



“Part of the business’ success is that people are really in love with their food these days. We’re riding the wave of this gourmet-quality thing that’s happening in our society.

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From the foothold of a quiet industrial estate near Normanby Avenue two brothers are serving up millions of gourmet desserts every year, and quietly commanding an expansive market that few people even notice.

THE EMPIRE OF MOUSSE

Exquisite / Thornbury / www.exquisite.com.au

We met with the owners of Exquisite, Nigel and David Rose, two friendly veterans of the dessert trade, who were more than happy to share some of the tactics they’ve used over 25 years to build their mousse empire.

‘A really important ingredient is investing in your business,’ Nigel said as we moved past the hulking industrial mixers. ‘It’s a false economy to try and skimp on good equipment. It’s like insurance, if you want to grow, spend the money up front and it counts in the long run when you need it.’

But equipment is just one part of the story: ‘We would not be here without the good fortune of having wonderful staff. The owners of a business are really just the tip of the iceberg, the real work happens below the surface.’

Founded in 1987, Exquisite started out producing a variety of products, from pâtés and terrines to clotted creams and mango juice. When Nigel joined the business in the early ‘90s, the Rose brothers began culling their product range and with it, their overheads.

By discontinuing or selling off product lines they were able to focus on what they did best, dairy desserts, particularly Exquisite’s signature dish: ‘A traditional chocolate mousse with real cream and real chocolate. It’s top restaurant quality.’

Armed with a quality product, the Rose brothers embarked on a lifelong campaign to grow their business steadily. As with all conquests, it had humble beginnings, ‘We went knocking on the doors of local restaurants and asked if they wanted to stock our gourmet mousses.’ It’s a simple approach that worked well. Years later, it continues to drive Exquisite’s expansion.

Embedding their mousse in the aisles and menus of other businesses built a strong distribution base and occupied new spaces in maturing markets. Profits were re-invested into new and better equipment; economies of scale kicked in; and Exquisite formed new alliances with larger retailers and restaurants – including several franchised fast-food chains.

‘Say you go into a Dominos, they’ve already sold you a pizza because you walked in there specifically to buy a pizza. What they’re understanding now is that they can sell desirable add-ons and get more share of wallet from their customers – a gourmet dessert is a perfect way to increase that sales ticket.’

Today, Exquisite’s mousses are camouflaged in a range of branding, from Dominos’ and Red Rooster’s to the Duchess line carried by Aldi supermarkets. Only 5% of the mousses dispatched from Exquisite’s Normanby Avenue stronghold wear the company’s colours.

Like any good generals Nigel and David also know that the lay of the land is just as important as tactics. ‘Part of the business’ success is that people are really in love with their food these days. We’re riding the wave of this gourmet-quality thing that’s happening in our society.’

Consumers are turning away from reconstituted foods in favour of gourmet products with natural ingredients and clean labelling. Although Exquisite are producing mousse en masse they’ve remained true to authentic production methods that make a quality product from the get go: ‘We still make mousses in the traditional method, by mixing cream and chocolate in a planetary mixer. We do this just like you’d do on a kitchen bench but we do it in 100 litre batches.’

Adding to their brand halo, Exquisite are also green and good. ‘As any business does we use as few resources as possible to produce what we do.’ And they never leave a mousse behind, ‘We send anything we can to Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda.’

David and Nigel are still doing what they’ve always done, preparing for the next long march: they’ve just bought their next generation of equipment; covered the factory roof with enough solar panels to power several dozen homes. Shiploads of Exquisite’s desserts are already heading to New Zealand, Singapore and the Middle East, under a variety of brandings. As additional export markets come online, the next stage of the expansion is becoming increasingly important.

‘A few years after moving to Thornbury we bought out our neighbour thinking, ‘Great, another 900m2, this’ll last us until retirement!’ Then in March of last year we bought the 1700m2 unit on the other side so I guess we’re still growing and on the verge of our next stage.’ ■

DID YOU KNOW...

Council is currently running a pilot export program with ten local businesses.

Left: Filled portions of mousse roll off the production line, ready to be packed and shipped.

Top Right: Nigel Rose (left) and David Rose (right) stand proud in their warehouse.

