



Gordon Ramsay barrels into Plane Food at Heathrow's Terminal 5 like a bull in its own china shop. Even bigger, browner and shoutier than he appears on TV, he greets his kitchen staff noisily, then in case anyone in the 180-seat restaurant hasn't noticed his arrival, he hollers in the direction of a couple he met in the BA check-in queue: "Champagne for these people!" And a waiter duly delivers a couple of glasses. He's so wired, I wonder if he's going to be able to sit long enough to do the interview.

A row of waiters, none of them native English speakers, arrives to take his order. He asks for tea. "PG tips — builder's. Do you know what builder's bum is? Let me show you..." The

boss is in. They are pale with spent adrenaline, desperate to get it right. But what can he mean? All the tea is specially blended. "Camomile?" they twitter, getting more and more confused. "Camomile is a f***** thousand miles away from builder's," Ramsay roars. "Camomile is f***** ballet dancers. Come on. COME ON!"

He's tanned and buff from nine months' training for an Iron Man competition in Kona, Hawaii in October. "Opening restaurants is exciting, but each year I need a focus point, a benchmark." After a tumultuous few years (and more of this later) he's now on a mission to turn departure lounge snacking into fine dining Ramsay-style. Now that Plane Food, which opened in 2008, is established, he's en

COME FRY WITH ME

Britain's most bad-tempered chef is planning to take over the globe - or at least its airports - with a string of new restaurants for holidaymakers. Caroline Scott met him at Heathrow

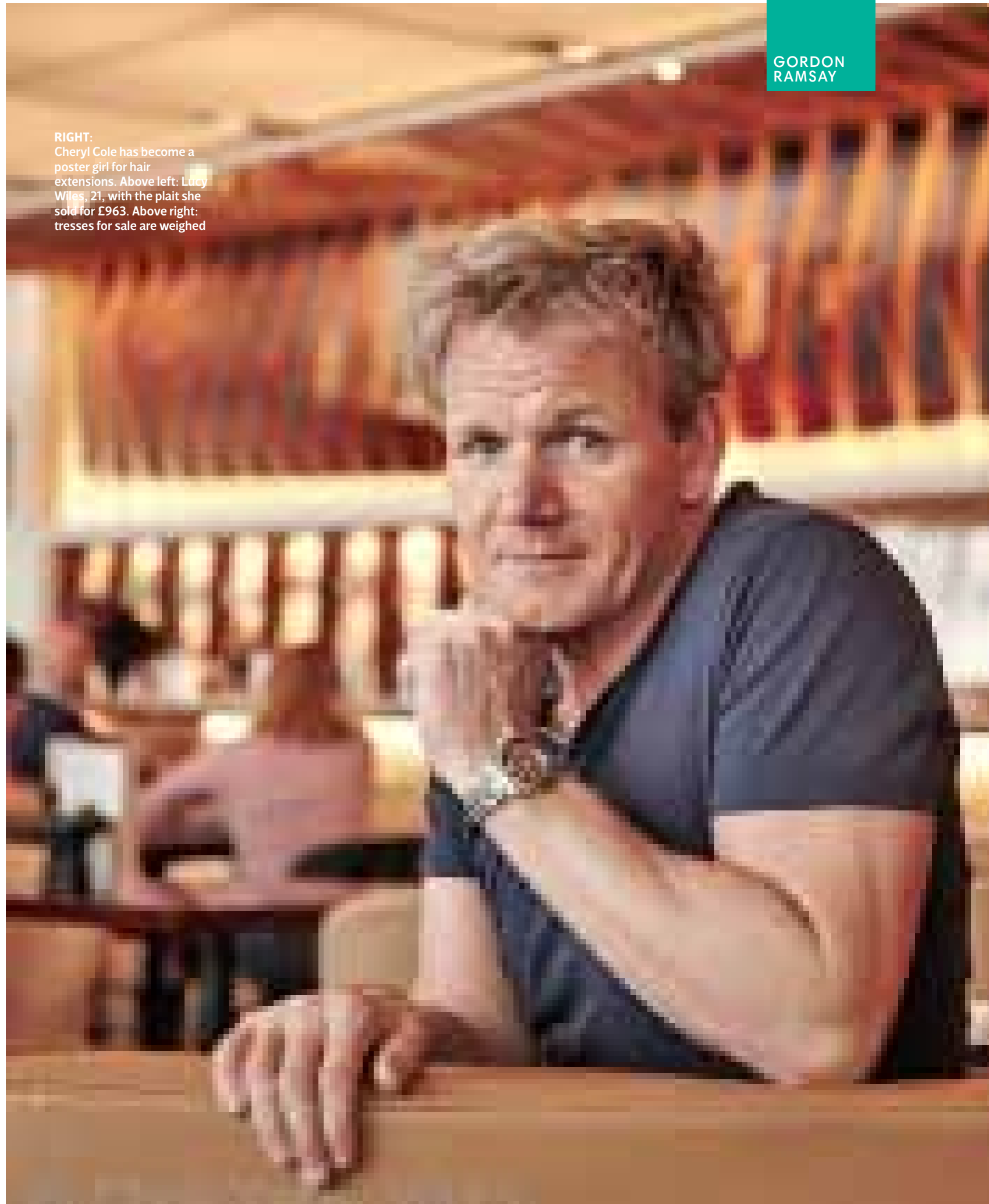


route to Las Vegas to check out the first of four more sites — others are planned at LA X, Chicago O'Hare and New York JFK. His hair is artfully tousled, a set of brand-new teeth gleams winningly and the Shar Pei brow-folds have been softened with Botox and filler. The result is kind of sexy-ferocious, with a definite emphasis on the latter.

According to his people (and there are many), there are two things you'd better not bring up in an interview with Ramsay: vegetarianism and his childhood. Just under three minutes in, he asks me what I ate for lunch and and, oh Lord, I've unwittingly stumbled into both. I did not eat roasted cod cheeks or grilled baby chicken because, Gordon, I am a vegetarian. He doesn't react, but there's not much eye contact either. He seems to be talking in everything from the single cotton thread dangling from a waiter's jacket to the possible cloudiness of a nearby glass. His entire body is in motion; he picks at his arms, ➡➡➡

GORDON
RAMSAY

RIGHT:
Cheryl Cole has become a
poster girl for hair
extensions. Above left: Lucy
Wiles, 21, with the plait she
sold for £963. Above right:
tresses for sale are weighed



fidgets, taps, swivels and splurts words elliptically like an eight-year-old with ADHD.

"I grew up on a council estate just outside Birmingham," he frowns. "And I didn't think I'd see anything worse — then we moved to Stratford on Avon and I thought: 'Wow, this is posh!' But this estate, Gifford Walk it was called, was terrifying. Terrifying! Then we went to Bretch Hill in Banbury. I didn't think I'd ever match an estate like that for sheer terror, but I found one in Bradford when I was filming Ramsay's Best Restaurant. Horrible place. Disaster. But there, in the midst of, it was this amazing, beautiful Indian restaurant, [Prashad — its vegetarian cuisine was runner up in Ramsay's Best Restaurant 2010] I've never known chickpeas to be so exciting."

Ramsay's constant in a sometimes violent and peripatetic childhood was his mum's "phenomenal food. Steak and kidney pie, ham hock soup, roast ham. It was all about smells. Going to mum's work at The Cobweb Teahouse in Stratford and watching them make the most amazing apple pie." The first thing he did as a professional chef was to try to cook better food than was served at home. "I still think that journey from raw ingredient to something wonderful is incredibly emotional, I've never lost that feeling."

"You've come through a very difficult few years," I venture. Suddenly, his mood darkens. "Are you asking me or telling me?" he snaps. Part Hollyoaks script, part bar-room brawl, Ramsay's recent troubles have hardly been shrouded in mystery. First, there was a kiss-and-tell book detailing a seven-year affair, which he denied, and severe financial losses resulting in the closure of several restaurants, which he couldn't. But most unsettling was the dramatic fall from grace of his father-in-law and friend, Chris Hutcheson. Ramsay hired private detectives to spy on Hutcheson, whom he accused of siphoning off £1.4m of company money to fund a secret second family. The mother of his wife, Tana, wrote to her to say: "Tana, you are not welcome anywhere near our door... Until you dispose of that man, you are not welcome back." In response, Ramsay took out a full-page advert in which he called his father-in-law a "manipulative and controlling dictator". Lawsuits whizzed back and forth, Ramsay eventually settled by paying Hutcheson £2m and severed all links.

"I've had an amazing few years," he growls. "Wouldn't change a minute. I've never felt fitter. Or more in control." This is a bafflingly bad way to deal with a story already in the public arena. "Shall we call it a day?" he announces. ➤➤➤



RIGHT: Cheryl Cole has become a poster girl for hair extensions. Above left: Lucy Wiles, 21, with the

WHERE DOES ALL THE CASH COME FROM?

John Arlidge on the complex business affairs of Gordon Ramsey

David Bailey photographed Jean Shrimpton in a dress by Mary Quant for The Sunday Times Magazine's launch issue, published on February 4, 1962. The shoot took place on a wooden pier at Chelsea Reach on a freezing day. "People don't realise how cold it was, working back then," says Bailey.

"There was no warm Winnebago waiting for us afterwards. But Jean's a good strong country girl. I shouldn't think she got to keep the dress. Everything was done on the cheap. We did the make-up in the taxi on the way there and the whole thing probably took half an hour."

The cover also featured footballer-of-the-moment Jimmy McIlroy of Burnley. The first 50 years of The Sunday Times Magazine are being marked by a special anniversary issue and by a free exhibition of memorable and groundbreaking photographs at the Saatchi Gallery, London SW3, January 31-February 17; Ur aut et quis dis inctotatem volor aut doluptat occatur, omnisi sa volo commolore earum rae sitape rferior eritibusa dolorest autatur aute evenihicit, aliquatumLis? An tu intra numum dena, publica quemuncer at aucterr iondac

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"But Gordon! We were doing so nicely!"

"We? We?" he spits. "I didn't put a foot out of line. And anyway, my wife is arriving shortly."

I start blathering about how much I love the saintly Tana's family recipe book, which is true. But the tumescent thighs have already sprung free from the buttermilk leather of the Plane Food chair like a

couple of dogs released from the traps, and I don't think he's listening. He's talking to his new PR about something to do with "the office". And then he's gone.

Everyone who's ever watched Ramsay on telly (most recently, Ramsay Behind Bars, where he baited 12 hapless inmates) knows that he has an attention span about 10 seconds long. Seeing how "soft" the regime was behind bars made him "quite angry". But this, he says briskly, when he slinks back half an hour later, all smiles, having established "the boundaries" for our interview (ie, airport food), is not the real me. "It's the edited me."

The real Ramsay is part multimillionaire — he earns about £7m annually from his restaurants and media empire; his net worth is an estimated £25m — to two parts battered child. His childhood was scarred by almost perpetual fear and violence. His mother, Helen, who had been brought up in a children's home, met his father, also called Gordon, at 16, married him at 17, and within five years they had four children: Diane, Gordon, Yvonne and Ronnie. An inveterate gambler, Gordon senior distinguished himself mainly by his ability to mete out cruelty.

"I was his punchbag," Helen has said. "Forty years ago, no one talked about domestic violence and I felt I had to take it."

Ramsay's sister, Diane, 48, has described how her father, who died of alcoholism aged 53 in 1998, smashed up the Christmas presents her mother had saved to buy and left her own body so covered in bruises she couldn't risk getting changed for PE "because to be found out meant another battering". For Gordon, the

abuse wasn't just physical, it was mental too. "He bullied Gordon relentlessly to make him feel inadequate. But the thing we were most afraid of was that dad would kill mum."

Gordon Jr would eventually gravitate to one of the few working environments as brutal, insecure and demeaning as home. As a child, he must have been consumed with impotent rage, but at least there was one advantage: nothing else could hurt him. By working "mad 20-hour days", he gained the magic three stars at his Chelsea restaurant, Gordon Ramsay, at just 31. He now has 25 restaurants worldwide and nine stars. It's not hard to understand why he cannot abide what he calls "slackers".

The last time I met anyone this wired it was in a residential home for children so disturbed,

'WE'VE GOT NO, NO BEARS... WE LIVE A COSSETED EXISTENCE.

they'd been serially excluded from a string of primary schools. Stress and fear left them hyper-stimulated to the point that the slightest thing could trigger a hurled chair and a string of expletives. Ramsay has survived thus far because his chosen profession tolerates and positively encourages this kind of behaviour. Having famously fallen out with both his mentor, Marco Pierre White, and his prodigy, Marcus Waring, he now turns on the same spectacular spleen-venting like a tap for prime-time TV. There have now been eight TV shows, numerous cookbooks and a homeware range. He lives in a beautiful gated mansion in south London, full of expensive modern furniture and framed magazine front covers of himself. His brother Ronnie, perhaps lacking the same resilience and drive, is a heroin addict who has

been in and out of prison and rehab.

Ramsay is a regular traveller who operates a rigorously tight schedule. He travels on average two or three times a month and always tries to co-ordinate what he eats to his destination time zone: for breakfast today, he ate muesli and a smoothie. He'll have a Caesar salad with grilled chicken, and a bowl of roasted

tomato and pepper soup — "no dessert" — before he gets on the plane; then nothing until he arrives in Vegas, when he'll immediately go for a run or a swim. What he will never do is eat from an in-flight tray even though he always travels first class. The children do. (He has four with Tana, aged from 10 to 15). They travel cattle class. "They're going to have to work f***** hard before they turn right when they get on a plane." He calls this "keeping it real".

Plane Food prices are pretty reasonable: you could have lunch here for roughly the same price as a Pret sandwich and a pastry. He makes money on the volume — 1,000 covers a day. "We've got the speed, 11 minutes from when you sit down, 100% banged to rights." Food is fresh and seasonal,, and he's proud of the "phenomenal multicultural kitchen".

Everyone spends time in other Ramsay kitchens in order to dispel the idea that

Plane Food is somehow dumbed down. "We're not after Michelin stars, just good, honest, relevant food with a feel-good factor."

For someone so perpetually furious, he's fond of the phrase "feel-good factor". "If you board your flight having had a decent dinner and a small glass of wine, you arrive prepped and in a good mood," he coos. Well, that's the theory. Ramsay's journey from terrified council-estate boy to the hub of fine dining has been epic by anyone's standards; if only he would take the histrionics down a few notches. The photographer declares the braised neck of lamb, cooked overnight in its own juices, the best he's ever had. I eat the carry-on three-course picnic (£12.95) — honey-roast beetroot and goats cheese, cheesecake tart with berries — on the way home. It is absolutely delicious ■



RIGHT: Cheryl Cole has become a poster girl for hair extensions. Above left: Lucy Wiles, 21, with the plait she