

MyTFLIFE



# B R I E

*our guest*

In three whirlwind years, **Steve and Hilary Barney** took over The Cheesery, opened a second shop, started a family and found their forever home. LIVING meets the young couple who have won the hearts (and stomachs) of the local community with their love of cheese.

By Ketsuda Phoutinane



WITH all due respect to supermarket cheese, its products tend to be rather spiritless versions of their cheesemonger cousins.

Cheese from a monger is a treat, a delight for the senses.

Fortunately, The Cheesery in Dundee and Broughty Ferry carries 75 varieties of cheese and two owners who would love nothing more than to help you find ones to enjoy.

If you fancy cheese or, more excitingly for them, are just curious, Steve and Hilary Barney are your people.

In 2016, Birmingham-bred Steve and Dundee native Hilary relocated from London to greener pastures, taking over the reins of The Cheesery and adding fresh bread, wine, spirits and charcuterie to its offerings.

The last three years have been a busy one for the Barneys with a new shop and first child in their first year, and, this year, a second shop and second child.

A passion for food is a foundational part of their relationship. Indeed, their first conversation was about food.

"We were sitting in a club at half past one in the morning speaking about Thai pea purée," Hilary says with a laugh. "It's actually quite sad."

"That's how we rock," adds Steve.

Meeting Hilary and Steve in their Dundee home, their easy back-and-forth and hospitality are made especially clear given that their son is feeling poorly this humid day. Yet they welcomed me with cheese, wine and charcoal crackers, which I am delighted to accept.



"This feels like home. And it helps having customers that are so nice."

Their modern house, smartly decorated in a style not unlike the newly refurbished Broughty Ferry shop, shows a family home with a passion for food and drink.

Upon entering, an impressive and well-displayed spirits collection is on view. A line-up of thick cookbooks, with favourites like Yotam Ottolenghi's Simple and the eye-catching Persiana, occupy kitchen shelves.

Finn, their ruffle-haired three-year-old son, watches telly in the adjacent room while the



Outside the Broughty Ferry shop.



they take turns bouncing their smiley four-month-old daughter Leah.

They speak thoughtfully, making jokes; their conversation overlaps one another's harmoniously.

It's evident these two have been working side-by-side for a while. The pair met while working in media advertising in London, but soon the call to start a food business became hard to ignore.

Steve says, "We'd spoken about it loads and it came to a point where we were, like, we need to shut up," – Hilary chimes in, "Just do it! Just do it and get started."

They left their jobs, bought a vintage Citroen H van they named Apollo, and founded ATE in 2013, a food truck selling sliders.

Steve and Hilary cooked out of their flat, creating offerings like slow-cooked Indian lamb sliders with raita and coriander seed chutney.

ATE went from market to market, from weddings to British Summer Time in Hyde Park, but three years later, Hilary and Steve were married and keen to move.

Luckily, the cheesemonger in Hilary's hometown of Dundee was retiring.

"It was a real right place, right time thing," Hilary says.

"I walk into work and I just love all this cheese."

They hit the ground running, with Hilary's father taking on a key part in business planning.

Steve and Hilary researched cheese books, carried out work experience, made cheese at dairies and even embarked on a personal cheese tour of Scotland.

"It just kind of blows my mind the history of cheese and how old a food source it is," says Steve. "It's the way it helped with human migration, being able to preserve milk."

"I walk into work and I love all this cheese. It's providing the complete array of different flavours and textures and styles."

Their cheese tour emphasised the labour that goes into cheese production.

"The guys wear back braces a lot of the time and it's just full-on," Hilary says. "Just to have a slice of cheddar, that's another thing now. That's somebody's blood, sweat and tears."

When it came to the shop, Hilary and Steve made a point of being as friendly and accessible as possible.

With a rebrand, increased social media, cheese wedding towers and tasting nights with Brewdog and Eden Mill, they hope to reach a younger audience.

"Some people can think, 'Oh there's a bit of snobbery about it', but we just want people to feel relaxed and try them," says Hilary.

"It's nice when other people say 'I don't know what to have.' I think my favourite thing is when someone says, 'I only like cheddar.'"

For cheese lovers, it can evoke powerful nostalgia.

A customer, whose mother is Spanish, once requested a cheese whose name she had forgotten. The two then identified and sourced Cañarejal Cremoso, a luscious, liquid Spanish cheese similar to cream cheese. The woman had last eaten it as a young teenager.

Steve and Hilary's efforts have inspired a dedicated clientele. They estimate 85% are returning customers, some of whom bring back cheese from holiday for them to try.

As a loyal customer who spends quite a while chatting with the staff on Saturdays, I can personally attest to the Barneys' thoughtfulness and friendly disposition. It is a pleasure to shop at The Cheesery and it is not just because of the very good cheese.

"You can speak to people and get to know them, their likes, their dislikes, where they're going on holiday, their family and stuff," says Steve.

"You then feel a little bit more like part of the community, and Hills grew up in Dundee, but for me, that was really important to feel. This feels like home. And I think it really helps having customers that are so nice."

In between running a small business and starting a family, Hilary and Steve have found a forever home in Dundee.

"That's what great about Dundee – you're 10 minutes to the beach, but you're 10 minutes to the hills, which is just fab," Hilary points out.

"When we moved back from London we felt like we'd been given the gift of time."

The two enjoy dining out, cooking and entertaining – and, naturally, their friends have come to expect "loads of cheese".

Now content with their two shops and two kiddos, their foreseeable future includes watching them all grow.

Hilary is currently on maternity leave, while Steve is fiercely protective of his two days a week off for family time. Their free time is mostly spent in parks to expend Finn's energy.

The family of four also spends their days by the water at Broughty Ferry beach and on the sandy shores of Tentsmuir Forest.

Steve says, "We kind of just came to the conclusion you don't get this time back, so you just make the most of it."

"There are plenty of years to work when these guys are at school and they're embarrassed by us," he jokes. "So we'll make the most of it when they do want to be around us."

All photography by Element Dundee, except family's own self portrait (page 17).

