

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY*

He Gives And Takes The Heat

By VINCENT MAO

On the hit TV show "Hell's Kitchen," a wannabe chef forgets to turn on the gas for the oven.

For that goof, Gordon Ramsay screams, "You donkey!"

Another time, a contestant shows Ramsay her signature dish of half-baked focaccia with a garlic dipping sauce. The master chef's response: "I'd rather eat poodle (bleep) than put that in my mouth."

In case the show's cooks don't get the point, he also throws food around and makes subordinates wear their own creations.

Is Ramsay a ruthless, hot-tempered tyrant? Or perhaps just plain mean? Neither, say colleagues.

"He's a perfectionist," his protege, Angela Hartnett, told the New York Times. "He demands the best, and if he has to shout to get the best, he does it. It's not like he does it every day, and in the end, it's all about the food. It's constructive criticism and it's never personal."

It's about the food and his booming restaurants. He knows what he's talking about because, like his show, he's been through hell.

"He went from absolutely nothing to being one of the top chefs in the world," said Shelia Conlin, the "Hell's Kitchen" casting director. "He's been there and lived it, and that's why he's not easy on these guys that come in."

The fiery, demanding and controversial Scotsman is a world-class chef, restaurateur, author and TV personality. He's on three global hit shows — "Hell's Kitchen," "Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares" and "The F Word."

Name Of His Game

Don't call him a celebrity chef. He hates that term. He wants aspiring cooks to know that a professional kitchen is a rough space, contrasting the cheery atmosphere seen on so many cooking shows.

"I think people tend to think of being a chef as this glamorous job," he told the Chicago Sun-Times. "But to cook at his level, it's nothing but incredibly hard work. There's nothing glamorous about it."

Reportedly worth over \$100 million, Ramsay runs a global empire. He has 20-plus fine-dining restaurants and pubs across the U.K, plus eateries in Ireland, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Czech Republic, New York, Florida and California.

Ramsay's high aim has led to 12 Michelin stars — honors given by the Michelin Guide, the respected authority on fine restaurants and hotels. He is the first Scot to have a total of 12 stars and one of three British chefs to have a Michelin three-star restaurant.

In less than a year of business, his New York City eatery already has two Michelin stars.

"Each of Michelin's two- or three-star restaurants has to offer something very special in its cuisine — a real element of creativity, originality or personality that sets it apart from the rest," said Michelin Guide Director Jean-Luc Naret. "Ramsay's New York restaurant certainly attained this distinction in 2007."

Ramsay, 42, has also grabbed other honors, including three Catey awards, the top prize in the U.K. hospitality industry. In 2006 he was named "most influential" in the Caterersearch 100 list by Caterer and Hotelkeeper magazine.

Ramsay's rise to the top of the culinary world was anything but a piece of cake. He reached his level through a willingness to learn and a burning desire to succeed.

Born in 1966 in Johnstone, Scotland, Ramsay was raised in England's Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of William Shakespeare.

He grew up poor and was raised in council estates — the English version of public housing. His dad, Gordon Sr., was an aspiring country singer who couldn't hold a job. He was also an alcoholic who'd beat him, his

mom and his three siblings, Gordon Jr. wrote in his memoir, "Roasting in Hell's Kitchen."

Cooking was hardly Ramsay's first career choice. In his early teens, he played on the Glasgow Rangers' youth soccer team and was on track to turn pro. But at age 18, a couple of knee injuries spoiled his sports dream — and cooked up a new idea.

Against his dad's approval, he took a course in hotel management and pursued haute cuisine — French for high kitchen, or the cooking of fine food. The atmosphere in professional kitchens excited him. The clamoring reminded him of soccer. And just like the sport, the kitchen required precision, stamina and teamwork to get the job done.

"I knew that I didn't want to go into hotel management with all the red tape. Kitchens are freer, more boisterous, really," Ramsay told Nation's Restaurant News.

After getting his college degree in 1987, Ramsay started his career at the bottom — as an entry-level chef chopping vegetables. He worked like a dog in top British and French kitchens from 1986 to 1993 and climbed his way to head chef or second in command. Along the way, he learned how to cook from some of the world's culinary masters.

In 1986, Ramsay talked his way to a job with Marco Pierre White, Britain's superstar chef of that time at the Harvey's in London. "You had to push yourself to the limit every day and every night," he said in this book. "You had to take a lot of (bleep) and bite your lip and work even harder when that happened."

From White, he learned how to make pasta and other dishes that Ramsay said "tasted phenomenal."

Three years later, Ramsay worked with Albert Roux at Le Gavroche, a French restaurant in London. Then the Scot landed in Paris and studied french cooking at Guy Savoy's namesake restaurant.

In 1993, Ramsay returned to London and applied his know-how as head chef at the newly opened Aubergine, which served French food.

Still, he hungered for his own spot. So in 1998 he opened Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in London, and it eventually drew three Michelin stars.

"Ramsay has managed to retain his three stars since 2001, which is an extraordinary feat," said Naret.

In 1999 he opened Petrus in London and has been expanding since.

While Ramsay rose in the business, he endured conditions that would make labor boards cringe. The places boiled with oral and physical abuse and long hours. Cooks cursed him out in English and in French. His bosses hurled food — as well as pot and pans filled with hot sauce and soup — at him.

He often worked 16 hours a day — then stay overnight on the restaurant's benches.

Bereavement time off? Forget it. Ramsay rushed straight back to work after his father's funeral.

Now some criticize him for the same conditions — swearing and wall-to-wall work. In an episode of his "Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares" show, which airs globally, he cursed so often, Australian officials considered cracking down on the verbiage.

The Puppet Master

"It gets stressful a lot of the time," Ramsay said on Australia's version of the "Today" show. "I don't mean to swear; it's just that I work with Muppets sometimes."

Ramsay says his high standards explain why he's so tough on himself and his staff. He figures if he sends out less-than-stellar food, customers won't return.

"His demand for turning out work to a perfect standard or not sending it out at all, his ability to accept when he is wrong and that he has let the customer down, plus his words of praise and encouragement when needed are all marks of a good manager," Peter Hooker told Personnel Today magazine.

Some critics doubt Ramsay's ability to maintain quality at his restaurants. To counter that argument, Ramsay uses longstanding employees as mystery diners. Anything short of a spectacular report will earn a Ramsay-style grilling.