



15 MINUTES WITH
ROGER
BERKOWITZ





Roger Berkowitz: Seafood Tycoon. Industry Mogul. Fisher King.

The President & CEO of Legal Sea Foods got his start in his grandfather's fish market. Since then, Roger took the helm and grew the company into the empire it is today, boasting 32 restaurants along the East Coast. His first Downtown Crossing location and the 33rd restaurant in his wheelhouse, Legal Crossing (LX) is a totally new, unique concept designed exclusively for Millennium Place. Set to open early this year, we sat down with Roger to pick his brain about the new restaurant, business, and Boston.

WHAT'S THE MOST VALUABLE LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED AS A BUSINESSMAN IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY?

You've got to continue to evolve. You can't sit on your laurels and assume that the same thing that's worked will continue to – tastes, consumer behavior and economic influences change.

SO, IS THAT THE SECRET TO LEGAL'S GROWING SUCCESS?

Don't get me wrong, we're very proud of our 60+ year history and our growth, but we maintain a healthy discontent...we know that we're only as good as the last meal we served.

THE NEW RESTAURANT, LEGAL CROSSING (LX), IS A TOTALLY NEW CONCEPT. WHAT MAKES IT SO DISTINCT FROM OTHER LEGAL PROJECTS?

Yes, Legal Crossing will be a unique, one-off concept. But it's spawn from Legal Sea Foods' commitment to quality and freshness. I like to say that Legal Crossing shares the same DNA as Legal Sea Foods and our other concepts, but it'll offer a very singular experience. The food and beverage menu will be different; the design will be different – all developed exclusively for LX. Guests who want Legal Sea Foods can dine down the street at our Park Square location.

WE KNOW YOU'D BEEN THINKING ABOUT OPENING A DOWNTOWN CROSSING LOCATION FOR SOME TIME. WHAT CEMENTED YOUR DECISION TO DO IT AT MILLENNIUM PLACE?

Well, I have a thing for Downtown Crossing. My grandmother was a seamstress at the old Kennedy's department store. As a kid, she'd take me downtown by street car to buy me clothes with her employee discount. But to me, the trips were so much more than that. We'd take in a movie at the old Paramount or Mayflower and go to Schrafft's for one of their great ice cream sundaes.

WHAT A GREAT STORY. SO DOWNTOWN CROSSING HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FAVORITE OF YOURS?

Absolutely. I developed a true affinity for the area on those trips. And perhaps that's why I'm especially looking forward to opening a restaurant in Downtown Crossing. And while I'd been looking in the area for a space, nothing was right...until I saw the plans for Millennium Place. It promised to be a one-of-a-kind residential property in Boston and I wanted to develop a unique concept different from anything we'd ever done before in an area that's rich with history and on the cusp of a vibrant renewal. I knew it could be a great partnership. And for me, personally, I look forward to getting back into Downtown Crossing.





WELL, THE CITY ITSELF HAS AN AMAZING CULINARY SCENE. WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE DINING EXPERIENCES IN BOSTON OTHER THAN LEGAL SEA FOODS?

Ahh...let's see. In no particular order...If I'm in the mood for pizza, I'll go to Picco. Rick Katz is absolutely fanatical about his dough. And the ice cream he makes is great, too. When I'm in the mood for Japanese food—which is quite often—I go to Oishii. I think it's the best around. Ting Yen and his team always provide a great dining experience. And one of my all-time favorite restaurants in Boston is Hamersley's Bistro where my friend Gordon Hamersley continues to set the bar. If you've never had an opportunity to try his famous roast chicken, you don't know what you're missing!

ALL MASTERFUL CHOICES, OF COURSE. LET'S SWITCH GEARS A BIT. YOU'RE INVOLVED IN SO MANY GREAT NONPROFIT AND SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS. HOW DOES THIS WORK INFLUENCE YOU AS A RESTAURATEUR?

It's always been important to us to positively contribute to the communities in which we operate. We're a family-owned company and so naturally we find that most of our philanthropy is targeted to kids and families. We just finished our 19th annual Holiday Gift Card program which benefits Boston Children's Hospital. Since 1994, we've contributed a portion of proceeds from holiday gift card sales in MA to Dr. Leonard Zon's cutting-edge zebrafish research, who interestingly enough share 2/3 of their genes with humans, so they play a big part in medical research. Dr. Zon is a world-renowned researcher and he's using zebrafish to help kids with diseases like cancer. I'm proud to say that Legal Sea Foods has made a cumulative gift of well over \$1M and we're looking forward to contributing more to this great Boston institution.

WOW! THAT'S FANTASTIC. SO NATURALLY, THAT COMMITMENT TO SERVING THE CITY IS TRANSLATED INTO YOUR RESTAURANT?

