

Watt's the Secret

How does a Montrose butcher lift the Scottish Countryside Alliance Best Traditional Business award for two consecutive years? Deemed the best in Scotland, Neil Watt will find out on Saturday 2nd February's Daily Telegraph, if he has won the UK title in this competition.



Neil is hiding nothing when he explains "we are not doing anything different, we are just doing the job the way it should be done." He feels that he has built up trade by sourcing quality product, maturing his beef and "being just what good butchers should be."

According to the Countryside Alliance judges: "In today's supermarket age Neil Watt shows that exceptional quality of produce can still be achieved. The quality of the produce in his shop is always excellent, and the meat is well hung 'as it should be'.

"But the best bit of all is the atmosphere. Watt the Butcher is like a club or a meeting place where everybody knows each other. Service in the shop is excellent and the team are knowledgeable and friendly."



A visit to his main street shop reveals a few little touches that suggest his customer care goes beyond the expected. Every customer is greeted by Neil, his staff are friendly and experienced, the customer is treated with courtesy in recognition that they provide the success for the business and there is a full display that is both attractive and full of variety. On the customer side there are two comfy armchairs for customers to sit and muse, making the meat purchasing experience as pleasurable as possible.





Neil stresses the importance of communicating with his customers:-

"I purposely make the effort to say 'hello' and 'goodbye' to every customer, especially old people because you may be the only person they speak to in a day. It doesn't hurt to be nice."

Affection seems to work both ways with butchers ideally placed to win public admiration, he continues: - "Customers appreciate butchers now because of the dominance of the multiples. We get in a lot of youngsters. There is a generation of mothers now who were brought up in supermarkets and they are coming back to butchers because we can tell them where our stock comes from and point to the field. The main problem is that they do not teach cookery or domestic science at school anymore."

Possibly of even greater significance is that Neil Watt is a unique individual. You are only in his company a matter of minutes before he is rattling off the names of top chefs and restaurants like Peter O'Sullivan used to describe Derby runners and riders.

All this is possible because of his days working in London and abroad. Neil learned his craft in his father (right), James R Watt's family butchers business, bought over from DD Scott in January 1960. He was also tutored in live buying at Montrose Mart by Co-op buyer Jim Cairncross. In 1978 he went off to work as a butcher in the Gulf for Jahmiel – Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Doha. When he returned to the UK his father had retired so he worked in a chain of 48 shops and two factories operated by J Hunt in London.



After a spell at Fenn's of Piccadilly serving the public and the catering industry, Neil became Head of the Fresh Meat Department at Claridges and continued in catering butchery with the Dorchester



before heading the Fresh Meat Department at the Savoy Hotel in the Strand. The annual meat budget under his control was £2.8 million and while at the Savoy he was also Senior Sous Chef Naturally through all this involvement he made many friends in the industry and received training in France under Jean Francoise Deport.

In 2003 Neil returned to his hometown with his Londoner wife who didn't want to return south and after several months went by with the butcher's shop of Edwin Strachan lying empty, he decided to complete the cycle and open his own butcher's business. Word of mouth soon created the clientele and he has never looked back since.

Emphasis has been strong on beef and with a vast agricultural hinterland there has been much admiration for the butcher ploughing back a return into the local economy. Neil recognises that his customers are astute and they know what they want and what they like. He has a full time staff of seven with the youngest 37 years of age.



Chris and John





With the complexities that Butchers Licensing brought, Neil added a Bakery production area to his facilities. A total separate unit is rented from Angus Council that has been fitted out to the highest standards. The unit has gained approval from the Food Standards Agency, he has the oval stamp that allows him to supply not just his own shop but wholesale to other businesses as well.

Neil's baker works through the night cooking off roasts and making potted hough and steak pies. The range of small pastry products covers everything from Mince & Gravy Pies to Chicken & Apricot Sausage Rolls and Chicken Tikka Brides.



Standards in the bakery are extremely high, first class equipment:- Italiana Bake off oven with 99 programmes, Bakbar turbofan oven, two Gram Blast Chillers, Ham Boiler, Silko hob, a Cooked Meat chill and separate raw meat ingredients chill. All this is managed by a very impressive and fully documented HACCP system.

There's plenty therefore to earn Neil the Countryside Alliance award and that's without particular reference to his fantastic beef story. His customers can't quite comprehend their luck that their butcher's beef is produced in the most caring of ways on the Glenbervie estate and the cattle that provides their meals is from one of the world's most prestigious herds of pedigree Aberdeen Angus cattle. This in itself is worth a feature all of its own and you will find that at <http://www.sfmta.co.uk/members/index.php?ID=2161&CATEGORY=13Shop%20Features>

There are no secrets with Neil Watt, he is desperate to tell you more and more. He still supplies the top chefs with their personal needs, generating comments of approval in Neil's colour brochure from the likes of Egon Ronay and Anton Edelmann.

The population of 12,000 in the town of Montrose has the choice of shopping in Tesco, Lidl, Somerfield or the Co-op but Neil knows the origin of all his meat and if he could take you there you'd be even more impressed.

