

## The Secret is in the Sausage



Brian, Simon, Ryan, Barry and Wayne

There can be few butchers who visit Edinburgh who do not successfully escape from their partner or family's attentions to sneak a peak at the shop that has for years been considered the pace setter for Britain's butchers.

While some might prefer retail therapy at the nearby Harvey Nics, do the unmissable Edinburgh Castle or marvel at the unique Scottish Parliament building at the foot of the Royal Mile, Enric Miralles has to take second place for those with designs on more meaty creations.





Butchers from all the corners of the planet earth gravitate to the edge of the New Town to visit Crombies of Edinburgh and proclaim its developer as the most important architect in the Scottish capital. And what a palace this is.

While you can admire the wonderful displays, the phenomenal range of sausages and the innovative products, curiously and a little surprisingly, the most impressive feature is the staff! Each one seems intoxicated with enthusiasm, "look at this" "you should try this" they don't stop. What are these guys on?

The spectacular selection of sausages include those with ingredients such as Edinburgh Gin and the fabulous classy local brew from none other than Innes and Gunn but it seems sampling the sausages has had a positive effect on those who sell them.

Alex Crombie established a fairly small butchers shop in 1955. On Alex's death in 1962, the founder's son Sandy took the business and moulded it into a market-leading food shop, recognised throughout the city as being the place to buy meat. Sandy is still there in the background but one of his most admirable talents has been to set up such a vibrant business and competent staff that virtually runs itself.

In their very own Real Sausage Company, a standalone business in Leith that makes Crombies famous sausages and also provides the boning facility to supply the Broughton Street 'Palace', two dependable sausage makers in Ian Campbell and Charlie Cairns make production look like a stroll. The set up is a model that others would do well to copy.

The pair shock with tales of how easy they deal with Christmas. For most butchers the thought of having to produce 28,000 chipolata sausages just a couple of days before Christmas is enough to induce a cardiac arrest but for these guys (with a little help from their friends in the shop to pack) that's all possible in a morning. Sausage production is computer controlled with ingredients double checked and no sausages leave their chills without being labelled for full traceability.



Sausages take up almost 30% of the fresh meat counter in Crombies but that only demonstrates how serious sausages are to the business. His lamb is plated like there is a skills competition but shop manager Brian Barclay has time to stop and chat, relaxed in the confidence that everything is just fine.

Assistant Manager Wayne Anderson is the product's man and such is the intensity of his colourful displays even the pineapples are wearing shades! His bright ideas are well received and definitely attract repeat business. The butchery side employs a further four full time staff, one of whom works part time at the processing unit.

The shop has a hot food counter and the steady morning trade is replaced by an avalanche of all sorts of customers as soon as the Hog Roast is ready at noon. 200 breakfast rolls daily and a lunch time selection serving over 200 hot meals, what a feast!

The deli and hot food counter trade is all co-ordinated by PJ - what else do you call someone with a name like Francois Van Niekerk? He has introduced quality coffee that widens the appeal for their takeaway customers and his work is assisted by three full time and one part time staff members.

Then in the basement there's the 'engine room' where all the pies and puddings are made. Again the storage and systems are exemplary. Sandy shows you around but the efficiency oozes out without any more than a pleasant exchange between him and his staff. Goodness these sausages must be magic!





You think you've seen it all and there is nothing more to note but then you talk to Yommana Crombie, Sandy's daughter in law. She is nicknamed Cola and she is the Real Thing!

Cola has control of the 52" screen in the shop window and three flat screens in the shop all beaming out punchy lines and using the smartest images. She has addressed modern technology and is clear that you should not use social media as a direct sales channel.

"Rather than hard sell, buy now, do it now messages, it has to create positives to engage with the business" said Cola with authority. "Newspapers are more for an older audience, social media is for the newer generation. There are tons of ideas on Instagram and you can use it as a guideline to see what kind of content, what kind of image that people like to click and make them positive.

"A website is essential in 2017; it provides convenience to customers who are so busy with their kids and work" points out Cola. She has a deep understanding of marketing and that shows all the way through to a Loyalty Card scheme that offers their year-round customers 10% discounts at Christmas.



Defying his 77 years, Sandy enjoys the great satisfaction of watching his business continue to stand out be it the counter displays or on social media.

"It is nice to see, everything is positive just now and I feel very positive. Sales are good but we are going to launch a different kind of delivery service" he promises with mischievous intrigue.

With everything expertly delegated into manageable divisions, Sandy Crombie is certainly still the king of Scotland's craft butchers but now that he is on 'Sunset Strip', you just have to wonder how long he can resist predatory investors who could do very nicely too.