It's in our DNA. And much of what we do is behind the scenes. We buy only the best quality fish we can and then we go beyond that to ensure the healthfulness and safety of what we put on the plate. We have a laboratory at our Quality Control Center where we test our shellfish and fish for purity. At our restaurants, we're known for going above-and-beyond for our guests with allergies. We introduced an extensive gluten-free menu back in 2005, way before it became somewhat trendy to do so. And we totally eliminated trans-fats from our restaurants in 2003, years before it became a national issue.

OKAY, ONE LAST QUESTION. A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ROGER BERKOWITZ: WHAT'S IT LIKE?

First thing in the morning, I review sales and recaps from the previous day and I check email. Upon arrival to the office, I touch base with various teams (culinary, beverage, operations, marketing, finance, etc.) to see what issues may have popped up and what projects are being worked on. And then I attend to nagging paperwork for different licenses and permits. I thrive on the constant variety that occurs throughout the day. Each day is different and things fluctuate on almost an hourly basis. I never have to limit my focus to just one thing. On the flip side, the fish and restaurant business is labor intensive, tension-ridden and frustrating at times. But that makes it exciting. So both parts in tandem are great.

Roger will join us for a FIRESIDE CHAT and give us the dish on his inspiration behind Legal Crossing (LX). Stay tuned for scheduling information.



Italy **MEETS** *Boston*

☕ A LOVE STORY ☕





When Caffè Nero Founder Gerry Ford decided to bring his Pan-European brand to the United States, only one place came to mind. Having lived in Boston for some time, Gerry fell in love with the close-knit culture of the city, the vibrance of downtown and the comfort of finding solace from winter's bone in a warm coffee house. Then, he realized one afternoon that, while the city was drenched in coffee chains, those places lacked the intimacy of the European coffee house. And so, as in all affairs of the heart, Gerry wanted to spoil his love, and romance Boston with the attention it deserves.

"I lived in Boston and love the city. It's a dynamic city where I feel familiar and fit in well."

Now, as we sip a chocolate-dusted cappuccino from a corner spot in Caffè Nero, we understand exactly what he was talking about. Read our interview with Gerry and get a behind-the-espresso-bar perspective on our new home away from home.

MP: What attracted you to Boston in the first place?

GF: I love Boston. I lived here as a graduate student and had a wonderful time. It's a beautiful, vibrant city full of culture and diversity. Additionally, Boston is on the move, developing several parts of the city like Seaport and Downtown Crossing. Boston also has an affinity for Europe, which makes it more likely that Caffè Nero, as a European/Italian coffee house, will connect with customers.

MP: What inspired you to open the first U.S. location at Millennium Place?

GF: After deciding on Boston, we wanted a location that would allow us to attract a diverse set of consumers. We wanted to test our offer with a residential community, the business community, students, tourists and even just passers-by. Millennium Place offered that and seemed a great opportunity to participate in the transformation of Downtown Crossing.



MP: How do you see Caffè Nero fitting into Downtown Crossing?

GF: We want to be the neighborhood gathering spot. This is a place where people can sit and have our award-winning coffee roasted in our facility in Europe. They can also enjoy our food, much of which we make fresh daily on site, ranging from freshly baked croissants, to freshly made ciabatta and baguette sandwiches, to salads, to fantastic cakes and artisan desserts. We have a fireplace, chessboard and generally feel like somebody's living room. I hope people will use the store this way.

MP: What kind of special connection can Millennium Place residents look forward to with Caffè Nero?

GF: The residents have been drinking our brewed coffee in The Club before anyone else for the last 9 months. We also offer a loyalty discount for regulars. I'll be speaking at a Fireside Chat this fall and I really hope residents will see us as their home away from home.

MP: What European influences can be seen in the Boston location?

GF: First and foremost, our coffee is Italian style. It's similar to what you'd find in the streets of Rome. Also, our food has a European bent, with ciabatta sandwiches, mozzarella salads, prosciutto, Italian cheeses, baguettes, biscotti, and the list goes on. Additionally, a lot of the furniture you'll find has been brought over from Europe. Our back bar, for example, has been shipped from Strasbourg and is more than 300 years old.

MP: Caffè Nero has a known commitment to sustainability. Can you elaborate?

GF: We work with Rainforest Alliance in sourcing our beans and our factory is certified for Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance.

MP: Are any of your food or beverage items sourced locally?

GF: Yes. We're working with Nashoba Brook Bakery out of Concord. For those who don't know them, they're a wonderful artisan bakery and they provide us with fresh bread daily. We also get desserts from Leo's Bakery in South Boston, and we get our milk from High Lawn Dairy.

MP: What makes Caffè Nero so unique compared to U.S. coffee shops?

GF: I think our strong craftsmanship in coffee. We have a tremendous amount of expertise in our sourcing, blending and roasting. We also feel strongly about giving the customer a high quality experience through our fresh deli-like food, warm atmosphere and unusual decor. I think people feel really comfortable in our places.

MP: What are your plans for expansion in the United States?

GF: Well, we do plan on opening other stores, but we're not in any hurry. Our focus right now is on Boston. We want to open in several neighborhoods in the city and become part of the fabric of the community.

