



The heart of a project

French consultancy BEGC prides itself on a personal approach to each project, as Nolwenn Laroche and FCSI Associate **Xavier Brochard** tell Sandra Haurant

BEGC works on assignments across France, as well as overseas, and has a client base that ranges from small local creches catering for 15 children to immense centralized kitchens making 10,000 to 15,000 meals each day. The firm covers a broad range of market segments, too, including schools and universities, hospitals and care homes, large corporate canteens and small commercial restaurants. Its philosophy is simple: if there is a kitchen or a laundry to be created, BEGC can help.

Passion and skills

As the company's range of clients suggests, this is a company that thrives on diversity – a fact that is reflected in its recruitment practices as much as its scope of projects. The 18-strong team has a broad range of skills and backgrounds, including design specialists, refrigeration experts, chefs and even a landscape architect. Today, the director is **Nolwenn Laroche**, who is the daughter of the founder. She explains: "We choose people based on their passion and their skills, rather than simply their qualifications. As a consequence we have a varied set of competences that leads to a very creative team, and on a human level it means we have a team full of interesting people to work with."

Associate chief project manager **Xavier Brochard's** background is firmly rooted in the restauration trade – he studied for a diploma in hospitality and catering, specializing in cuisine, and went on to study engineering for the catering



The company refreshed the kitchen of La Mare aux Oiseaux for chef Eric Guerin

industry in Grenoble. He then began working for a different design office where he stayed for five years, before joining BEGC in 2005.

Laroche brings a different set of skills to the company. She took over as director two years ago, and her professional background is in accountancy and finance, but the industry has always been very much part of her personal history. "I was brought up surrounded by the business – it's been part of my life since I was a child, and the company has always felt like part of the family to us," she says.

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A holistic approach

Whatever the project, whether a commercial restaurant or a large-scale public facility, BEGC has the same priorities. "We always aim to be very present from start to finish, and to work closely, as a team, with the architects and other design offices. We never work alone in our corner; we always see ourselves as part of the whole," says Brochard. While different clients have different budgets, scales and centres of interest, BEGC aims to meet their needs by approaching the project in a holistic way.

By the same token, the firm always seeks to put the kitchen at the heart of a project, resisting the idea that it should be hidden away in a basement. "Often, clients will think of the dining area or the office, but not necessarily the kitchens, although of course the people working in the kitchen need the same consideration as everyone else. We try to bring that to the fore, to show the importance of the kitchens and encourage them to think of



the ergonomic aspect," says Brochard. "I have worked in dark kitchens for eight to 10 hours and I know what that's like; we want people to feel good in their workplace, and for us that means natural light. We are trying to remove this idea that kitchens should not be seen."

"Sometimes it's hard for clients to understand this," Laroche says. "They want to put their kitchens somewhere at the back of the building, or think about them at the end of the process. We try to explain to them that it's a really positive step to place these elements at the center of the project, that they will have a much better turnover of staff if people working in the kitchens are happy and satisfied in their workplace."

"We have to think about the cleaning too," says Brochard. "We need to consider ways to keep kitchens clean as part of our designs, it's an extremely important aspect. Cleaning time in a kitchen is long and thankless – in a 10-hour working day



Top: BEGC is proud of its diverse, talented team. Above: The state-of-the-art campus for Ducasse catering school



Above: The Alain Ducasse catering school outside Paris is set within a 5,000 sq m building

"We need to consider ways to keep kitchens clean as part of our designs, it's an extremely important aspect. Cleaning time in a kitchen is long and thankless – in a 10-hour working day you can easily spend two hours cleaning"

you can easily spend two hours cleaning, so it's a vital part of the design process."

Creative attitude

So, too, is a personal approach, which is why BEGC begins with a clean slate for every single project. "We make kitchens to measure; it's very much tailor-made for each client and we never copy and paste a project from one job to the next," says Brochard. "Our creativity is really important to us." It's this attitude that has helped BEGC to respond successfully to many tender requests, while also

maintaining enduring relationships with clients and architects who select them to work on new assignments, not just in France but across the world.

"A good proportion – 15-20% – of our projects are in Paris, but we have worked on assignments as far away as Cuba, China, and Congo as well as Marrakech in Morocco and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire," Laroche explains. "We go where our clients ask us to go. If a client, who has worked with us in France, wants to bring us into a project overseas, we will go there."

The broad range of skills and experience within the team means that BEGC is in a strong position to combine an in-depth understanding of the needs of their clients, with a unique combination of people able to find creative solutions and think beyond conventional ideas. ■

LANDMARK PROJECTS

The most demanding assignments can often be the most rewarding, and there are few clients more demanding than a Michelin-starred chef. La Mare aux Oiseaux is a gastronomic restaurant and hotel in Saint Joachim, at the heart of the Brière regional park in Loire Atlantique, western France. Chef Eric Guérin, who has owned the establishment since 1995, wanted to breathe new life into his successful business, and BEGC was entrusted with the redesign of the kitchen.

The project required a top-of-the-range design in a relatively small space, so BEGC set about creating a cutting-edge kitchen that would sit well within this charming cottage. The emphasis was firmly on producing a kitchen of the very best quality, while also bringing personality and creating a space in which people were happy to cook. "We worked very closely with Eric Guérin to find the best use of space, using 3D mock-ups and focusing on creating something that was completely ergonomic," says Xavier Brochard.

While the restaurant was short on space, another project presented the opposite challenge when French chef and national institution Alain Ducasse created a new state-of-the-art campus for his renowned catering school in Meudon, just outside Paris. BEGC took charge of the kitchen designs. Here was a project on a formidable scale: the school boasts 10 kitchens with space for 14 students working in each, set within a 5,000 sq m building.

Both projects were demanding for different reasons, but in each case there was a need to be on top of every detail. "We used the same sets of skills but with very different results," says Brochard.