

## waste not, want not

Douglas McMaster is behind the UK's first zero-waste restaurant. It's a brave concept, and it's changing the game

**WRITER** Helene Dancer  
**PHOTOGRAPHER** Jonathan Cherry

Food, glorious food:  
Silo's bread is made  
using flour milled on  
site, coffee is served  
in jam jars and all  
dishes are seasonal

the restaurant in reusable containers and prepared on site, and the team even churns its own butter, rolls its own oats, mills its own flour and ferments its own grain.

'It's hard work,' says Sheffield-born Douglas McMaster, the mastermind behind Silo along with Australian artist and designer Joost Bakker. He wipes his hands on his apron, his hair tied up on top of his head as he emerges from the kitchen where he has been prepping venison for the dinner service – Silo buys its animals whole, so nothing is packaged and nothing is wasted. It means more man-hours, but that's the compromise.

It's a bold concept but Doug seems to be relishing the challenge, even if it does mean working incredibly hard to realise his dream. Since Silo launched in October 2014, the reception has been overwhelmingly positive and has captured people's imaginations in a way not even Doug could have predicted. >>

**Silo is the UK's first zero-waste restaurant**, a title that comes with a weight of expectation in an age of mass consumption and a predilection for not always acting in the planet's best interests.

The idea behind this Brighton-based enterprise is that nothing is wasted nor waste unnecessarily created – leftover food is composted, bills are emailed or texted to customers, all food is delivered to



**IPAD EXTRA**  
See more on the Audi  
Magazine iPad app



He sits down on one of the restaurant's chairs made using wood offcuts and orders a coffee from the barista, who delivers it with a flourish, placing the beautifully nutty roast on a table top made from shiny metal industrial floor tiles.

'Even the furniture is made from waste materials,' says Doug. 'The table legs were meant for a primary school but were too short so we welded them together to get the height right. Our glasses are jam jars and the coasters are offcuts from Brighton university's art department. But the coffee cups are new, because it tastes better.'

Doug is evangelical about coffee. He lived in Melbourne for a couple of years, a city famous for its coffee culture, and it taught him to really appreciate the skill in making the perfect cup. Apart from drinking gallons of coffee, he also devised the Silo concept with Joost, who he met in Sydney when he wandered into his pop-up restaurant, Greenhouse, made from recyclable materials and all about sustainability. Utterly seduced by the concept, Doug ditched his job at a fine-dining restaurant to explore this new opportunity.

Together they opened Silo Melbourne, a prototype version that seated 20. Silo Brighton seats 100, so it's zero waste on a much bigger scale and has evolved to incorporate a move towards what Doug calls a pre-industrial food system. 'What I mean by this is preparing food like they did before the industrial revolution,' he explains. 'We deal directly with small, organic farmers, cut out the middleman who packages things, and prepare the food in its whole form on site. What was zero waste is now a system of creating what is essentially pure food.'

Doug devises his menus according to what is naturally available – if there's an abundance of asparagus, for example, then two or three

## VORSPRUNG



### Mushroom latte?

Silo often sources its mushrooms from a supplier who grows them using waste coffee grounds. It's a creative way of being sustainable

dishes may feature the ingredient. 'The modern food industry is manipulating the natural food system but what I'm trying to do here is let nature dictate what we've got on the menu,' he says.

It's also important for him to cater to different eating habits, so he and creates dishes under the banners of plant, fish, meat, dairy and wild. This formula has proved popular with customers.

The menu is also informed by Silo's waste food production, such as the cheese they make from leftover milk. Every time a barista steams milk for coffee, they'll use a little extra milk so they don't run out. Milk can't be re-steamed but rather than tip it down the sink, they turn it into cheese. The curds go into the dairy dishes and the whey is used to make sorbet.

Doug is proud of these innovations, and is particularly pleased with how they avoid using chemical cleaning products. They only use detergents in the dishwasher and oven, everything else is cleaned with water that passes through an electrolysed oxidised water system that separates out pure water particles, with the remainder



used to flush the toilets. The pure water is then electrolysed and split into acid and alkaline. Bacteria can't survive in such extremes so the water becomes, according to Doug, the most hygienic liquid on Earth.


Doug doesn't do things by halves. He left school at 16 and decided to become a chef after a stint as a kitchen porter. He applied to the five best restaurants in the country – 'If I want to do something, I want to do it brilliantly' – and honed his craft at an array of Michelin-starred restaurants. He moved to London to work at the renowned St John, which introduced him to a more conceptual restaurant approach. Interest piqued, he worked at Copenhagen's Noma via a clutch of other more idiosyncratic restaurants, and then wended his way to Sydney, where he met Joost and the idea of Silo was born.



### The milky whey

Baristas always steam extra milk so they don't run out when pouring. Silo uses the waste milk to make cheese, using the curds for dairy dishes and whey for sorbet

The Silo concept continues to evolve, and green energy is very much on Doug's radar as a logical next step. That and a creative way of dealing with what he calls alien waste – yogurt pots and wrappers that customers bring in with them.

Doug tinkers with the idea of creating some sort of art from this waste, before the call of the half-prepped venison downstairs becomes too strong. Before he dashes off, he offers a gift of an apple pastry made in the Silo bakery, handing it over with a reverence usually reserved for diamonds and pearls. It's delicious and not a single crumb is wasted. 

A local carpenter made the restaurant's furniture using offcuts of sterling board and industrial floor tiles, and wheatgrass is grown in upcycled drainpipes

