

Brendan James Maher

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After starting a career in graphic design, Brendan James Maher decided his calling was to market Scottish smoked salmon and founded the award-winning St. James Smokehouse.

Proud of his Irish ancestry, Maher was born and raised in Liverpool and became interested in brand development and Scottish smoked salmon after he moved to London and worked for some of the top design companies in the British capital.

“While I was working at the design companies, I became fascinated with marketing, advertising and brand development and decided I wanted to run my own business,” Maher says.

In the early nineties, he moved to Cumbria in northern England to work with a smoked salmon company, and realized there was a niche for artisan-produced Scottish smoked salmon. In 2003, he established St. James Smokehouse with his wife, Alexandra.

“St. James was founded as a brand,” he said. “At first, we outsourced our production to small Scottish smokers. Although the product was strong, we couldn’t achieve consistency in flavour without more control over production.”

Eight years ago, they established the first St. James Smokehouse at Newton Stewart in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland, but they soon outgrew that premises and relocated to nearby Annan.

“The business has grown exponentially,” Maher says. “We now have a sales office in Miami as approximately 60 per cent of our exports go to North America. We supply some of the most

prestigious retailers, restaurants and hotel groups in that region.

“We also export to over 15 other territories. Over the next 12-18 months, we plan to increase our international presence. We have British Retail Consortium Grade A status, which will help in that.”

Last year, the company achieved sales of US \$25 million, an increase of about 20 per cent over 2010.

Maher says that success is due to “the distinct and delicate taste” of the smoked salmon. That taste has been recognized with a slew of national and international awards.

Last year, the company won recognition around the globe, winning awards at Gulfood in Dubai, the International Boston Seafood Show and at the Scotland Food & Drink Excellence Awards. This year, Monde Selection International Quality Institute awarded them three gold medals in the World Quality Selections.

Maintaining high product standards and the integrity of their brand as they expand into new markets is the biggest challenge currently facing the company, Maher says, but it’s satisfying to see the business grow.

“It’s also immensely rewarding to support the community in Annan and to employ a team of fifty artisanal workers who are integral to our success.”