

Michelle interviews : Caely in Silfiac

Michelle: I've come to Silfiac today to meet with Caely who runs le Martin-Pecher in the village. Welcome to Spotlight on Brittany.

Caely: Thank you, it's lovely to be here.

Michelle: Firstly Caely, tell us whereabouts you're from?

Caely: I'm from California. I was born and raised in San Diego and studied in San Francisco.

Michelle: Okay. And how long ago did you move to Brittany?

Caely: Gosh, er, it's been 14 years already.

Michelle: Wow

Caely: I've been in Silfiac for 12 years and I was in Rennes for 2 years before that.

Michelle: Okay. And so you've lived in Silfiac with your family for 12 years?

Caely: Er yes, with my husband Toby who I met when I first came to France. I came here to do a certificate to teach English as a foreign language and I met him then, so that was 15 years ago now

Michelle: Okay.

Caely: And er I had been planning to go back to the South of France where I'd studied abroad, you know, back to the heat that I knew and grew up with. But that got waylaid by meeting Toby and falling in love but I also fell in love with Brittany and I'm really happy that I stayed here because I've come to appreciate this part of France and the people especially the Breton people so much

Michelle: Yeah definitely absolutely. So why did you choose to open a business in Silfiac?

Caely: Well, it was sort of by accident to be honest. The property next door to us which is the old cafe and bar went up for auction and we grabbed it for a steal and then when we were renovating it um it became clear to us that we wanted to keep the commerce part of it as some sort of a public place that the people of the village could come, it just seemed that as so many of the

businesses had died in the village it seemed a shame not to keep it in some capacity as a space where people could from the community could come and use it and enjoy it, so we didn't have any concrete plans for it at first we focused on renovating the apartment above it and er well we had a couple of different people interested in opening something and it didn't work out for various reasons and then finally we were approached by a group of people from Silfiac who run a non-profit organisation and they wanted to rent this space off of us from time to time

Michelle: OK.

Caely: To do cultural events which they've been doing since 2023 and still are doing. So they're called La Source and they do theatre and all sorts of great stuff but the space wasn't being used as much as we wanted so that was where the idea of the fish and chips came in. It was originally my husband's idea he had, he felt very strongly that if it was done properly it would attract the French and English

Michelle: Okay

Caely: And he also felt that it was important to give the people of the village a place where they could come and sit down in the village which they hadn't been able to do for many years in a restaurant setting.

Michelle: Sure.

Caely: And to feed people for a decent price even in England fish and chips has become quite an expensive meal now.

Michelle: Yeah, so I hear.

Caely: So that's the goal really, to serve the community in that way. and it's been really incredible actually to see people enjoying the space and the ambiance and so yeah it's just a project that started as a small idea and it's really grown.

Michelle: Okay and so how long have you been doing it as fish and chips specifically?

Caely: Since September of last year

Michelle: OK.

Caely: Since the end of September of last year.

Michelle: And I know it's going well cos I've been and the fish and chips are fantastic.

Caely: That's very good to hear.

Michelle: They really are and I wondered if there was an English connection because the fish and chips are so good. So obviously

Caely: So me being American it was not my forte or my idea. I mean I knew of fish and chips as a cultural thing

Michelle: Sure

Caely: But I remember even when because it's Toby my husband who really developed the recipe. He spent over a year doing that.

Michelle: Wow.

Caely: I, I at first I thought that's not how a fry should be it should be crispier I'm thinking, sort of McDonalds style fry, but now I've really come to appreciate the dish and that it's not sort of as simple as it seems, you don't just bung something into a fryer. You know we have a secret ingredient in our batter which will remain secret, I have a lot of people who ask me about it but we have people say to us you know I always get indigestion from fried food and fish and chips but I don't with yours because we used really high quality ingredients, really high quality oil I won't go into all the ins and outs.

Michelle: Of course.

Caely: You know, we filter the oil every service and even twice during service so that is really the goal to have just to focus on that one dish, to do it really well and to keep the price as low as possible which is difficult in this climate you know with rising oil prices and gas, and electricity and all that, so it's not you know a huge money earner for us .

Michelle: Okay

Caely: But it is something that we're both very passionate about and we really pour our heart and soul into getting it up and running and renovating the space that it feels nice for people.

Michelle: Yeah, it does.

