

How did you first get interested in seaweed?

It was 20 years ago and I was a creative director in the advertising industry, developing and managing brands. One of my clients was involved with horticultural seaweed in the north of Norway, and I had access to a lot of research data. It seemed to me that this was something that could seriously help to re-establish balance in the body, in terms of nutrition and health.

How did your previous experience shape the business you created?

During the 1980s and 1990s I began to realise that it's only when we look at things as a whole that we can move forwards – in our health or the wider world. For example, I had a client whose companies were producing wonderful, useful products, but in their workplace I found employees who hated working there so much that they left their passion, energy and drive at home each day. We are losing so much of the inherent loveliness and brilliance of humanity because we do not look after the whole. In the last issue of *Walnut*, Sebastian Pole, co-founder of Pukka Herbs, put it beautifully: “There’s no point in serving a great cup of tea if somewhere along the line you are damaging the whole you want to be part of”. The Seagreens® model is an international partnership in which there must be balance in all we do, so that we only go upwards and forwards and avoid effects that continually upset us or others and are the most serious and unhealthy drain on our God-given purity, energy and creativity.

What is the Seagreens approach?

The Seagreens ethos is to know everything there is to know about this extraordinarily nutritious food – hence our obsession with research. Our aim is not to produce ‘gourmet’ seaweed; my primary interest is its value to population health and how we can use it very easily on a daily basis. I didn’t want to do this for just 10 per cent of the population; in another 20 years there’s no reason why the average weekly shopping basket should not have a little bit of seaweed in a number of everyday products.

Walnut has a three-pronged approach: looking at health, food and people, and it’s very profound. That is the triangle; it’s got to be food, it’s got to be healthy, it’s got to be how people live and eat. It’s no good trying to change everybody’s eating habits to fit the food, and it’s no good starting a fad or a temporary trend. So we make pieces to bake into bread, capsules to take every morning, ingredients that can be used in lots of different foods.

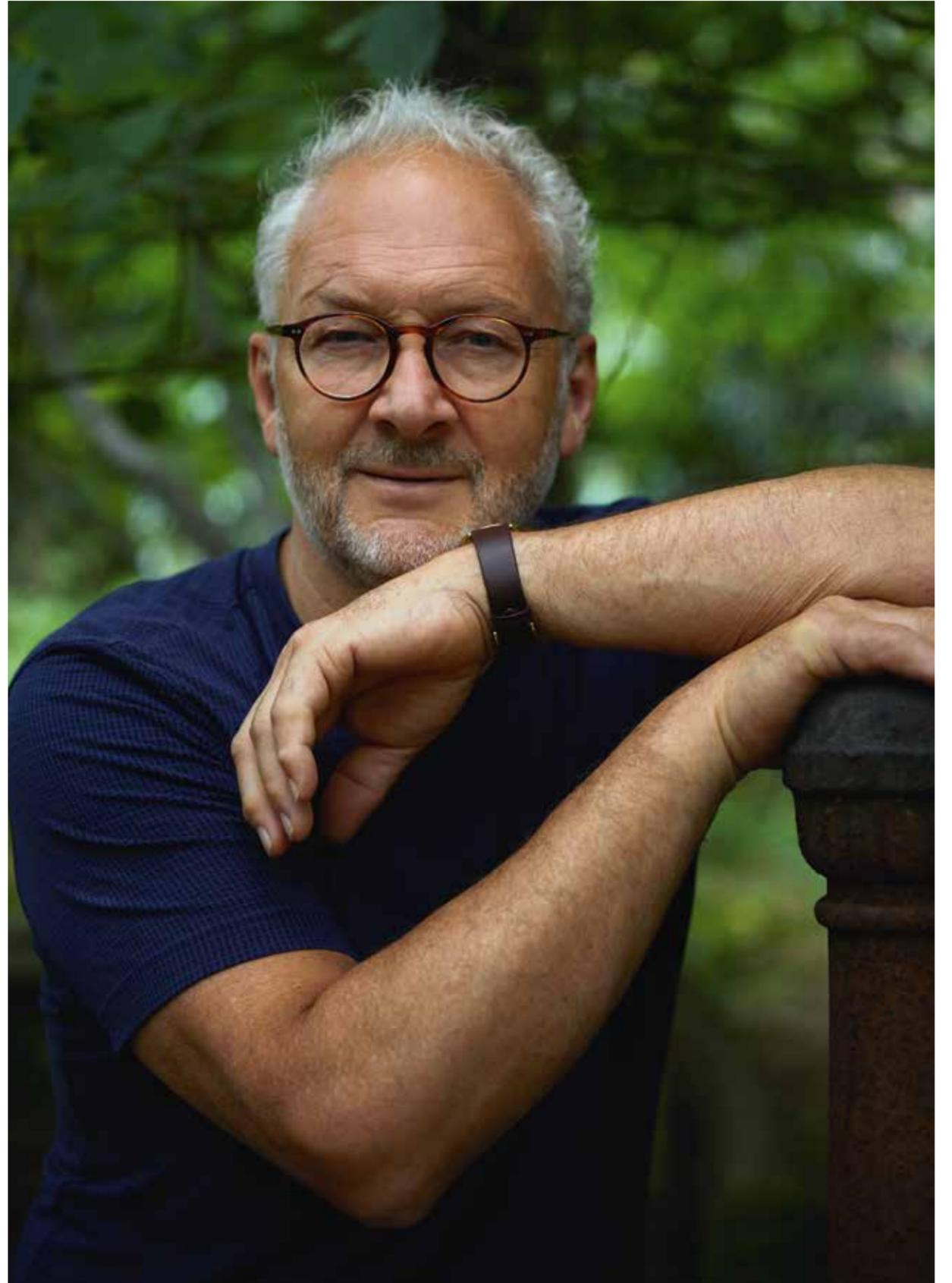
What’s so special about seaweed?

