.

Within these 3 months, before the experience, the first question is asking for allergies, things you like or don't like, because you won't have a choice.

For example, I have requirements and you don't have and we're paying the same I can't have less than you or you can't have the same as me so I have to have plates to replace exactly the same or as similar as possible or at the same level as the plate I'm serving to the normal person so there comes the first level of personalization with the fact that you did and nowadays I see restaurants doing the same but I never saw the level with the fact that you did you have exactly the same plate.

Beatriz Brandt I've never seen that

Francisco Fernandes: You'll have the same plate. Sometimes it's impossible and we have to replace it but I say 75% of the time it's exactly the same plate but adapted to your needs. Whenever I did a new dish, I still had one or two months to go I had to do the various versions of dietetics, still had to make the gluten-free dessert...

Beatriz Brandt lactose-free...

Francisco Fernandes: Sometimes I had to see what the best options were it could be that I had to make a gluten-free a lactose-free and another vegan. There were times that I could do everything in a single vegan and gluten-free, but sometimes not.

I had to make the various possible versions of that dessert or that dish and so it's a great customization because you'll have a menu the same as the other.

Beatriz Brandt: So, you didn't substitute the dessert with another dessert. You would make the same dessert but a different version of it, that could accommodate all the food restrictions. That is incredible.

Francisco Fernandes: Sometimes, we had to remove if there is no possible solution.

There are things that we couldn't come up with

For example, we already had diabetics to ask for the caloric value of the whole menu, which is like 17 dishes.

But sometimes in the 17 dishes you had 4 or 5 recipes in each dish, from 8 to 17 mini recipes inside.

I imagine the work that it wasn't. But we also had to do that. One more thing.

Sometimes we had to replace the complete dish. For something else that was more enjoyable.

But we had this advantage.

I may not have the same dish as you, but I still have a dish that everyone knows. We don't have it in the menu anymore. But you will recognize it.

And you will feel even more special to everyone. You will have a dish that no one will have.

And it's a dish that you recognize because it was on TV.

Or someone talked about it. Or it was one of the most famous dishes that Western made. So we had this advantage.

We had this part of celebrity that helps us to distribute the game. You won't be the same.

Beatriz Brandt: That is amazing.

Francisco Fernandes: Right?

Then, after having all the information's about food restrictions, they'll ask you two questions.

The creation of these questions had assistance with a psychologist.

These questions would force you to speak.

The first was, what made you feel like a child in a candy store? And the second was... What was the most nostalgic moment of your holidays?

The overall experience was an immersive experience, there was a story behind it. The story that was found at the menu was a typical day of English holidays.

And then there was the customization. Because a day of holidays, for me, is not the same for you.

These questions would make people write testaments and go deeper on what they say.

They will have 3 months to know everything about you and being able to create an immersive experience for you, based on what you responded.

They will make a call with you, and use with techniques that the psychologists gave to create techniques to try to make questions in a way that the person can get information and then you can register that information.

They would also look for you online, Instagram, Facebook, to try to understand and look for information, to collect photographs for that moment.

I can tell you about my grandmother's experience at the restaurant:

My grandmother speaks a lot of Bussaco and that she would spend the holidays when it was a kid.

Basically, there is a part of the menu that is in-to-the-wood, it's a part of the day of the holidays.

You start in-to-the-wood to the place, then you go to the lunch box, then you go to the beach to eat fish and chips, and then you go to the forest.

Of course, this is the english typical day, then continuing the menu is the forest, you go to sit outside.

And in the part of the forest, my grandmother always speaks about the forest, what did they do?

My grandmother specifically told me to be in a garden bank in the forest with my father. That's what they did in the forest, that garden bank.

We had a 3D printer to prepare the objects

Beatriz Brandt: They really dedicate so much in it.

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, we even had a person who, basically, she did sculptures by hand.