- Caely: We're just proud of what we've created and yeah, it's, it's become successful I think because we're just focused on that and we haven't even done any advertising, it's been all word of mouth and we've just let it sort of grow organically like an oak tree
- Michelle: Okay, excellent.
- Caely: And that's been the idea from the start.
- Michelle: Brilliant. And what's the capacity in the restaurant?
- Caely: So we can do about 35 people sitting down at once.
- Michelle: Okay.
- Caely: We also do takeaway.
- Michelle: Excellent. And I've seen that in traditional newspaper is that right?
- Caely: Yes. We wrap it in the traditional English fish and chips paper, with 3 sheets of the white paper food safe paper, and then a little decorative newspaper piece in there too as a throw-back.
- Michelle: It's been very authentic, I've even seen Sarsons vinegar on the table.
- Caely: Yes, oh yes we couldn't get away with not having that. We have certain customers who shall remain nameless who have very much demanded it and even in specific types of bottles.
- Michelle: Yes, we're very particular.
- Caely: English people are very particular about
- Michelle: Well I'm Irish and we're particular about them too.
- Caely: Sorry I should say British because I know it is important in Ireland and in Scotland and but originally it's a Portuguese dish .
- Michelle: Is that right?
- Caely: Yeah it was originally Portuguese and it became a big thing in Britain during the World War 2 because they subsidised it because to boost the morale of the population and so that's why it's become such a beloved dish that lifts so many people's spirits, I think.

Michelle: I did not know that. That's amaze, I just said it was developed in the East End of London somewhere

Caely: Well it's I heard that you can get good fish and chips there as well but

Michelle: Yes. That's true, you really can. So would you say your clientele was mostly English, a mixture because it's based in a local community?

Caely: So we've been vey lucky I would say were pretty much most nights about 50-50.

Michelle: Okay.

Caely: Luckily we tend to get 2 waves of service we usually have English people who prefer to eat earlier and French people who prefer to eat later, so we usually have the English wave at the beginning and the French wave later on. Although there've been nights where honestly it's almost all French and nights where it's almost all English, so really it breaks down to about 50-50 which we're really proud of because the idea is to give English people a taste of home but also we take pride in the fact that if it's good quality French people will like it too and you know the majority of our community are French and that was the idea from the beginning was to serve the community with a good meal.

Michelle: That's a great idea. And do the French expect several courses for the evening meal or are they happy with just fish and chips?

Caely: Yes that's another thing that's changed from the start. I you know we started just doing one size really big portion. In England the standardised size of fish and chips is 175 grams for the fish. Ours is 200 grams plus, but then we've had so many French people say you know I can't eat and we only are open on a Wednesday evening and so we had a lot of French people saying I can't eat very much in the evening, I'm used to just having a soup can't you do a smaller size why don't you do pudding why don't you do desert. I was surprised that people were asking for desert because it is so filling

Michelle: Yes.

Caely: but a lot of people do prefer to have a smaller portion of the fish and chips and then have a, goodness i can't even say fish and chips properly, they

prefer to have the choice to have a smaller portion for dinner and then have a little bit of something sweet after.

Michelle: Okay

Caely: So my typical deserts that I alternate between are tiramisu and a crumble

Michelle: Nice.

Caely: Which I've been told I'm exceedingly good at both of those, so .

Michelle: Excellent

Caely: The idea is to keep it all homemade and made for scratch so every step of the way everything is homemade so the chips are cut by hand and they're cooked more than once again I won't go into all the boring details but um the tartare sauce is handmade and everything is really handmade with just the basic ingredients so so yes to answer your question in a long-winded way we do offer desert and we also now do 3 different sizes of fish and chips. We do the regular, the normal, we don't like to say large because we like to think of it as the standard and that's more than 200 grams, then we also do medium which is 150 grams and small which is 100 grams.

Michelle: Excellent

Caely: And er we have people ordering pretty much equal amounts of those 3 sizes I would say.

Michelle: OK. That's amazing, so it's just Wednesday night and what are the hours?

Caely: It's Wednesday from 6 o'clock. Doors open at 6 o'clock so the first orders come out at about 10 past six

Michelle: Okay

Caely: And we're open well we don't have a set closing time really but the fryers turnoff at half past 8.

Michelle: OK. And obviously its advisable to reserve?

Caely: Yes, because we are a very small operation we do prefer to have for people to reserve that is best because we do sell out so we order a certain amount of fish and once that fish is gone we can't magically produce more. Best to

reserve to be safe however I do always order extra fish and so it is usually possible to come in and get some last minute but definitely advise reserving

Michelle: And for takeaway the same?

Caely: The same for takeaway.

Michelle: Okay, do it beforehand. And how do people find out more about your and get in contact with you?

Caely: So I have a FaceBook page, it's le Martin-Pecher. In Silfiac and we also have a Google page so our contact information, our hours and our menus are all up on those pages and my mobile phone number is available on those pages as well so I take reservations by phone call, by text message by WhatsApp, by FaceBook message

Michelle: Okay. Great stuff, Well that's fantastic., I shall certainly be reserving with you after our interview for next week, I look forward to it and I'm sure lots of our listeners will be in to see you too. It sounds fantastic.

Caely: Thanks Michelle.

Michelle: Thanks very much for your time Caely.