



# Andres Lopez

The Bull Inn at Bisham

The youngest of a family of 9 brothers and sisters, Andres Lopez was born in Santiago de Compostela in North West Spain. With his eldest two brothers pursuing careers in catering, Andres followed suit and upon leaving school his first job was in a bar/restaurant in Biarritz. The following year, at the request of his brother in the diplomatic corp, he went on to work at the Spanish Embassy in London.

## What was it like working at the Embassy?

"It was here that I learnt all the grass roots of restaurant service and management. I often got involved in the kitchen too." From manning the door to serving leading politicians such as Edward Heath and Harold Wilson, his training was wide-ranging. It was also rigorous and strict, based very much on Military Service and that instilled in Andres a tireless attention to detail. "I remember one occasion, on a swelteringly hot night in my early days, when the Ambassador noticed I had two buttons on my tunic undone. I was immediately called to the Catering Manager to be told how furious the Ambassador was at this indiscretion!" Undeterred by this and with a real determination to succeed, within

a short period of time Andres was promoted to head waiter where he managed a large team of waiters and waitresses, who in turn were responsible for serving up to 1800 people at any one sitting!

## How did you get in to the restaurant business?

"I moved up the ranks in my two years at the Embassy learning as much as I could, but what I really wanted was to work in a French restaurant before moving back to Spain. I was offered a position at the L'Ecu de France in Jermyn Street, London where I was able to learn about the restaurant business first hand. After that I moved to a French restaurant in Pinner as the Head Waiter and then Manager for ten years."

Managing other people's restaurants was never going to be enough for this Foodies hero! In 1980 a friend was running La Capelle in Denham and one evening Andres popped in for a chat. To Andres' surprise his friend intimated that he was looking to sell the business. He could see the possibilities immediately and, with the backing of his friendly bank manager, Andres bought La Capelle. "It was a fantastic experience" he said. "To be able to refurbish the restaurant to my own design and start afresh." Spending a great deal of money was a risk that proved worthwhile and La Capelle was turned into one of the most popular and successful restaurants in the area. Being not far from Pinewood Studios they often had celebrity visitors, including Cilla Black, Paul Daniels, Gloria Hunniford and Michael Winner.

Twelve years later, Andres was invited to buy The Bull Inn, and the rest as they say is history. He rolled his sleeves up and

began to put right all of those things that had caused the restaurant to sink into decline. He immediately slashed the prices both of food and wines, increased the quality and made the customers feel welcome again. Within the year he turned the Bull into a popular restaurant again, much to the locals' delight (and his bank manager's).

## What are your most popular dishes?

"French food has always been prominent in our menus. We have classic fish dishes, grills and some flambés as well as the more informal Spanish Tapas.

One of our trademark dishes is classic French Lobster Thermidor, (served in a brandy, cream sauce and gratineed with Parmesan cheese). This is on the menu whenever possible and always sells. "My customers know I never buy frozen foods and that my lobster is the freshest you can get, straight from the market. It doesn't matter how many lobsters I buy, they will always go!"

## Are your family involved with the business?

"La Capelle was a restaurant that I ran with my wife Carmen. At The Bull we are a real family business-I trained all of my own chefs and my head chef is still with me today, some 15 years later. Carmen, Miguel my son, and I all work in the restaurant and I hope one day to hand over the reins to Miguel."

## How do you take time to relax?

"I don't really have any spare time, but I do occasionally like to watch football.

My father used to make wine and wine has become a bit of a passion, which is why we have such a varied wine list. I still go to wine tastings when I can" (for business purposes of course!)