She is a designer; we call her the Imagineer because the Imagineer is a position that Disney created and there is a complex a complex of companies. Today it's a company only of Disney, which is Imagineering and basically it was the creation of Imagination for Engineering of

Imagineering and basically, it's a person who is generally an engineer and they are people who create the part of the parks.

The park is also an experience of Disney, an impressive experience and therefore people who are the creation basically of the imaginary but in practice.

Once a client mentioned that her favorite holiday moment was when she went to Greece with her husband. Can you guess what she did? She found her and her husband on Instagram and sculpted them and incorporated the sculpture in the experience.

Beatriz Brandt No way...

Francisco Fernandes: People could mention a food or a nostalgic moment of his life, and they would incorporate it in the experience.

The last question of “what it feels like as a child in a candy store” is a very English saying as sweet candy shop means is that dazzling enthusiasm.

Chef Blumenthal spooke a lot of nostalgia and we try to incorporate in what we did.

Nostalgia is something that influences memories and influences the way you take pleasure in things.

Imagine that you would mention a recipe of your grandmother, doing it industrially will always result in a different version, but we would do it our way. We wanted to provoke this nostalgia in people with these personalized moments.

Therefore it forces the restaurant a lot to personalize the menu.

Beatriz Brandt: How would you do it if the guest didn't respond to any of your contacts?

Francisco Fernandes: Of course, this happens. For this people we would go for our “standard” menu.

If they did not respond to anything, we will try to create an immersive experience with what we identify from when they arrive at the restaurant.

Beatriz Brandt: But they are not so personal...

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, these personalized nostalgia moments will not exist.

Some things don't go always the way we idealize.

The Chef had a lot of contacts in the English industry, and he had access to the perfumes, the liquid nitrogen the recipes, I don't know if you remember some things from Listerine which were some little papers you put them in your mouth to have a good breath?

Beatriz Brandt: No, I don't know.

Francisco Fernandes: So, they gave us the recipe of this.

This is the phase that we call the psychological phase of the Western, which is if you had to study physics then chemistry. This is not the psychological phase. Then there was psychology, so much nostalgia involved, this is anthropology, the study of humans which basically combined everything that was behind.

Beatriz Brandt: Ok, wow.

Francisco Fernandes: During the experience, we also had another cool personalized moment, that would start in the beginning and would end in the final moment.

You would be offered some cards and you would be asked to choose your English breakfast: coffee or tea? mint, orange or orange juice? Your favorite jam, strawberry or tomato? Your favorite type of cereal?

This would give a level of suspicion that we wanted to provoke.

In the end of the experience, what you selected would be your petit fours. Each petit four would have the selected flavors.

I had to say that 100% to 70% of the work of the pastry was just to do this. Imagine. Imagine just the level of work that I had to do.

It took many hours to work.

Beatriz Brandt: I can imagine. Because you have so many options of choices.

Francisco Fernandes: The Chef Blumenthal's kitchen is a multi-sensorial. That is, the goal is to have the five senses.

The chef used a lot of molecular cooking, but it was used in the sense of making a multi-sensorial. So, everything for the five senses.

We even had the light of the restaurant that changed the environment exactly to change the person's experience. That's why we call it an immersive experience.

So, you chose English Breakfast. We had the ingredients, and the cereal pack, bacon, that is, cereals were breakfasts with English Breakfast. So, you created this moment of playing cards, and all the dishes have this kind of moment, in which you fool a little person, in which you use colors, forms, exactly, to fool your brain, to think of something, the way we say things, and you got distracted from what you wrote, this ending was for nothing.

But how is it so fun that the ending is funny, you know, it was just to fool us, no. You, when you answer that question, you end up answering something that is, in the end, an experience.

Because in this game you got distracted, and you forget.

Beatriz Brandt It's already done, the game.

Francisco Fernandes: It's done, it's a game, the ending was just to fool us, the ending was all the same, it wasn't for us to ask, you continue the experience, there is a phase that is, when you are on the beach, there is always that moment to eat the ice cream, right? Yes. So, we are on a move to buy the ice cream.

