

# When less is so much mOre

Dubai just can't get enough of the More café brand... even though it never advertises. **John Hunt** gets a taste of its success.

**I'm enjoying** a cup of tea in 'mOre' cafe in Garhoud, Dubai as I wait for the owner. Wouter Lap.

Lap is running a little late. One of his staff tells me that 'he won't be long, he's on his bike'.

Having already ascertained that he is Dutch, I remember the Netherlands' fascination with pedal bikes and look forward to seeing him ride up with his trousers tucked into his socks. A few minutes later, a huge man pulls up outside on an equally huge Harley-Davidson.

Lap, 47 years, is husband to Marijke and father Coen-Reinier, 15 years and daughter Carlijn-Valerie, 14 years. He has been in catering for "well over 20 years" more than half of them spent in the UAE. His last role was as executive chef at Sheraton Dubai Creek.

Since 1998, he and Marijke have worked in their joint catering and creative consultancy businesses - the former founded as Intelligent Foods - which, I discover, is the rock on which the More cafe concept is founded.

The two More outlets in Dubai are a development of the business interests began in 1998. When one considers that Intelligent Foods' concerns lie in the production of breads, coffees and ice cream then it becomes clear that Lap has built from the bottom up - supplying in-house produce to his own outlets and enjoying the benefits of 'an in-line' business operation and, as he is patronising it

himself, a reliability and economy of supply.

More food is simple, fresh, robust - but with a twist.

Lap tells me he wants people to 'understand' his cafes.

And, without wishing to overindulge in hyperbole, these are not ordinary cafes. More's look, its branding, is very strong. Lots of space, lots of light, these are givens; but the use of colour and furniture form are interesting and the liberal use of a very strong shade of purple - and within the logo, the website et al could not have be by accident. "It's a strong colour, a masculine colour, one with history and nobility," says Lap.

I ask whether More's adherence to the unusual colour as a branding concept means that he is trying to emulate Stelios' and his ubiquitous orange. He doesn't disagree: "We can link the name to anything," he says. "When looking for a name we needed something memorable, short and something that says what we are all about. More. This is a niche product, we have a feeling to sell. More is about organic growth.

"We built our two premises from the inside out. All of the furniture, all of the lighting, the bar, it's all made by us or to our own specifications, on site, from

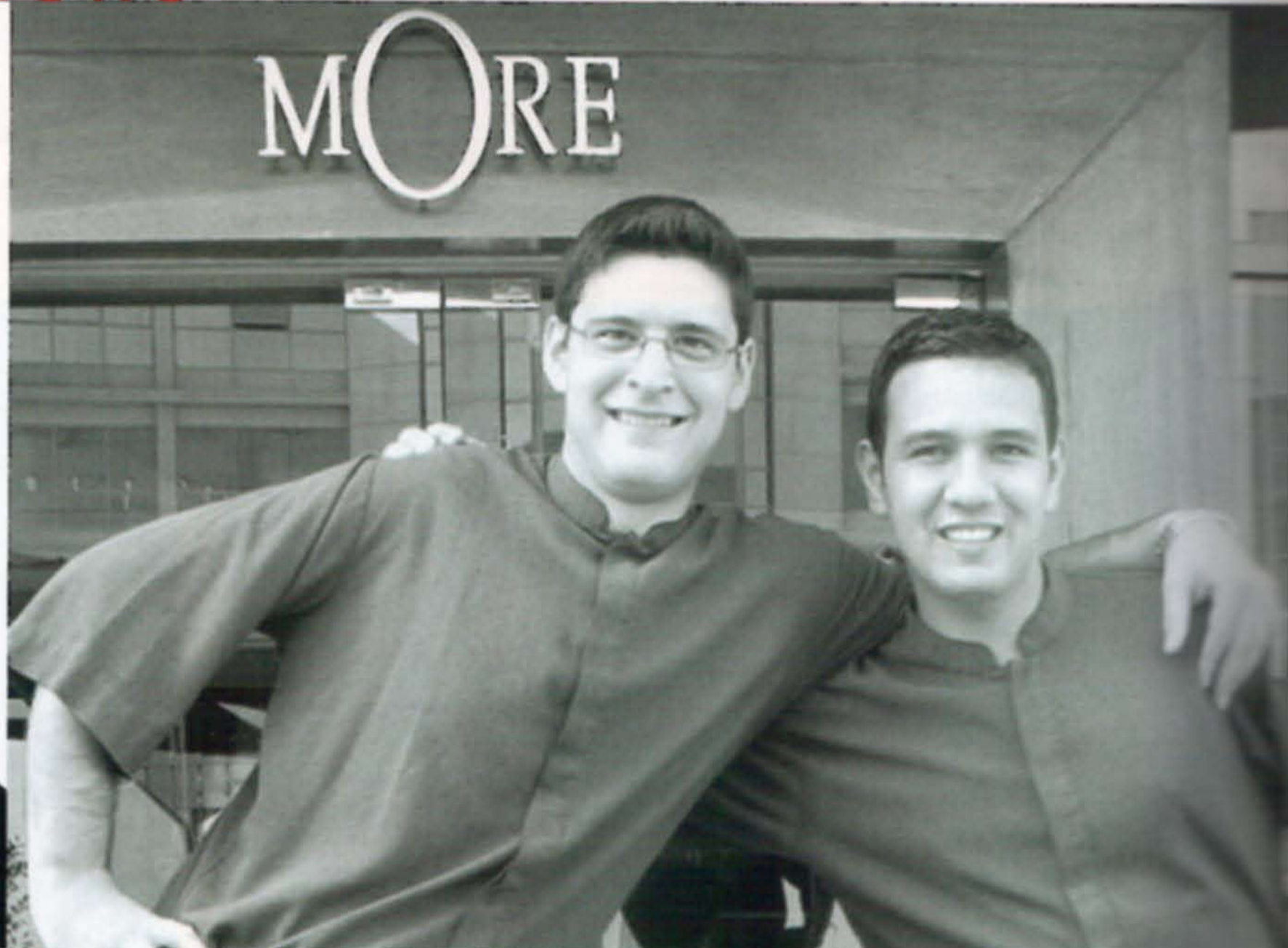
scratch. If I want something for the outlets and can't find it, I make it myself," he says, pointing to a large tryptic canvas on a nearby wall signed 'Lap' in heavy, black oil paint.