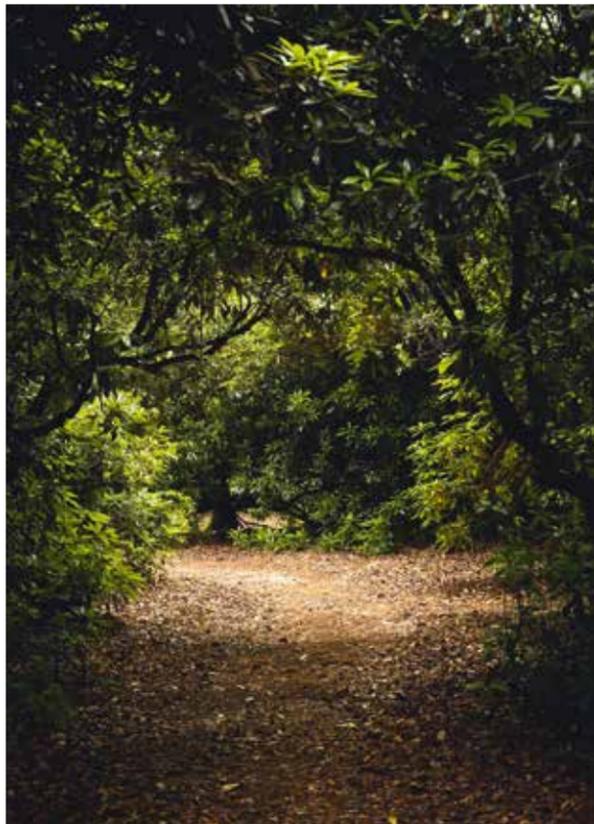
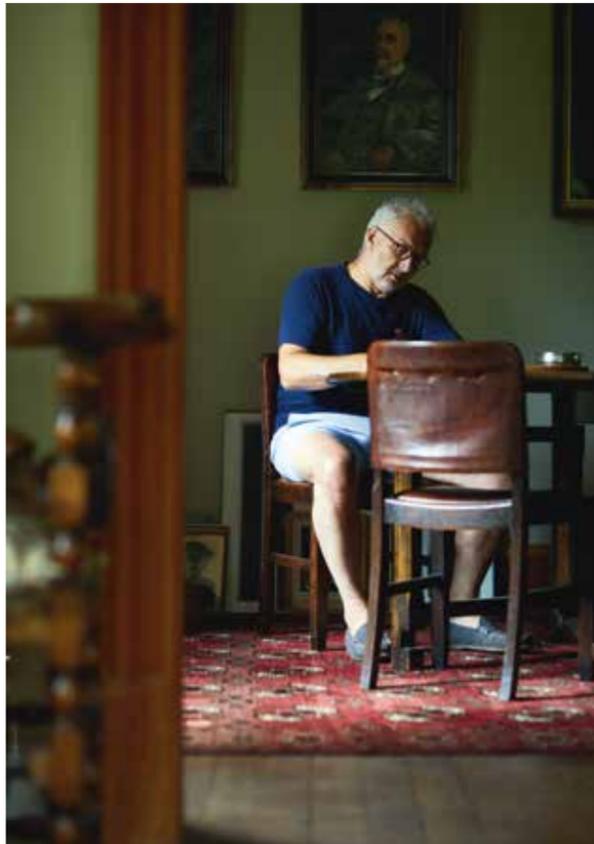
It’s different and distinct from everything we grow on the land. With land foods, you have to eat a wide variety to get a balanced input of all the nutrients because each different food is highly diversified. Seaweeds in the oceans are a much older, primordial food source; they provide all the nutrients in small amounts, most importantly the micronutrients that are typically drained from, or inadequate in, the land, especially minerals and trace elements. That’s important because it’s these micronutrients that >