And of course, it appears on the ice cream, it appears on the menu, with all the ice creams, typical English, and the ice creams are all salty, and one of the ice creams is the ice cream cream ice cream. And they are things, these little moments that also help you, after a while, to extract a little bit of it. There is also an explanation of why we say ice cream ice cream, and not your example, for example, a ice cream ice cream with ice cream.

Or, for example, I want exactly the perfect ice cream ice cream, and the more you eat it, the saltier it gets. To see the contrast.

The ice cream was there. And we say later, because I forgot to tell you something, inside the box of ice creams there is also a toy. So, you come inside the box of ice creams, each of us chooses the ice cream, there are several designs, each of us chooses the ice cream, but each of us has a little toy that is made of wood, then you build the ice cream and then you put it there.

Beatriz Brandt That's why it's such a long experience, because between dishes there is that.

Francisco Fernandes: Between dishes, sometimes with the dishes, imagine this part, I put the six cereal boxes, because I'm going to put everything as if it were a cereal box.

I put the dish, which is a very small dish, it's a Japanese dish, which is basically an egg cooked in steam, that is, a beaten egg cooked in steam, then you put the cereal on top. We explain this all, which is not a joke, this is a full English breakfast, the egg is here, the bacon is there, the pork is there, and then this is the conversation you make with the guest, then you go away and then you have fun until you finish eating and then you go back, you collect the dishes, I don't know what, so it happens naturally with the customer's spontaneity, the guest, you, as a storyteller, you give that first push to explain, to the side, small appointments, that is, it is very important, you give those little ones, and now don't forget to play, and you go away and they open it, they see a joke from the inside, they go up, but here, things like that, small, small, to the customers, without saying exactly what they want to do, but you give that little one...

Beatriz Brandt to the customers, a little bit too.

Francisco Fernandes: And then you put the coin inside the little box, and basically that thing of... Now I'm seeing that I was wrong, the coin is not the coin that you buy from the side, the coin is the exchange of the side, that is, it takes 99 cents, takes a centime of exchange, and you keep it in your wallet, that's it. It's been a few years, I don't know what you're talking about.

And you stay with the coin, that's it, it's your exchange, you think it's another joke, that you stay, after you have the little one on your side, in which we are keeping our things, some little things, we are studying, you stay with them, there is a dish that takes them like a bookmark, as they say, a bookmark, which is to explain the dish itself, because it is a dish from the country of the country of wonders, it was the first dish in the world to have storytelling, and it is very well known for its experience, and the way people interact with the dish, because it makes sense to be a bookmark, a bookmark, and you put it here and there, and they always put it in your pocket to take things home.

The box of the series, you take them home, the coin, the little things, then you take them home to finish the experience. Where is the personalization of all that started in this whole story? We got to the end of the experience, and suddenly it arrived at the foot of a little house of dolls, like this one too.

Thank you. It's a little house of dolls, and you start to realize that there is a replica of the restaurant.

Beatriz Brandt: Really?

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, but why don't you realize it?

Beatriz Brandt: But do you still form a child?

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, a little house of dolls, comes in a small car, full of rolls, but I propose to send the video too, because for me it is the most personalized moment of all, I always realize that let's see the video, the sweet shop, we call it the sweet shop, that is, so much, basically that little house costs as much as the Ferrari, when everything is done by hand, everything is done by hand, because there is a technology there inside, that is why I am going to explain now, that basically the little house you received the story of it opens the house, the house opens all the way, and suddenly you have a basement, in the basement you have the room of the child, and you have the library of the west, and then there is the explanation of what is

