

Winning a competition set London's newest restaurateurs on the road to success with novel green cuisine

The decision to open a group of upmarket restaurants in London in the middle of a recession is not one to be taken lightly.

But that was the challenge cheerfully accepted by a team of Swiss restaurateurs who were sure their unique concept of a fast food service of vegetarian dishes would find favour with Londoners.

They'd already proved the success of the idea in Switzerland with the opening of four Tibits restaurants – in Zurich (2000), Winterthur (2002), Berne (2003) and Basle (2007).

The thought of moving to London actually goes back more than four years and set in train a lengthy process before they were satisfied they were making the right decision, ranging from finding suitable sites and negotiating with suppliers to recruiting the 50 personnel they needed to man each restaurant.

In this they received valuable help from the Swiss Business Hub at the Swiss Embassy in London, who put them in touch with local specialists.

Eventually the first UK Tibits opened recently in Heddon Street, off Regent Street, and was quickly followed by a second in the Westfield Centre in West London.

The heart of each restaurant is its "food boat", an oval-shaped buffet displaying more than 30 salads and hot food dishes. Diners chose what they prefer, and then it is weighed and paid for by the gram.

The idea first took root ten years ago when Daniel, Christian and Reto Frei drew up a tentative business plan for a new kind of vegetarian restaurant and submitted it to a competition jointly organised by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and McKinsey Consulting.

They picked up two awards, and

the publicity they received was seen by Rolf and Marielle Hilti, the owners of Europe's oldest vegetarian restaurant in Zurich.

The five decided to join forces – and Tibits was launched. Their first Swiss restaurants have enjoyed considerable success. In fact a survey of diners showed that 90 per cent of them were non-vegetarians.

Said Reto Frei: "We are very excited and confident Londoners will embrace our fresh and stylist approach to vegetarian cuisine."



The team behind the two restaurants that are bringing a new dining experience to London: Daniel Frei (left) with Rolf Hilti and Daniel's brothers, Christian and Reto