



NEW FACES

SHARING THE SOCIUS DREAM

A new restaurant called Socius is coming to Norwich city centre very soon. Emma Outten meets the couple behind it, Natalie Stuhler and Dan Lawrence, whilst they search for the perfect premises VISIT [WWW.SOCIUSNORWICH.CO.UK](http://www.sociusnorwich.co.uk)

NEW YORK-STYLE DINING with a Norfolk flavour is coming to Norwich in the near future, thanks to the vision of a dynamic young couple, Natalie Stuhler and Dan Lawrence.

And while they search for the perfect premises for their restaurant, ideally in The Lanes area of Norwich, they have set up Socius Dining, a private dining and professional catering company which offers modern, British food with an international influence.

Chef Director Dan, 31, has been working as a chef for 15 years. 'I started in the hospitality industry when I was 16 and worked my way up from a kitchen porter to a head chef. I was running my own pub by the age of 22.'

His inspiration comes from travels across the globe from New York and San Francisco to Thailand and Australia.

Operations Director Natalie, 25, went to school in Framingham Earl and then Wymondham High School Sixth Form, before moving to Leicestershire to pursue a career managing events.

The couple met working for Stones Events, where he ended up as Head of Operations and she as Special Projects Manager. Dan says: 'We're a very strong team.'

During their time there they provided catering for a number of high end brands, clients and celebrities.

But, as Natalie says: 'We decided we'd both like to do something on our own and where better than Norwich?'

'Leicestershire was lovely but there isn't really an independent restaurant scene there and we used to come back here all the time when we had the rare

day off.' Dan interjects: 'As a kid, I've always holidayed in North Norfolk.'

They moved to Norfolk at the end of January and have felt thoroughly welcomed, with Natalie saying: 'In Norfolk it's almost like a family - people help each other out and we've met so many lovely people in the industry already in the three months we've been here.'

The Socius restaurant concept has been inspired by their travels around the food capitals of the world, particularly New York. Dan says: 'We had a dream before we went to New York, and eating in some of the cool quirky restaurants there confirmed that the concept was spot on.'

Socius is the Latin adjective for sharing, joining in, partaking, so the concept is all about bringing food and people together in an informal, relaxed environment whilst still delivering amazing food, drinks and service. Natalie explains: 'We want the restaurant to be somewhere that everyone feels welcome and relaxed. There are no rules - you can come straight from work, you can come dressed up, it's just going to be relaxed and casual.'

Dan reveals a key plan for their restaurant: 'The kitchen is going to



DAN LAWRENCE AND NATALIE STUHLER



Here's a great cocktail from Socius

be completely open and within the restaurant – there will be no walls, no back of house and no hiding space!’ Natalie adds: ‘That way, guests can interact with chefs and watch whilst their food is plated – it will create a really social atmosphere.’

The menu will focus around locally sourced ingredients, with dishes changing to reflect the seasons. Having relocated to Norfolk, Dan is excited about using the produce in this part of the region. And they’ve been busy meeting local suppliers, including, most recently, Dingley Dell pork farm in Suffolk.

Natalie says: ‘We’ve got such a great range of produce available here right on our doorstep it would be ludicrous not to make the most of it.’

The food will be served on variations of plates, and designed in a way that the guests choose exactly how they want to dine. Natalie says: ‘You can come in after work and have a cocktail and a few plates to nibble on, or you can come in, order six plates, decide to share two with your partner and have four for yourself – it’s a really relaxed, easy way to dine.’ Plus there’s another top secret concept involving dessert which is yet to be revealed!

Dan and Natalie are really passionate about creating a family feel in their restaurant. Dan adds: ‘We want it to feel like our staff and our customers are all part of the Socius family.’

And whilst they are hunting for their new home they are bringing the Socius ethos to the comfort of people’s homes, providing first class food, cocktails and service. For the cocktails they have teamed up with Leicestershire-based Clover Club to bring a full cocktail bar service, and food-wise they can provide anything from small plates to a full seven course tasting menu with wine pairing (they have been working closely with Robert Harrison, formerly of Morston Hall and now of CH Wine Merchants).

Socius Dining can provide catering for any type of event, from dinner parties and shoot dinners to birthday celebrations, lunches and anniversary parties. And one new venue they have been working with is Aldborough Hall.

The Socius Dining side of their business has served a great purpose, as Dan says: ‘It’s been a big introduction to Norfolk and a great way of getting the Socius brand out there.’

Natalie adds: ‘But the restaurant is where it’s really going to be at. That’s where our heart is.’

VANILLA LAIKA

SERVES ONE

INGREDIENTS

25ml of Wild Knight Vodka; 12½ml of Black Shuck Blackberry Liqueur; 5ml of lemon juice; 50ml of apple juice; 1 tsp of vanilla sugar; 12½ml of vanilla gomme

METHOD

Shake well with ice and strain into a Champagne flute. Garnish with a fresh raspberry and lemon rind