the room, there are little Easter Eggs inside of the rooms, that then we tell of course people will understand, but then there is the front, where the house would be, are drawers, as if it were the drawers of the other stores, but then in the middle, and we ask for the box, we put the box inside the cart, and the cart starts to make a dance with the drawers, that is, they make patterns, open the box, and suddenly ends up in only one drawer, we have a small clip, a small clip, that transforms the drawer into one of those scoops of the others, and we take the drawer, we present to the person who gave the coin, and we say here is an orange hero, the orange hero, his sweet, who asked for morango, is here, sweet morango, everything that was in that clip, I asked everyone, and it was the drawer of the person who likes it, but it is the drawer of the person who likes it, because it is also the drawer of the person who likes it, the drawer of the person who likes it, for the splashes, and of course it was the same for everyone, and there were others who were personalized, so the hero was personalized, there was this orange or orange element, the cup ring card, it was also a little ring card, which was a good one, it came from an envelope, and it was also filled with different sweets, the sweet, like in bread, it was sweet tomato with coffee, in the menu you could choose the mora, the strawberry, the fish, it was a huge collection, and that was for the card, that of the chums, that of the sweets, it was for the card, and so you chose it, and the person was like, if the person liked it, they were there, and the person remembered it, so he chose it at the beginning,

Beatriz Brandt: and that's it,

Francisco Fernandes: and that's it,

Francisco Fernandes: it was the little holes, it was the last part of the menu, and therefore, to take more time, because I had to make a giant section, that is, imagine, the cup ring, it leaves a lot in the morning, I don't know how many cards with the same flavor, the hero is difficult to do, because basically the hero is possible to do it in the industry, but we had to basically do it with the recipe, and it was the first restaurant to make the chocolate aerated, and it's a chocolate

difficult to do, at the level of this mix, it can't have any small crack, so it has a little crack, it's a little crack, it's a little crack, there was not much crack, there was not much crack on the chocolate part, and I can stop it, but the personalization is this problem, which is the crack, you can stop it, but it's also a double hand, and the money that you can make in these small toys. I can say it was here, because the core of it It is this type of experience, it is a surreal movement, it is to play with the scientists, it is to play with people, it is completely different from an experience of a normal restaurant.

But after this experience, it was in a bag, with 17 dishes or more, the latter of the times people were no longer eating more. So this one was always to take, it had to be the adaptability of things, to take it down and it had 5, 4 or 6 dishes to take with you. And then you have to take care of all the people.

Because what gives work is that you have to identify, in Icelandic countries we always have months and positions. That is, if I say it is M4P1, it is M4, position 1. That is, it is the person who is in that position all the time, you know.

And you have to make this, parallel this and how it should be. That is, the coin has to be parallel with the person, the fork has to be parallel with the person and the sweets that are there have to be parallel with the person. So that's why it had to be at the beginning of the reception, for the employees of the month to be able to register, make a ticket to the sweet shop and the bakery go to the restaurant and be able to fill the glasses as it should be.

Now, there is a funny thing, that is, at the moment the service enters, no one, if they talk about being from the front of the house, enters the restaurant. That's right. So everything that happened, there was only one door to enter, the old restaurant, only one door to enter and the exit.

There is no way to enter that restaurant anymore. Why? Because you always have to go through the room.

Well, there is no door to enter through the room.

Beatriz Brandt There is no door to enter through the room?

Francisco Fernandes: There is no door to enter through the room. Once we bought the next door, it was exactly to do that.

So, there was a special box, where you could put your clothes on. And you had to go through this box, and you couldn't even go through it. Because there was a person lined up with a box full of cabbages and wood, I don't know what was wrong there.

You couldn't go through those things. The only people who could enter the restaurant during the service time were the soldiers. We had the soldiers, they only did a part of the bakery.

And why did they let me enter? When I had to enter with the bread, for at least in the dinner chapter, I mean, it was the bread of the restaurant. It was the time when some of the people were in the chapter of the little lunch.

Beatriz Brandt I think they're expensive, but at the same time, they still have that return.

Francisco Fernandes: And the personalized experience, I got to this point. Until when you leave, you still receive another email. Thank you.

I compromise the experience and I compromise what we did with you.

Beatriz Brandt Yes, that's unique.

Francisco Fernandes: Don't forget what happened there.

Beatriz Brandt And do you have regular clients, usually?

Francisco Fernandes: We do.

