

AUGUST 26, 2018 - **HEYER PERFORMANCE** IN THE NEWS - By Charles Passy

High-Profile British Restaurant Group Makes Its Way to New York

With \$20 million commitment, D&D London will open spots at Columbus Circle and Hudson Yards



D&D London will open its first New York restaurant next month in the Shops at Columbus Circle. PHOTO: STEVE REMICH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



David Loewi, left, and Des Gunewardena at the Shops at Columbus Circle. PHOTO: ERIC VITALE

Since it launched in 2006, D&D London has emerged as one of the most prominent dining companies in its namesake city, with more than 30 restaurants. It has also branched out to other locations in England and to Paris and Tokyo.

Now may come its toughest act: making a name for itself in New York City.



A rendering of the interior of D&D's restaurant at the Shops at Columbus Circle. PHOTO: CETRARUDDY

The company, whose annual revenue tops £150 million (\$193 million), is opening its first restaurant in the Big Apple next month at the Shops at Columbus Circle. Bluebird London will be a British-inspired brasserie modeled after its similar spots in London. It has a still-to-be-named restaurant planned for 2019 as part of the Hudson Yards, the residential and commercial complex under construction on Manhattan's far West Side.

Add up the startup costs of the two spaces, and it amounts to a commitment of about \$20 million, D&D officials say.

"We are not coming in unaware that lot of people come in and don't succeed," said D&D London Chairman and Chief Executive Des Gunewardena, who is one of the Ds in the company name. (The other D is David Loewi, deputy chairman).

Examples of out-of-town chefs whose New York restaurants didn't last are almost too numerous to cite. The late and legendary Creole and Cajun chef Paul Prudhomme couldn't make a long-term go of it in New York. Nor could celebrity chef Guy Fieri, whose Times Square establishment, Guy's American Kitchen & Bar, closed at the end of 2017 following a five-year run.

But D&D has much going in its favor, say restaurant-industry professionals, who often describe it as the British equivalent of Union Square Hospitality Group, Danny Meyer's restaurant company. That is, D&D develops many concepts covering many

cuisines, from a sustainable seafood restaurant to what the company bills as a "slick take on the traditional British steakhouse."

Plus, D&D has an unmistakable flair for design, professionals say.

"They're known for creating great spaces," said **Julia Heyer**, a New York-based restaurant consultant who has worked in Europe.

Bluebird London isn't a single dining destination as such, but an 11,000-square-foot space done with a contemporary British look that combines a bar, restaurant and all-day cafe.

The menu in New York will have plenty of British favorites, such as fish and chips and beef Wellington, but there will be tweaks made with New York tastes and preferences in mind. A case in point: Afternoon tea will be offered, but it will feature cocktails served in teacups.

D&D made its way to New York in large part because Related Cos., the real-estate giant behind the Shops at Columbus Circle and Hudson Yards, sought it out as a tenant. The Bluebird concept especially had appeal because it functions on many levels, said Kevin Stuessi, vice president at Related.

"It can be a special occasion place, but it can also be your everyday lunch or weekly dinner destination," he said.

The bigger challenge for D&D may be at Hudson Yards. Although the complex will feature a Who's Who of the dining scene, including high-profile chefs such as Thomas Keller and David Chang, restaurant-industry professionals question if it will draw in enough patrons on a regular basis, especially due to its relatively remote location.