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Searcys eyes growth and Champagne brasserie concept

By John Harrington, 02-Aug-2013

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Searcys, the up-market bar and restaurant operator and caterer, hopes to expand from 16 to 25 sites in the next two years, with a Champagne brasserie concept one vehicle for growth, chief executive Doug Tetley has told BigHospitality's sister publication M&C Report.

Searcys is to work with Champagne brand Besserat de Bellefon as the brand partner for the concept, for which Tetley said there's "potentially a gap in the market".

"We believe that there's an opportunity to do something that's not fine dining but it's bridging Champagne with food in an accessible brasserie environment. We're talking to a couple of potential partners in terms of a unit to do that in."

Units could be either on high streets or by working with a partner on a conversion basis.

Tetley told M&C Report: "If we can deliver this then it has got some roll-out potential." He highlighted London, Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham as possible locations and imaged there could be "half a dozen, maximum".

Hotel F&B

Another route to expansion that's being examined is providing F&B operations at hotels. In October Searcys will take over running the bar and fine dining restaurant at Montcalm Marble Arch, the five-star hotel.

The company has also signed heads of terms to open a destination restaurant, Champagne bar and members club at a hotel off City Road in Shoreditch that's expected to open next March. It will also provide catering for new banqueting facilities.

Tetley said: "We've been looking at places to do interesting restaurants without paying significant premiums and the rents required on high streets."

Attractions

The third expansion route is to look for partners who run arts and visitor attractions. Searcys is to open a restaurant at the Birmingham's Repertory Theatre in September, featuring 120 covers inside and the same outside. Tetley said he'd like to find more opportunities along these lines.

About nine months ago Searcys began operating conference and banqueting facilities at the home of the British Academy in Westminster. It also began

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handling in-house operations at the Royal College of General Practitioners' head quarters at Euston Square, including the café and accommodation provisions.

"Both are trading really well," said Tetley. "We have some really good, solid partner relationships with these institutions that will continue to grow."

Optimistic

Asked about overall expansion aims, he said: "We have 16 now. We would ideally like to be 25 in a two-year time period. That's not unachievable."

Meanwhile, Tetley said Searcys continues to invest in its outlets. For example, £300,000 was spent in the past year to "refresh and re-position" the Champagne bar at St Pancras station, and £500k was invested at 30 Pavillion Road, the luxury private dining and events venue in Knightsbridge.

Tetley is optimistic about current trading. He said Searcys' Roman Bar & Kitchen in Bath, which has significant outdoor seating, took £40k net last week. Its site at the Gherkin building had its best ever June, he added.

"We believe there's still a good market for that top-end event and personal discretionary spend."

Keywords: Besserat de Bellefon, The Gherkin, Searcys, M&C Report, expansion, Champagne, brasserie, Doug Tetley, hotels, bars, F&B, St Pancras

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