Beatriz Brandt And how do you do it in that sense?

Francisco Fernandes: We have their historic in our systems. In other words, the token leaves you to buy a ticket.

In the token, you register an account.

Beatriz Brandt Yes.

Francisco Fernandes: It means that the account is then associated with the person. And then internally we can put notes in those letters. In other words, if the person has returned to the restaurant with my name, then you have a way...

You do the reservation. We call five people. Then you receive an email asking who are the five people.

If you answer it even better, because then we receive those names in the reservation, and if any of the other people returns, I can write their name and that reservation appears.

Beatriz Brandt: But how do you also ask, literally, who are the other people?

Francisco Fernandes: No, an automatic email appears so that it doesn't seem that they are us. We send the order, it's our reservation system, is that behind the token there are several functionalities. And one of them is sending the automatic emails....

It doesn't seem that we have to fill it up. It appears to you as the main reservation. And then it appears, imagine, it's going to be a table of six.

It appears five spaces. And then one, two, three, four, five. Next to it, you ask the name, email and call.

We want to send the email to all the people. I mean, those two questions we ask to all the people.

Beatriz Brandt Ok. I already understood. It is not one person that replies for the other members of the party.

Francisco Fernandes: Yeah. We try to avoid it. Sometimes it happens.

But we try to avoid it. I mean, we want to know all of them. Sometimes we can just tell them to send them to each other.

Beatriz Brandt Ok.

Francisco Fernandes: Send them to each other. Ok. The reality is that this mail, there are more chances of being the person who made the reservation.

It's to respond to the two. Well, because it seems to me that it's just a month or two, than people to respond to these things, because they don't know what it is to know. And that's why I think it's the best way to respond.

Beatriz Brandt: How do you guarantee that a welcome back guest doesn't have the same experience twice?

Do you change all experience or is it going to be the same?

Francisco Fernandes: The usual, for us, is spent six months here. The person is back.

Beatriz Brandt Yes.

Francisco Fernandes: We don't have guests who goes there every week. Yes. The maximum we can have been a person who goes there every month, but it's for business reasons.

Normally when this happens the guest says, focus on the other person's experience and not me. I want to impress him; I want to close the business with him. Therefore, tell him to come out and when we succeed, we do something.

The person already knows the experience and therefore, if he is back, he will ask, they may have this part of personalization, but the experience is good. Only having the experience is already an experience of three Michelin stars. Personalization.

Beatriz Brandt: Of course. Then your personalization is different. For example, the last interview I did, was with another 3 Michelin-starred restaurant and they embroider the initials of regular customers on napkins

Francisco Fernandes: We also had this, basically, people will have to always take the personalized things home, you always take the bag.

We have a library, made with fake books with the initial recording of the usual client, where they can keep there the things they got through the dinner. So, next time that they come back,

they can have access to it and keep there more things again. Like a collection of your belongings.

Beatriz Brandt And that is more special, because is there the all-time.

Francisco Fernandes: To remember the previous experience and to be able to remember or if you want to use something, or to remember what you did and what you did differently. And so they could take the case if they wanted to, but it was a small case where they were the usual customers. The usual customers were a little they weren't many, but they were a few.

They only had 6 or 7 books. Some even had couples who were there all the time.

Beatriz Brandt: How do you handle privacy through the experience?

Francisco Fernandes: Well, I remember one time, we had a famous actress come to The Fat Duck. Next to her was a couple.

The gentleman wasn't feeling good and vomited. He projected the vomit, really. His wife only took a towel and did this.

Beatriz Brandt: Like a shield.

Francisco Fernandes: Like a shield, she didn't do anything, she didn't help her husband or anything. And then we...

For this type of thing, as it's a small restaurant, and as it's obvious that you can't touch the man, you have to call an ambulance, etc. Then there are the small procedures that any restaurant has to have. Because you can't, especially in such a small restaurant, you can't bother the rest of the customers who are paying.

