

# Thinking *outside* the box

*Olivier Blanc tells  
Sophie Farrah about  
bringing sustainable street  
dining to Wandsworth*

Visitors to Southside Wandsworth this summer may have noticed a new arrival on the piazza outside: two large shipping containers. But these are not storage units, nor the collateral necessity of nearby building work. Welcome to StreetCube: a new, sustainability-focused street dining concept, created by chef Pascal Gerrard and Olivier Blanc, son of celebrated chef Raymond Blanc OBE.

"I grew up in a food household. Not only is my father a chef, but my mother is Le Cordon Bleu trained, so I couldn't really escape it!" explains Olivier.

"When I met Pascal and he told me about his idea – to take shipping containers, upcycle them and essentially create sustainable, modern working kitchens – I was very interested."

Olivier was soon on board as 'sustainable gastronomy consultant', and StreetCube was born. It is the UK's first and only sustainable, semi-permanent street kitchen, intent upon serving top-quality 'food-to-go' whilst eliminating plastics and waste. Produce is organic, local and seasonal, enabling StreetCube to reinvest in the local community and boost sustainability therein, developing a better food system for people and planet alike.

Its shipping containers – themselves a poignant reminder of the millions of food miles covered around the globe – are cleverly upcycled to create solid, weatherproof, hygienic, safe and secure street kitchens that can pop up virtually anywhere. Customers eat at an attached sit-up bar or on picnic tables nearby.

"Think of street food and you often imagine a gazebo. No fridge, no stainless steel counters – not exactly the most professional set-up to cook in," reflects Olivier.

"What we're offering instead is a space for professionals who want to cook, but

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who don't have the two to three hundred thousand pounds required to launch a restaurant or food business.

"But we also want operators who are different, and who are passionate about sustainability and where they source their ingredients. Your average street food vendor only thinks about costs and profit, so he uses the cheapest meat, or the cheapest product. That's how he makes his mark-up."

Contrast that with what Olivier describes as 'street gastronomy'. Sounds intriguing, but what exactly is it?

"Well, gastronomy is high-end type food; the very best quality. So, the term 'street gastronomy' reflects the care we put into everything and the responsibility our operators feel, not only about where they source their food, but also as to how they present it."



Whilst the offerings may be gourmet, however, the price tag is not. The two Wandsworth 'cubes' – the company's first – are currently occupied by award-winning, sustainable, organic

Moroccan food vendor The Hungry Bedouin and the Earlsfield-based Amrutha Lounge, an Indian vegan 'Soul Food' collective, ranked by TripAdvisor as the number one restaurant in London. Most dishes are priced from £5 to £8 and, according to Olivier, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

"I know that 99% of the time customers aren't coming because we're sustainable, or zero plastic, or for the solar panels on the roof – they're coming because they are hungry! So we have to deliver something delicious, nutritious and different. And it *is* delicious!"

"Arvin, who runs Amrutha Lounge, has a real passion for food. He does these wonderful pakoras, filled with things like mushrooms, aubergine and sweet potato, as well as these beautiful fresh dips and dals. Then there's his delicious beetroot gazpacho and lovely vegan cheesecake. He's a great advert for vegan food that tastes good."

And what does Olivier's father – owner of a world-famous two-Michelin-starred restaurant and one of Britain's most respected chefs – make of StreetCube's unique 'street gastronomy' style?

"He likes it! Dad has been a champion of sustainability and organic ingredients for a long time. He knows it's important to get good quality food out to as many people as possible – that's what he's all about. He has visited the cubes and talked to the operators, and he thinks they have a good standard of food. So that's a big tick!"

When not busy helping adults to eat better, Olivier turns his attention toward the younger generation. The Kingston resident has created *Henri Le Worm*: an interactive, animated story app designed to connect children to nature and food. It's voiced by actor Simon Pegg and features one strangely familiar character...

"Henri is actually based loosely on Raymond," reveals Olivier. "I gave him a little pot belly and a stripy jumper, which he was fine with!" he laughs.

"Dad designed 10 recipes for children, which appear in the app. I love to cook too, but I am not technically trained. Mind you, neither is my dad! I've grown up with food though. I think I'd be very happy in a cube!"

■ StreetCube is on the hunt for new locations in high footfall spaces. To suggest somewhere suitable visit: [streetcube.org](http://streetcube.org)