

ELAINE INTERVIEWS : EMMA SMITH OF LE TEMPS D'UN CAFÉ, LANGOELAN

Elaine: So Emma, thank you very much for taking time out from your very busy schedule to talk to me about Le temps d'un café, and first of all when did you come, and when did you take over the café and why?

Emma: Well the café had been shut for eight months, the last owner departed and there's absolutely nothing in the village for anyone. Nowhere, you know to go for a drink and, you know how long the winter is. So, it was closed. I asked the Mayor and, you know, if I could take it over, but that was a long process. A lot of rendez-vous, business plans went into him, um you know, a lot, a lot of meetings and then they got together and they came to the decision, yep you can take it over. So we opened on the 20th January and did our official opening on the 25th January where we had a local group, Alain and Zadiq, come and do the music. A fantastic night, very, very busy but yes all went as planned.

Elaine: Fantastic. Was there some competition then, that you were up against when you put in your bid?

Emma: There were six other couples – all French – that had put their business plans in also. So it was a big surprise, you know for the fact that an English couple could take over the commune bar.

Elaine: Why do you think that was?

Emma: I think because the ideas. I've got lots of ideas in place for the future for now, and they just needed a bit of life in the village and, you know, I'm happy to work long hours to get it back up and running, for people to gain their trust in us and, and you know, run it as a good little bar.

Elaine: A good meeting place for everybody that lives here.

Emma: Everyone, yes.

Elaine: French, English, whatever.

Emma: It's very much a mixed bar, which is great. We've got Swiss, we have Germans, Dutch, French and English in which, so you can imagine, all different languages going on. No, it's fantastic.

Elaine: Fantastic. Like the United Nations.

Emma: Yes. In Langoelan.

Elaine: That's brilliant. So, what changes were needed. Did you have much renovation to do or?

Emma: A lot of changes were made. It was, it had been empty for eight months, like I said. So the bar was positioned in the wrong place, so we moved the bar so it's in front of the big window. So anyone that comes in the door, that's the first thing they see. A lot of painting, a lot of cleaning and, yes, so... it was a lot of work.

Elaine: And this was over the, well, winter really wasn't it that you would have been doing that.

Emma: Yes, it was before Christmas. I think November we got the go ahead to...we actually got the keys. Because we had not seen it. We weren't allowed in it before they said yes we could have it, and actually when I turned the key I thought I'm just gonna walk straight back out because this isn't what I expected.

Elaine: What have I done?

Emma: Yes. No. But it was... you know. We sat down, looked at everything and then we just cracked on with it.

Elaine: Brilliant. Well, well done you, because it was a very wet winter and miserable and you know...

Emma: Oh it's been hard, yes, but you know it's kept us busy and you know we go to bed tired every night.

Elaine: Sleep like babies.... or teenagers!

Emma: Yes, ready for the next day.

Elaine: Brilliant. So obviously, I mean I can see now, you've got, you're in a good position because it's a crossroads here. So you've got good footfall going on outside.

Emma: Yes.

Elaine: And also the garage next door, is handy, people need to drop off their car.

Emma: Perfect.

Elaine: They can pop in and have a coffee...

Emma: Yeah, Which they often do. The garage is, I think, Atelier de Flo, next door. Brilliant. He's worked on my car already, and we came and got our keys at the same time. So it was really nice. He had lots of work to do in there.

Elaine: So it's like it all landed in one place at one time.

Emma: Yes. At the right time.



Elaine: At the right time. So what actually, uh, I was going to say, who's here to help you with this?

Emma: So, um, I've got my partner Roy. He helps. Although not today. Um, but he's usually here helping me. My daughter's at lycée. She can't do an awful lot at the moment cos she's only 15. But she can help more when she's 16 in May. So...

Elaine: Oh that's good.

Emma: Yes, but she can wait on tables and things when we're busy.

Elaine: Because I understand that all businesses, particularly in hospitality. It's very difficult because there is so much you have to pay upfront for, like the insurance and whatever, and it's very difficult to get rid of somebody who is not doing very well.

Emma: Yes.

Elaine: It's what's called 'keep it in the family'.

Emma: Yes, well, the plan is that we're not employing anyone at the moment. But dependent on how, you know, how popular the bar is, that maybe something for the future that we'll have to think about, so...

Elaine: Well, probably in the summer you'll find that you might need extra help, you know.

Emma: Yes.

Elaine: In the summer.... when the summer arrives!

Emma: When we get one.

Elaine: When we get one. A big surprise. And I see that you've got an area outside, probably that you will...

Emma: A terrace yes. No that's going to hopefully come into good use. All the tables and chairs are ready in anticipation for the sun and the warm weather. So, yes.

Elaine: And the parasols...

Emma: For all that sun that we're going to have.