At this time, the storytellers go to the tables, for the service. So, the kitchen is stopped, the service is stopped, the storytellers go to the tables, to see if everything is okay with their tables.

The storyteller and the waiters of the table that is happening get in touch with the security systems, the ambulance. The table employees, who are not storytellers, are holding towels around them.

Beatriz Brandt: But, like, to cover the customer, right?

Francisco Fernandes: To cover the scene, yes. But first, to give privacy to what is happening. It's first of all.

And then, if there is something that can be more sensitive, for example, If there is children there.

So, it can be... There is something that can be a little more serious. It's also to protect the others a bit.

It's a little bit to protect both sides. Both people who are a little more sensitive, and also how to give privacy to what is happening to people. Nobody is to blame for having a medical emergency, right?

So, we have some plans to cover the situation. Sometimes it is not necessary, but in this case it was, because the man vomited. So, then we still have to do the cleaning, and so on.

So, sometimes we even offer visits to the kitchen.

But this is already the level of service. I no longer consider that personalization.

Beatriz Brandt: Do you feel it was treated differently because there was someone famous there?

Francisco Fernandes: There are no VIPs.

Everyone is a VIP. Everyone is treated the same way.

Of course this type of client needs to give some privacy.

But the restaurant is already private.

Beatriz Brandt: Yes, it is a different context for sure.

Francisco Fernandes: I forget to mention, as a personalization, when people ask about personalization, but, in fact it is, despite being a process, which for us, is a process of organization, as a personalization, therefore, when you arrive at the restaurant, the restaurant is

all closed, that is, you have two large glass windows, next to the main door, and these are covered, precisely for privacy, and the wooden door is closed.

The goal is really to explore, to experiment, and when you enter, you enter a room, for example, in a mirror, we call it the cloud, and you only have, and you don't really know where the door is, there are only two small focuses, like a museum, to illuminate the space, and a fireplace, with a hologram, and this, in an immersive experience, is considered a decompression chamber, you know how it is in submarines, when you have to, or in space, when you have to go from one middle to the other, there is always a chamber, where you fill with water, or the air comes out, between, between two doors, it is an immersive experience.

It requires a little bit of that, because you want the person to leave the middle, from where they came, to your world, so they created there, that little space, where the hologram, helps to start already, imagining what you are going to see, beyond that, that space, and it already gives that feeling, out of this world, and when you open, you have a person built in our uniform, and the person, when you open the door, says your name right away, says "hello, Beatriz, how are you?"

Beatriz Brandt How does she do that?

Francisco Fernandes: Because only you, can enter those doors, at that time, oh, ok, only the person, gets that reaction "how does she know, that I am Beatriz?"

Beatriz Brandt It's you, but how is it that only a person, can enter at that time? Are all my hours, scattered? How does it work?

Francisco Fernandes: 15 in 15 minutes, there is a customer's entrance, and you are showing, three Michelin stars, so the person will arrive at time, most likely, you will arrive at time.

Beatriz Brandt When you do the search and you don't see the person's picture, don't you use that?

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, we do. The person who is going to be at the door will also have to do this little search. This person is not a storyteller, it is a host.

If you have the list in front of you and you have only a table of 4 men. If the 4 men appears outside the time, you know it's them, right?

Beatriz Brandt It makes it easier because you already have the names of the people.

Francisco Fernandes: The most difficult thing is when it's less than 2 people. Because they are more reservations of 2 than 5 people, for example.

Beatriz Brandt: Financial speaking, this high personalization must be a really big investment...

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, it brings costs. And there were times when we had to calm down a bit, there was a time when we did everything. And suddenly the direction of the group said something like, even though the price is included in the personalization, you are going too far. At a time when there were tables where each chapter had the personalization.

Then, regarding food costs, and time as well, for the kitchen it is easier to make a dish for 500 people, than to make 5 dishes for 3 people.

Beatriz Brandt Yes.

Francisco Fernandes: In the laboratory budget. It's not that we don't do it, it's not that we don't do it, but sometimes it's a little monster, sometimes it's hard to control. Because I don't know how it is in hotels, but I believe that you charge that service, right?

