

Akh Tamar ! [(Ah Tamar (prénom)!] Akhtamar , l'île à Van (Arménie occupée)

Opened in 1979, the "Aghtamar Lake Van Monastery in Exile" was part exotic dining, part eccentric performance.

In the days before social media, it had a cult following and could only be found by rumour and word of mouth.

Reservations were notoriously guarded by the secretive Armenian owner and cook, who called himself Peter, and who served all-night banquets of traditional foods and dancing.

Then suddenly, a decade ago, Peter disappeared, leaving his customers hungry for one last meal and a clue to where he went.

Jo Spiller ate at the restaurant in 2010, right before it closed, and like other diners, only found it by word of mouth.



Image caption,

Armenian and Soviet decorations were on display in the restaurant

Its director Terry Levinthal met Peter to discuss maintaining the building but also ate there before it closed.

He says: "The experience of the place was one of these incredibly unique and authentic activities that only comes from someone listening to his own tune.

"As tourists and people now look for authentic experiences, Peter was ahead of his time in presenting himself and his culture for others to share.

"Today, it would be badged and branded by a celebrity chef, which just wouldn't be the same."

By all accounts, Peter was not, in fact, a trained cook, rather an immigrant simply serving the family dishes he had grown up with. But inadvertently, he helped change the perception of what food and dining could be in Scotland.

Food journalist Cate Devine says she has seen Peter's influence on Scotland's chef's and restaurants.

She says: "The kitchen used to be cut off from diners and the food they received. But Peter would come out and meet and greet people, which was astonishing then.

"Now, food is central, but there has to be something else too, like mystery and theatre. If you've got the personality, why hide it?"

Good question. So where was Peter hiding?

I had one clue. I learned Peter also owned an Armenian rug shop in Edinburgh, which is now also derelict.

source : BBC photo : D.R.