

TASTE OF SUCCESS

Ever thought of jacking in the day job to start a fulfilling food-focused business? You're not alone. We seek counsel from the lawyers, marketeers and managers turned tea vendors, grocers and restaurateurs who are finding fresh ways to uphold the traditions of their countries' culinary delights



Bjorn Steinar Jonsson
Owner, Saltverk, *Reykjavik*

While living in Copenhagen as a student of engineering, Iceland native Bjorn Steinar Jonsson was thinking of returning home – but the financial crash of 2008 meant that jobs were scarce. While researching Iceland's plentiful geothermal energy, he stumbled upon the idea of reviving a long-lost tradition: manufacturing salt much as it had been done in the 17th century. "It started with me going to the remote Westfjords of Iceland and making up a small batch of flaky salt using geothermal energy to evaporate seawater," says Jonsson. "I took it to Dill [the first restaurant in Iceland to be awarded a Michelin star] in Reykjavik where I knew the chef, and asked him how he liked it. He told me to make more. It snowballed from there."

But the salt-production process didn't come without its challenges: Jonsson had to design

and produce the required equipment, while the Westfjords has an unforgiving climate. However, once the production got going there was no turning back. His pristine mineral salt is stocked all over Scandinavia and in high-end food shops in Europe and the US. Saltverk now employs 15 people. "We're extremely proud of our Icelandic heritage and our product," says Jonsson. — SZ

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

Former occupation: Engineer
Current occupation: Salt maker

Reason for career change: "To have a positive impact on sustainability and food production by using renewable resources in Iceland, my home country."

Sigitas Zemaitis
Owner, Sweet Root, *Vilnius*

Frustrated by Lithuanians' forgetfulness when it comes to their country's rich natural bounty, Sigitas Zemaitis, his brother Vilius and fiancée Agne Marcinauskaitė decided to jog memories. The idea for their restaurant, Sweet Root, had been brewing for some time, says Sigitas. "If you ask people abroad about their local produce they talk about it with passion and pride. Here in Lithuania we have so many lovely-yet-forgotten ingredients. That's how we got to the idea of showing Lithuania at its best: at the dinner table."

Sigitas ditched a career in marketing and communications and the trio sought out a space in Vilnius's bohemian neighbourhood of Uzupis. "We decided to build our restaurant around the ingredients that are available at a particular moment in time, so we started to follow the natural rhythm of nature," says Sigitas. Opening in 2014, it took some time for Sweet Root's tasting menu to catch on. Locals were

perplexed by the restaurant's refined presentation and its emphasis on ingredients grown nearby. After all, anybody can make beetroot soup. "We're not that far away from our history of growing our vegetables or going foraging – it's only 30 years ago that it would be really natural for us to do this," says Sigitas. "People don't see the value in it anymore so we have to present our dishes in a surprising way. We want people to say, 'Oh I didn't know you could do *this* with a beetroot.'" — SZ

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

Former occupation: Communications and marketing manager

Current occupation: Restaurateur

Reason for career change: "The idea is to bring back the pride of Lithuania at the dinner table using true, sincere and seasonal ingredients."



PHOTOGRAPHERS: FELIX ODELL