Beatriz Brandt: It depends. When I was in Dubai as an intern, I understood that I depends on if the guest required for that or not. If it was the client asking, yes.

But, if there's nothing out of the ordinary, they don't charge.

Francisco Fernandes: Yes, we... It's like this, when I was in a hotel in Italy, they didn't charge, but we had a budget to do that. While here there is no budget, do you understand?

Beatriz Brandt Yes.

Francisco Fernandes: It's more like what I'm saying. Because it's already a service with many tasks, a lot of associated work.

After the customization, it still increases a lot more.

They even had to double the team. The team was already 80 people.

That is, pastry, kitchen, room, cup, laboratory, reserves, office.

It requires a lot, a lot of time as well.

And the problem would be, maybe we would need much less if we didn't do all this personalization. Yes.

But the search for information...

Beatriz Brandt: But that's what makes the difference.

Do you know if they incorporate any technology in their daily tasks? Such as the contact with clients?

Francisco Fernandes: I, in my work, use artificial intelligence more in the aspect of image creation, which also helps, for example, the part of imagination.

Beatriz Brandt: Ok, that is curious.

Francisco Fernandes: If I have any experience, it helps a little bit, but don't forget one thing, it will always give work to someone. Of course. Basically, you just don't need to have someone specialized in that area.

And then it helps a lot in the fine details, in the part of things. The problem is, sometimes I have to search for information about people, and they don't do that.

Beatriz Brandt: Yes.

Francisco Fernandes: The problem is data protection, right?

Beatriz Brandt: Yes, that's it.

Francisco Fernandes: We have the data protection part, and we have a lot of work to do. I'm going to do this all over again. Why?

In the past, it was all a bit of a mess, and we would get everything, and I don't know what, and it would end, and we would do it, and it would happen. Now, we keep this. Of course.

Now the client has to know that we keep this. The client has to know that there is the possibility that we are going to search Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, you know? So, it's all in those terms of contracts, I don't know what.

It's a little more hidden, but if someone asks us, we have to say everything.

Beatriz Brandt: Of course.

Beatriz Brandt: Do you think I would fit in the system of Michelin-starred restaurants?

Francisco Fernandes: But, well, I still see a lot of difficulty. It's because the personalization, the GPT chat, for example, is great, if I wanted to create a text, they said, write a text from someone who has gone on vacation to Greece, and I need to put, great. But someone will have to write this by hand on a card.

It's because, besides that, the Chef didn't want anything written on the computer. Nothing. So, the storytellers had to know calligraphy.

So, there were already sessions where they were training calligraphy to write something for calligraphy.

Beatriz Brandt: Incredible.

Francisco Fernandes: The chef has written everything, if it is to be personalized, it is not a computer that will do it. If you want to have that thing transmitted, I dedicated it to you, and it will have to be written by hand. It was all written by hand.

There were things that weren't, like invitations or things like that. But it was a message from someone to someone, it had to be written by hand. Less personalized, it had to be written by hand.

Beatriz Brandt: Yes. It was a lot of work.

Francisco Fernandes: Yes. Now you understand why there were 80 people and why the personalization gives so much work. Because you're really, the personalization, just to say, at least in the The Fat Duck, just to say that you have your name there, it's not worth it.

You personalized it, you put your name and that's it.

Beatriz Brandt: No.

Francisco Fernandes: It's not worth it. Where is the personal contact? Where is it?

I just made a copy and paste. I put your name there, on your menu, and on Beatriz's menu. For us, that was not the goal.

As I said, nostalgia was the central theme of the menu. And being a multi-sensory kitchen, there has to be much more beyond that. But it is.

Beatriz Brandt: It's amazing.

Francisco Fernandes: That's right. Right. Now I don't remember anything else.

Beatriz Brandt: I think I already have a lot of information.

Thank you so much for your help. It really surprised me and gave me another way of looking to personalization.

