



MADAME ZINGARA

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD GRIFFIN

by EUGENE YIGA

It all began with a Loop Street restaurant in 2001. But over the years, the Madame Zingara brand has expanded to six restaurants in Cape Town: Bombay Bicycle Club, Café Mozart, Café Paradiso, Café Manhattan, Company's Garden Restaurant, and Sidewalk Café. There's also a retail outlet named This Is Not a Post Office, a laundromat the White Rabbit Wash House and the Theatre of Dreams.

Eugene Yiga: You created Madame Zingara, but what is your current involvement or role in the businesses?

Richard Griffin: My main role is Creative Director; that's the part I love most. But I'm also the Managing Director, and the cleaner, and answerable to all.

How do you as a company manage to run so many different restaurants?

I have endless energy and am driven by my passion. Key to this successful multitasking is having the right like-minded people alongside me, and I am fortunate to have a team of talented individuals who have walked the walk with me over the years and remained with me, even though it can be trying at times. They know me and how my brain works.

Ultimately, you are only as good as your people, and I can't take solo credit for any of this success.

You've faced many challenges over the years, including having your first restaurant burn down and facing liquidation



when the economic crisis hit in 2008. What have these experiences taught you?

To never give up, keep the people you trust close to you, and always stay focused. Difficult experiences are as important as good ones, and we are all here to learn and grow. The way I see it is nothing is on your desk unless it's supposed to be there. I work with what I have and find those golden threads where I can.

What's kept you going over the last fifteen years?

Together with an incredible team of passionate and driven people, I love being able to offer surprising food combinations and have a near-obsessive attention to detail. Our offerings seem to continuously amaze and delight.

Why do you think so many people have been so captivated by Madame Zingara's Theatre of Dreams?

I believe it's because we go out of our way to make sure the guest is part of the experience, from the moment they walk in to the moment they say their reluctant goodbyes after an incredible night out. Unlike a normal theatre where you are an observer, the Theatre of Dreams is an all-inclusive and intimate experience with a massive "wow" factor. We take people on a sensory journey and they feel a part of it. I also believe there's a circus child in all of us.

What is The Celebration about?

It's about saying thank you. We're in our fifteenth year and would not be here without the support of our loyal guests and our team. We're going to be celebrating our birthday each and every night with

spectacular entertainment in a mind-blowing custom built double volume palace. It's about ending one era and moving straight into another – a new direction come 2016. And it's about having the biggest party ever, each night for six months in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

What can guests expect to see on the stage of the new mirrored palace?

We've gone all out with this one. Thirty-five award-winning artists from sixteen countries are joining us to give South Africa a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The inimitable Cathy Specific returns after two years as our glamorous MC, resplendent in gorgeous gowns and crystals. With the double volume space, we've been able to bring in even more outstanding acts which we weren't able to do before: acrobatic troupes from China, amazing aerial artists, The Specifics singers, and more. Adding to the theatrics we have pyrotechnics, intelligent lighting, superb surround sound, tons of special effects and even a hot air balloon. This is the Madame as audiences have never seen her before. It'll blow the audience's hair back!

What is your biggest goal for the Madame Zingara brand?

I have definite goals of what I'd like us to achieve. When we get to that place, whenever and whatever it might be, we can assess where we are as a company and look to the next adventure and to the road ahead. I have a family now and so eventually I'd like to step back. But my ultimate goal has always been to leave a solid legacy and see Madame Zingara firmly established as a household name. Only then do I think I'll be able to completely relax. ©

The Celebration runs in Cape Town at the Grand Parade until 26 September and at Montecasino in Johannesburg from 22 October to 31 December.

Bookings: 0861 623 263

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