

## The Stag

How do two people in their late twenties/early thirties with no experience of running a pub manage to update the traditional values of their pub so that they become a 'destination pub' while retaining the loyal custom of their regulars?

Emma Browne went to Carrington and Wycombe High and has had experience of managing fast food restaurants. Ben Grierson is a chef with wide experience managing catering in up market wine bars. They are a pretty cool couple – they took 14 months to think about taking over the Stag. It could have been snapped up at any time but they carefully considered their requirements and the price kept dropping.

As a premises, the Stag has many plus points. Everyone comments on the view and on the garden which attracts people in the summer. It is also very child friendly. The inside has a slightly seedy pseudo old world charm but like Dr Who's tardis the inside is bigger than the outside. The kitchens were already well equipped but Ben has insisted on a new oven and a new fridge. Outside there is parking for some 25 cars.

It also helps that Emma's mother lives locally and can be called on to help out in emergencies such as the week she had on toilet cleaning duties. It was only a month later she noticed that the pub had two men's toilets.

The traditional concept of the pub is under pressure from drink driving laws, the ban on smoking, the need to appeal to women and the alternative of staying at home drinking beer from Threshers or Budgens. The industry will be changing very quickly.

Different pubs will take different approaches. One vision of the future is being designed at the Stag. Food and ambience are important. It is fundamental to Ben that they will keep selling traditional pub food at pub prices. But he will also have daily specials such as Nile perch oven baked or pan fried in olive oil. You will also find seasonal game and wild mushrooms on the specials board. He aims to have the Stag selling delicatessen food at sensible prices and he would like to be in the Good Pub Guide as a destination pub which people will travel to because it has something special their local does not have.

Emma will see that the ambience is right and that the staff project the energy and joie de vivre that will make the place hum. She sees the modern pub as friendly to women and attractive to men. They are already a 'hot spot' where in the mornings business people and writers are able to use free wifi (wireless internet connection) for their laptops while they take a good quality coffee. As the Deux Magots is associated with Sartre and the Cheshire Cheese with Dr Johnson so might the Stag be associated with one of the literary or philosophical greats of the twenty-first century.

Developing these changes can be slow and they have a long way to go but it will be worth keeping an eye on Emma and Ben at the Stag. They may just get the formula right if they are prepared to put in the hard work.