Gelato gives huge scoop of pleasure

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Kieran Tosolini left a business career to follow his dream of opening his own gelato shop in Darlington. Picture: Daniel Aarons

How many of us dream of following our heart and working at something we are passionate about? It takes courage and supreme confidence to walk away from a successful career to launch your own venture. Selling premium artisan gelato is a world away from analysing company financials but for KIERAN TOSOLINI, 30, couldn’t be happier and says success comes with loving what you do.

One of my earliest memories is sitting on the front step of my grandmother’s house in Italy peeling beans which we’d just picked from the garden.

For Kieran Tosolini, food has always been an integral part of family life. On frequent holidays to Italy, ensconced in his nonna’s kitchen in Udine, his passion for cooking was nurtured.

“In primary school I would be inside watching cooking shows while my friends would be out playing or going to the movies,” he says.

As a child Tosolini dreamt of being a chef but a love of study and outstanding academic achievements steered him instead towards an economics degree at University of Sydney, then a Masters in Accounting.

In his mid 20s he was forging an enviable career path – first with one of the world’s leading business consulting firms and then with an elite, privately held firm.

But as his career trajectory continued its upward track, Tosolini could not shake a profound and growing sense of dissatisfaction.

“There was this gradual awareness that it wasn’t for me,” he says.

“I enjoyed my work but my mind was always ticking over different business ideas and trying to find something I could do that involved food and running my own business,” he says.

Opportunity knocks

Four years ago while travelling with a friend through Europe on a career break Tosolini stumbled across a gelato that would change his life.

The perfect business opportunity he had been seeking had finally presented itself.

“In Italy, gelato is everywhere – every second shop sells it and every one of them is supposedly ‘the best’ but when I tasted this RivaReno gelato I just loved it,” he says.

“It was a very high quality product and the overall look of the store was very different and designed to stand out from everyone else.”

After visiting RivaReno gelaterias in Florence and Turin, he was utterly convinced of his business idea – to bring the authentic, award-winning Italian gelato to Sydney.

“I honestly believed there was absolutely no product like this here in Australia and still do.”

Getting started

What followed was a year of meticulous research and complex negotiations with the franchise founders before he finally secured the Australian rights.

“I was still working but every night I’d be on the phone to Italy negotiating and every spare moment was spent on the business plan, and looking for a (store) location,” he says.

“It was challenging but I have a very strong drive and the effort and hard work didn’t faze me – and it still doesn’t.”

The venture needed substantial capital and Tosolini has poured his life savings, along with some not inconceivable bank borrowings.

“I’d been saving for a long time and had a fair bit (of capital) ... it was hard getting all the finance but with the skills I acquired in my previous career, I managed to pull it off,” he says.

Spreading the word

This month RivaReno celebrates its second birthday since opening in Crown St, Darlington, and the venture has been a slow burn, steadily attracting a growing legion of devotees as word spreads.

Speciality lines for cafes and restaurants along with hiring out a specially-made gelato cart for weddings, birthdays and festivals (which doubles as a clever marketing tool) has provided additional revenue streams.

Tosolini says success lies in an uncompromising focus on quality and customer service.

“The RivaReno philosophy is to use only the highest quality ingredients sourced from wherever that happens to be – like pistachios from Bronte, Sicily or hazelnuts from Piedmont,” he says.

“Then the way the gelato is made and stored is very precise and different to what people are used to.”

The gelato, which is made on site every day with only fresh ingredients and nothing artificial, is stored in special stainless steel covered tubs (called pozzetti) which keeps the texture perfect and the flavours fresh.

“This is a complex product – it’s not just ice cream – and I love talking to customers and explaining what goes into making this gelato,” Tosolini says. “The best reward is seeing people try it for the first time and then say it’s the most amazing gelato they’ve ever had.”

Grateful to his earlier career for the invaluable business skills he acquired, Tosolini has not a single regret about choosing another path.

“It doesn’t feel like I’m working,” he says. “Gelato is a magic food and in the end, we’re here putting smiles on people’s faces and that makes you happy which makes it fun to be at work.”