Elaine: That we're going to get this year. So what events actually take place? I know it's only be recently opened, but what events have you got planned, or

Emma: It's difficult. We've got an Irish music night coming up on the 15th February, and then we've got an 80s soirée in March, which I know is going to be really really popular – me and my daughter are dressing up for that. So that's optional – you can come along in

fancy dress if you like. And then in April we have a Blues night with a man who's quite well known on Google. He's coming in to do a Blues evening in April. I think that's on the 12th. Um, yes, I think it's really important to keep changing it around. Something different, things that people haven't seen before. I think's quite important. Um, you know, it's new.

Elaine: Well, that's the thing. That's very good – that's a very good idea that you are varying, like the music. You've got Blues, you've got Irish, which with people are very popular and, um, 80s of course. So, I think rather than it being predictable... What about quizzes? Have you thought of...

Emma: Absolutely. We're going to do a quiz. We want to do a mixed quiz, where the rules are you know, two French per table, or two other nationalities, or English or whatever, so they're forced to mix. They're forced to work together, you know, in order to, answer the questions.

Elaine: That's good.

Emma: You know, so we're not having one lot huddled over in one corner, one lot huddled over in the other. No, come in this bar you have to mix.

Elaine: Exactly. So would you say you attract quite a lot of the French residents?

Emma: Absolutely. The Depot de Pain has been an absolute hit because there are a lot of the elderly who don't drive. So they come in. They put their orders in for their bread and it's there ready for them the next day, and then we've got the small Epicerie there for just your every day essentials, which also does really really well.

Elaine: All the... I can see it's all the things that you think, ooh I've just run out of like tea bags, or I've just run out of water, or whatever, shower gel...

Emma: Yes.

Elaine: It's just the little things. That's great. It's a little back-up.

Emma: Absolutely. Yes I mean, I've delved into it myself when I've run out of something in the kitchen, but yes it's doing well. It's proving, you know. Yes, it's doing well.

Elaine: Did they have that, was that here before? Or was that something new that you..

Emma: No, that wasn't here before. It was part of... when I spoke to the Mayor with rendez-vous it was part of the business plan to have an Epicerie, because there are an awful lot of elderly in the commune.

Elaine: That's Brittany really, isn't it too? In many towns.

Emma: And not all of them have got family near by. Some of the younger ones come in and order their bread for them and then they'll toodle up and pick it up the next day. And then they have a chat...

Elaine: I was going to say, they come in to pick up their bread or their pain au raisin or whatever and will sit down and maybe have a chat and a coffee.

Emma: Yes, yes. And I think that's probably really important because I'm probably the only person that they'll interact with in a day. You know, for them to come in, and have someone to speak to, I think's really really important, especially during you know... the weather's not great. The winters are long.

Elaine: And it's good for your French too.

Emma: Good for my French

Elaine: Chatting French, rather than written French.

Emma: Yes, I'm hearing it 24/7 now, and I'm even dreaming it.

Elaine: I was going to say, you even get to that point where you're dreaming it.

Emma: Yes. Which is quite funny... well it's not funny, because I don't feel I've been to sleep! But um yes, everyday, day-in, day-out, is hearing it all the time.

Elaine: So you feel well settled here?

Emma: Yes. Yes, absolutely.

Elaine: Lots of work, but very rewarding.

Emma: Lots of work, but it is really rewarding, when you can just get into bed of a night and think you know what I've had a good day. And, yes...

Elaine: And then suddenly maybe a light bulb comes on with another idea for something you could do.

Emma: Yes, yes, it is. I've got a few ideas for the summer. A vide grenier out the back, because there's a field out the back there, and there's going to be a motor bike and classic car show.

Elaine: Oh brilliant.

Emma: Yes, that's no date set yet, so that's to be arranged. Um, so yes there's a few ideas that I've got going forward, and I'm getting married this year as well, so...

Elaine: One very busy person.

Emma: I'm incorporating that with the Fêtes des Voisins, so all the neighbours can come which is going to be done in a marquee on the field.

Elaine: Fantastic. Well I just say congratulations and well done Emma because you're just buzzing with ideas and also this big sign of 'integrate', come here and meet

Emma: Absolutely. Without a doubt. That's what it's all about. We live in France, you know, we all have to mingle in my opinion and that's how it will stay.

Elaine: No regrets.

Emma: Absolutely not. Ask me that in a year's time!

Elaine: Well thank you very much for your time.

Emma: Thank you so much for having me, it's been lovely talking to you. Thank you.

Elaine: And I wish you just all the luck in the world and I shall be back "I shall be back!" as they say. Now I've found where you are... down that long and winding road.

Emma: There's a song about that.

Elaine: Yes, there is.

Emma: No that's brilliant. Thank you so much for having me.