

My life in hospitality **Levent Hassan**

Levent Hassan owns Kazan, a Turkish restaurant in Knightsbridge, London, and is about to open a second

 **HIGHS...** Opening a restaurant serving Turkish food was a huge gamble for us. People still associate Turkish cuisine with doner kebabs, the sort of food you only eat when you're drunk, and it's still not known that well in the UK. But, hopefully, we can open up people's minds a little.

My brother and I opened the first Kazan in 2004, serving what we call Ottoman food, which also takes in influences from Lebanon and Greece. To start with, everyone I knew said stick to what you know, open a fried chicken restaurant or something, but we decided not to listen, and that's probably been one of my best business decisions so far – that, and having the balls to get a loan out and do what I really wanted to do.

Now, when I hear the busy hum of the restaurant, it gives

me a real high. Our family's been in catering for years. My grandfather came over from Cyprus – he was a farmer originally; he wanted to save up enough money to buy a tractor – but he ended up becoming one of the biggest Wimpy franchisees in London and stayed.

My parents also worked in the

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trade, and I went to catering college in Westminster, mainly to sharpen my tools for the family business. Then I decided to open my own café in Pimlico. It was one of the first upmarket coffee bars in the mid-1990s, before the Starbucks and Caffè Neros came along, and it made



Age 35

Lives Richmond, Surrey


Drives Audi RS6

Status Married with three children

Career highlights Opening Kazan in 2004, and now about to launch the second site in the City of London in March

me realise I could make real money in catering.

Now we're about to launch our second Kazan, in the City. It's going to be hard to leave the first baby. I'll be based at the new site for six months, making sure every single thing is just right.

 **LOWS...** I'm lucky, I haven't had too many lows so far, other than the usual tax bills and the VAT, of course. But being a not-very-well-known operator, when I was trying to find the site for Kazan wasn't easy. Landlords just don't want to know you, and you're up against the big brands, which tend to get the lion's share. It's pretty depressing and it's not great for consumers, either, the way the smaller guys get pushed back. One problem we've had is the congestion charge – it's hit our café's early-morning breakfast trade pretty hard.