Eat your Seagreens

It’s not the first thing that springs to mind as a supplement to take or an ingredient to add to food, but seaweed packs a nutritious punch. Simon Ranger explains how he’s harnessing this power in his Seagreens range

WORDS: STEPH WETHERALL PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIAN DOHERTY





I ABSOLUTELY THINK GOOD BUSINESS CULTURE AND GOOD BRANDS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

are responsible in the body for metabolising the nutrients in our land foods. It's also super abundant, eminently sustainable, doesn't need fresh water, soil or fertilisers and in our production, no fossil fuels.

How can daily consumption of seaweed impact health?

There have been two important scientific review papers on this; the first in 2015 concluded that seaweed has a place in reducing the causes of many of the health concerns we have today in the West, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and metabolic disorders like obesity. The second in 2017 pinpointed that these same seaweeds can be incredibly helpful in degenerative neural diseases in human beings, including things like dementia and Alzheimer's. I've taken at least a gram every day since I started Seagreens and I'm now 67. You'll get a clearer answer in 30 years or so!

Where do you see the crossover between food and health in today's culture?

You still find nutrition supplements in one part of a health store, and foods in another. But the dividing line is increasingly blurring as many brands, even in the mainstream, are now producing products that are absolutely food, but it's carefully produced, highly nutritious food that is valuable for your body and may come in the form of a ready meal, a carton or a capsule. The health message is being taken seriously and consumers are not afraid to demand information. I think these are good signs. Know yourself, yes – and know your food!

You made a conscious decision to be transparent about the nutritional content of your products. Why do you think this is important?

Yes, because how would it be holistic or healthy to not know everything about our seaweed or to not provide this to consumers? For several years now we've also been sharing our knowledge and data through various bodies like the Biodynamic Association (BDA), the Food Standards Agency and the Seaweed Health Foundation. Last year the BDA introduced the 'Nutritious Food

Seaweed' quality assurance scheme and standard, largely based on this work and rooted in biodynamics, organics, food safety and environmental sustainability. The standard provides the consumer with an independently certified profile of the nutrients and a safety assurance about its total composition. I think it's the first time this has had to be independently certified and available for the consumer, and there is no reason why the concept could not be applied to other foods.

Where do you sell your products?

We're in all good health food stores, a lot of alternative health practices and we export to more than 12 countries. But for me, the most important marketplace is the one that's more undefined; Seagreens is in some 80 products today, not as a consumer product but as a branded ingredient. This way it's available to large numbers of people, and it's being led by the more aware companies like Pukka, which has a number of products with our seaweed in, as well as companies making sauces, breads, sausages, oatcakes, teas and smoothies. Research has already shown that even a few grams of Seagreens in the daily diet can deliver a range of health benefits – this becomes really significant when a person begins to get a gram here, a gram there in a range of things they eat each day.

How would you like Seagreens to develop in the future?

Last year I began to put in place the Seagreens Trust, which brings together some of our longest-standing partners, including consumers, manufacturing customers and practitioners, who will hopefully continue the work Seagreens is doing around the world and make sure it is wholly good – after all, work is where we spend the biggest part of our lives. A thriving seaweed farming industry could be tremendously important for people's health and for the economy. I absolutely think good business culture and good brands can change the world, and in more profound and lasting ways than politics or economics. It's not just what we do together, but how we do it.