

Five new restaurants and bars in 12 months? Not a bad year for this celebrity chef

After a long simmer, Mr. Palmer turns the heat way up. But don't expect to see his face on a jar of pasta sauce.

By Deanna Cioppa

It was December 1987, and the rising star chef was poised to open his first restaurant, yet hadn't settled on a name for his new venture. Today, New Yorkers know the restaurant as Aureole, perhaps the best-known eatery from Charlie Palmer, whose 13 restaurants and bars and three hotels employ 680 and rake in an estimated \$55 million a year in revenue. The Charlie Palmer Group has opened five properties in the past 12 months in New York City alone.

The 40-cover lunch service

Part of what makes a Charlie Palmer dining experience is, well, Charlie Palmer. In the dining room, a 40-cover lunch service means 40 tables Mr. Palmer will personally visit.

"You don't build an empire by yourself," restaurant consultant Arlene Spiegel said. "Because Charlie is known in the industry as a smart but very nice person, he's been able to surround himself with other smart people who have very strategic alliances in the hospitality industry, whether it's restaurants or hotels."

Knickerbocker delays

Mr. Palmer has left his mark on restaurants of all kinds from coast to coast, creating a kind of social capital that he can tap into to power his business.

Not that everything is as smooth as butter. The Knickerbocker, for example, opened a year later than planned, crowding two restaurants and a bar into Mr. Palmer's already packed year. But Mr. Palmer takes these delays in stride. His real challenge, he says, remains finding



Photo: Buck Ennis

the right people to staff his properties so that he can split his time among them without too much fear that any one is suffering.

"The most valuable thing I can do is be involved in the operations" he said. "I can actually be in our restaurants—because then you're really touching people on a personal basis as opposed to being on a TV screen or on a product that's in a grocery store. To me, that's more real, and I could be wrong, but I think it would be longer lasting." ■