

**H G E M**
Empowering HospitalityTransform your
Guest Experience ManagementFRIDAY OPINION IS SPONSORED BY HGEM - EMPOWERING HOSPITALITY **Fri 20th Oct 2017 - Friday Opinion****Michelin status losing relevance to guest experience by Steven Pike**

The announcement by chefs Karen Keygnaert and Sébastien Bras (with restaurants in Belgium and France respectively) that they have decided to return their Michelin stars is nothing new. Plenty of others have made the same decision in the past, including Marco Pierre White, who returned his three stars after he became convinced the Michelin standard was irrelevant. He was quoted as saying: "The future of dining is casual dining. Let's be real."

It was a sentiment way ahead of its time and one that resonates with us here at HGEM. External standards no longer feel like the best yardstick to measure hospitality businesses against, and they're certainly an ineffective way to judge guest experience. This year, the owners of Michelin-starred restaurant Boath House in the Scottish Highlands spoke out to say it was impossible to live up to Michelin standards while maintaining a healthy profit margin, announcing they would take a new tack and offer simpler and more authentic food. Skye Gyngell, now head chef of Spring at Somerset House, garnered considerable press when she described Michelin recognition as "burdensome", when she was awarded a star for her food at Petersham Nurseries in Richmond.

Aside from the impressive PR response, there is a sense Michelin's ways of measuring the quality of food and service, which for a long time were considered the holy grail for restaurateurs, now have a much more limited appeal. Michelin's rigid emphasis on formalities (from overly attentive staff to particular ingredients), seems more anachronistic than it did even ten years ago. Its rulebook is at best particular and rather traditional and at worst totally out of step with what most guests want – a comfortable setting, friendly but not stuffy service, and good food that isn't overly fiddly or intimidatingly pretentious.

The hospitality goalposts have moved. In the past, consumers wanted a trusted authority to guide them in their choice of restaurant, looking to bodies such as Michelin as a mark of quality that gave them confidence. Now there is so much information online a positive TripAdvisor review or a glowing post by a respected blogger can have more real-world persuasive power than Michelin status. Consumers are setting their own standards.

Keygnaert makes the point that fine dining culture is shifting. He says: "People now go for dinner in another way – casual, quick, just for fun or a quick bite. In my new restaurant, the food remains the same but the formula for offering it will change. I continue to serve quality food but not as a (set) menu, so people can decide for themselves how expensive or long they want their meal to be."

For hospitality providers, the onus is on them to recalibrate their internal standards to match their customers' priorities. This is where HGEM can be incredibly helpful. When guest experience management ties in with the individual brand and concept, this gives a far more accurate perspective on how a provider is doing at delivering a great guest experience.

It's understandable restaurants get hung up on comparing themselves with competitors – it has a significant influence on perception and it's important for marketing purposes. However, guests don't want their experiences at different restaurants to conform to the same set standard every time. Measuring something as personal and varied as the guest experience against a rigid rulebook should be balanced against defining what it is about your brand experience that makes it unique – and ensuring this is delivered consistently time and again.

Steven Pike is managing director of guest experience management expert HGEM



H G E M
Empowering Hospitality

Transform your
Guest Experience Management