



INTERVIEW

M E E T I N G

MATT PRESTON

Renowned food writer, critic, and judge on the hit TV show MasterChef Australia, Matt Preston, paid a visit to Bangladesh to promote the cookie brand Rivoli. We here at Lifestyle were lucky enough to sit and chat with the man himself and talk about the show, his food philosophies, and the future of the food industry.

THE FOOD INDUSTRY HAS BEEN GIVEN A MASSIVE PUSH FORWARD THANKS TO SHOWS LIKE MASTERCHEF AND OTHER



FOOD PROGRAMMES, ESPECIALLY IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY LIKE BANGLADESH. WHERE DO YOU THINK THE FOOD INDUSTRY IS HEADED?

I think the reason why MasterChef resonated in Australia and even in Bangladesh is because it is about sitting down and breaking bread with people. Food is crucially important. It involves so many rituals and so many different cultures. The act of cooking and the act of feeding people is something that has genuine value. It doesn't matter whether it's a chef in a fancy restaurant or a mum cooking at home. That mere act is something else.

It doesn't surprise me that food has become important. I think the food industry is headed in a good direction where people value what they eat, they value its quality and they

also understand that the act of cooking is an act of love.

What's more, the younger boys in Australia are now eager to cook and I think it's important that we break down gender stereotypes. I love that the younger generations are now more involved with food.

WHAT ARE SOME FOOD TRENDS WE CAN EXPECT OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS?

Cooking on an open fire could be huge. It started in Bilbao and has been a great influence. Now you see it becoming

Rivoli

Rivoli, from Unimech Limited, is a Bangladeshi company known for producing premium chocolate chip cookies. They currently have two variants of the traditional chocolate chunk cookie available: vanilla and chocolate, where apart from the key ingredients which are imported, everything is made locally.

The brand is endorsed by popular Australian food critic and journalist, Matt Preston, who was approached with this venture because "he is somebody from the food industry who properly understands food," says Farhana Saleh, Director of the company. Rivoli has plans to expand into the

international market, where Matt Preston will represent them for SAARC regions.

"When you choose people to work with, you have to find people who are genuinely passionate about their work and have authenticity. This isn't just about the biscuits; it's also about family and tradition" says Preston, speaking about his reason for endorsing Rivoli.

"If you are involved in something - especially a product - it's got to be something that delivers. Rivoli made a perfect combination of crispy biscuits with molten chocolate and that's what makes it special," he added.

"For me, the mark of a good biscuit is when it disappears. You look at whether they've been sitting in the tin for a while or whether they have already been eaten up. I think that's how you judge how good a cookie is," Preston said, licking his fingers after

common for restaurants to put up grills. We also went from a technical style of cooking to a produce-driven style. Now the trend is moving towards combining bits of both. I also think the idea of locality - going somewhere to eat - is important. It supports chefs using indigenous ingredients and following that route, which is breaking the hegemony of French cooking or Italian cooking.

HOW HAS FOOD STYLING CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?



I think free form is good. In terms of styling, now we do a lot of stuff straight off the bowls because they look so much more appetising. In terms of restaurant styling, at first we used to have three things on a plate, then we went through layering spinach or meat on the plate, kind of like a Gordon Ramsey style. Then came the less constructive, food strewn all over the plate style and after that we moved to keeping lots of white space. Now you'll see the plating around the edge of the plate. The idea of deconstructing things has become fashionable. I think often it can impact the pleasure of what you are eating which is why I find myself constantly coming back to things like a beautiful chocolate cake, presented simply on a plate.

IS MARCO PIERRE WHITE REALLY THAT SCARY OR IS IT MORE OF AN ON-SCREEN PERSONA?

He is a big man. He can be a little intimidating because he is highly reputed and has so much knowledge. He is also a big unit. But it's a coiled spring tension that you feel with Marco. He is like the old warhorse that's coming out. He doesn't do it often but when he has the chance to do it, you can see the nostrils flare up. When he steps into the kitchen, Marco's like the shark from Finding Nemo. He is totally focused on one thing and that is getting the food out.

DO YOU HAVE A DJ DECK BACK AT HOME? DO YOU EVER TAKE IT OUT AT PARTIES?

You know what's interesting, our sound guy is a DJ and rapper and he's been looking for a deck for me. I've been looking at some mixes and for my last birthday, I got some mirror balls, lasers and a smoke machine. So yes, absolutely, I love it. I DJed with at a party last year too and it was fantastic!

YOU ARE WELL KNOWN FOR NAMING ALL OF YOUR CRAVATS. HOW DID THAT START?

When you dress yourself, it's easy to know what you are going to pick and you just put something on. But when I started doing

finishing a Rivoli cookie, a testament to the concept of being 'finger-licking good'.

Farah Josephine Saleh Hussain, Managing Director, said that Rivoli has plans for more products in the future, such as premium bread. Although they only have two flavours of cookie in production at the moment, there are talks of working on new flavours.

"At the moment, I want to come here and have a look at what flavours people like," Preston explained. "I think Rivoli is doing pretty well. Whatever new flavour we come up with, it has to resonate with the palate of the people."

Matt Preston will be travelling around Dhaka to sample the best in local cuisine that the country has to offer. From sweets to savouries, he will be looking at what the people like and what food trends are present in order to help Rivoli expand their portfolio.

MasterChef, we had a wardrobe manager and there were like 80 cravats to choose from. It started on the basis of me asking for a particular cravat and instead of using descriptions or numbers, I used names. It was a lot more fun, but people get temperamental if you don't name a cravat after them, and if you name the wrong cravat after them, they are even more temperamental. So, I think the wise thing for me to do is to step back!

**By Raffat Binte Rashid, Naveed Naushad, and Zahrah Haider
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel**