



Diane and Pierre Paradis

BY PIERRE HAMEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA DEEKS

Pierre Paradis says he is satisfied with his life as husband, father and owner of Ottawa's renowned kitchen supply store, Chef's Paradise (a div. of C.A. Paradis Inc.). His 90-year-old business has managed to remain successful and relevant, not despite change, but because of it.

Whether it was the emergence of the need for a commercial restaurant supply chain when none existed or the cultural swing to home entertaining, these seismic shifts and the flexibility of the business to adapt to them is what has made and continues to make good business sense.

Pierre's uncle Charles (the C in C.A. Paradis) started the original store on Rideau Street in 1921. Two years later, Charles asked his brother Ernest (Pierre's father) for help. Ernest ran the business until 1965. At that time, Pierre was just getting to an age where the business looked appealing and went to work for his father, eventually taking over a few years later.

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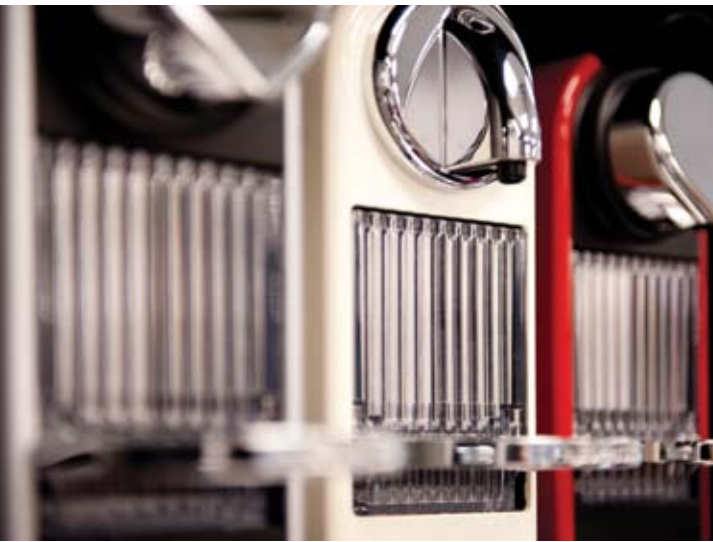
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Despite Pierre's many years with the business, he isn't the family member with the most seniority. Pierre explains that his wife, Diane Paradis, worked for his father at the original store on Rideau Street. "Technically, she has been with the store longer than I have," Pierre laughs.

By the early 70s, the first wind of change blew across C.A. Paradis's bow. The cramped space on Rideau Street was being demolished, so Pierre moved the business to its current location on Bank Street. At that time, the restaurant sector was booming, so the business shifted its focus from dinnerware for public purchase to a complete focus on commercial restaurant supply.

Pierre continued to run the business in much the same way until the early 90s when the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced and rippled through society. "More restaurants defaulted on their credit than ever before and that scared me and my banker," says Pierre.

He decided to steer the business down a different course, one that would capitalize on the home entertaining trend.

Pierre credits the slow food movement and "cocooning" for his success in the 90s. Upwardly-mobile men and women, self-labelled as foodies, were now purchasing the best quality kitchen accessories for high-end dinner soirées.

Around the same time, the consumer thirst for quality wine was ramping up. When Pierre's wife completed her sommelier course at Algonquin College in 2000, she created a wine speciality shop right in the store to service the same foodie crowd.

Chef's Paradise is now equally divided between commercial restaurant supply and retail. This keeps the business on an even keel. Now Pierre sees the need for balance in his life and recognizes his own retirement not far off. He is preparing for a change at the helm and looking forward to spending his winters down south and his summers boating amid the Thousand Islands. He offers his one piece of advice for anyone navigating these same waters: "Love what you do or you'll never succeed," he says. Pierre's legacy of success in Ottawa demonstrates this completely. **OH**



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