The attention to detail is something that makes an impression and this, again, something that is not by chance. The menus for example - are thick, cardboard back displays ▶

...we don't advertise and don't use marketing...

**Inside out: Wouter Lap does it his way**





Looking ahead: Marijke and Wouter formed their joint catering and creative consultancy business in 1998 and plan to expand beyond the UAE

plain, white A4 sheets with prices. The sheets are attached to the backing with a huge metal bolt. It's different. I then discover the underlying theme behind the More concept. "With the stack of papers, we are saying 'history, building history', with the bolt we are saying 'solidity', and the solidity of the bolt with the flimsiness of the paper? That is saying 'contrast'. It's definitely a 'yin and yang' thing."

There's a lot of wood, from the floor up and the word 'organic' is one Lap uses often. The More logo with its distended 'O' stares back at you from the napkins, the doors, the lightshades; but you have to look for it. I suggest that Lap is 'challenging' the customer? "We want people to come here and relax, but if they want to get involved in what is going on around them, then this is possible as well. People seek focus and we try to keep our customers concentrating - it helps them relax."

Lap won't be drawn on revenues but with a staff of 162 engaged in production through distribution and the outlets, the flying Dutchman is certainly worth way more than the \$12,000 (AED45000) he got when he left the Sheraton in 1998.

But for any agencies considering a cold call, don't bother - Lap does not advertise, period. "I don't see the need, for one thing. The idea behind More is, literally, word-of-mouth. Customers who understand what we are trying to do here are more likely to have friends like them and if they like what we are doing, they will tell these friends. It's important to understand that we don't advertise and don't use marketing because our product is the marketing," he says.

More is currently in talks with a number of parties across the GCC interested in franchise agreements and this represents the future of the brand, it seems. "We want to keep the UAE for ourselves," Lap says. "I envisage that in the next five years ...we will have another two in Abu Dhabi."

"In terms of franchises, though, we are looking at the other Gulf countries - at least in the first instance. Our 'no pork, no alcohol' model is one that will travel well and we're speaking to interested parties in Bahrain, Oman, Saudi, Kuwait," he tells me. "But it's vitally important that we like the potential franchisee, they have to understand the model

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completely. We are looking for friends, for partners, not money-making machines. We had one party approach us bragging about how many Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises he had and he said 'I want More. Give me More. Not interested.

So, when Lap says: "We will never compromise on quality", it rings true. He's a charming gentleman and his staff respond to him as a friend, not a boss. It's refreshing. There is no hype surrounding the More product, but if there were, I would believe it for sure. ■

