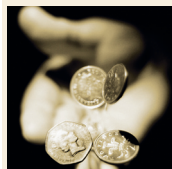


# INFOZONE

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## My life in hospitality Julian Saipe

Managing director, Zafferano

Julian Saipe, managing director of London party caterer Zafferano, started out as an opera singer. It was his time in the spotlight that gave him a taste for the glitz and glamour of events and private catering, leading to a personal venture providing opera entertainment at corporate soirées. When he married a chef and founder of Zafferano, it was then that the self-confessed bon viveur decided to combine his passion for parties, food and business by heading up the company.

He admits that private caterers have been hit by the global recession, but points out that people are still entertaining. "It's all about perception," he says. "Lots of people are still having events but can't be seen to be hiring out big, grand venues. They're having networking events and conferences with catering on the back of that – they're putting entertaining in a much more work-related context."

**HIGHS...** Last year winning *Event* magazine's Caterer of the Year and Events Catering Firm of the Year, were real highlights, because we've worked very hard for 10 years, and to get such industry recognition when there's so much competition out there is fantastic.

Doing really large-scale, beautifully produced events in grand venues is always wonderful. We did the launch of



the Francis Bacon exhibition at Tate Britain, which was brilliant, and we did the For Your Eyes Only exhibition launch party at the Imperial War Museum. We've catered at some fantastic private parties, too, at beautiful houses in the country, and all the time we're working in very colourful situations.

It's a very interesting industry because at the front end it can be quite glamorous but it's also hard graft – we have production premises, kitchens, and handle things like pest control and waste disposal, too. There's very much a show-business element to it. Food is our main product, but there's a real theatre to it: the staff, costumes, props and styling is all important. It's very much a production, and I love the glamour and challenge of it.



**LOWS...** In the early days it was difficult to penetrate a market that seemed sewn up.

Our main business is London venues, and when we initially approached places about the business, and becoming a preferred supplier, it was very much a closed shop – and that was pretty soul-destroying. They all had old favourites that they'd been using for years, and it was very difficult to make an impact.

For years we struggled to get involved. It was only when we started making a name for ourselves and bringing business to the venues that they started taking us seriously. In terms of one's enthusiasm, that was quite a trying time. It takes time for people to get to know what you do and take you seriously as a real player in the market.

## Age 40

**Family** Wife and two children  
**Favourite holiday** A forest cabin in North Yorkshire

**Drives** Ford C-Max

**Motto** Build a talent for picking yourself up after disappointment

It's an incredibly competitive business – especially now, when there's less work around – and there are a huge number of catering companies pitching for the same events. It doesn't matter how famous you are, you still have to audition for everything you do. More often than not we win business we go for, but when you don't win something that you've put a lot into it makes you feel low. It's the same across the board, because it's an industry saturated with suppliers – and, in this climate, not as many events – so we're having to work harder to win the business.

## RECESSION-BUSTING TIPS

- In this climate, client retention and nurturing client relationships is very important, so you should put in the hours to network after work. Going out into the big wide world and seeking new business is almost impossible at the moment, so it's about working with the people who know you.
- Also, keep an eye on managing overheads – power, fuel and transport. Shop around with suppliers, too, and get the best deals you can.