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life

how a former Tesla employee wants to change the world with Halo Burger's 'bleeding' patties

by Laura Enfield

Ross Forder may have cut his teeth at Tesla but the entrepreneur quit his high-flying job to convince the world to sink their gnashers into his "bleeding" vegan burgers.

A former meat eater, his dream is to make plant-based food mainstream and deliver an eco-friendly impact on the scale of Elon Musk's electric vehicles.

Ross' company, Halo Burger, launched in November 2018 and serves up a fast-food style menu complete with five burgers, chicken-style nuggets and fries topped with vegan cheese.

The patties are made from pea and rice protein infused with beetroot juice, designed to mimic the experience of eating beef.

"I realised if I wanted to have the most impact and help people who are used to meat consumption, the way to do that is not to feed them raw carrots and bean burgers," said Ross, who became a vegan two years ago.

"I needed to serve them what they already love – a delicious juicy burger. If you do that the vast majority of people will make the jump because they know it is better for the planet and their health.

"If there is no compromise on flavour, why would you not make that choice?"

With sites in Brixton and Shoreditch opened in the last 14 months, Ross is currently collaborating with Butlers Wharf Chop House in Bermondsey to tempt its meat-loving customers. His Smoky Carolina BBQ Burger (£9.50) will be on the menu at the Tower Bridge venue until February 24.

Designed to win over even

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The sauce and the balance had to be right. It had to hit that spot where a carnivore would eat it and feel they didn't need meat the next day

Ross Forder, Halo Burger

the "staunchest of carnivores" it contains a quarter pounder patty made by pioneering American company Beyond Meat.

It comes topped with rich vegan Gouda, crunchy panko breadcrumb-covered fried onions, creamy veganaise and tangy BBQ sauce. Guests can add jalapeños for an extra kick.

"We stripped out all of the salad and veg, which is usually synonymous with veganism and put the full focus on the other elements," said Ross. "So many people have eaten it and can't believe it is all plant-based."

Born and raised in Poole, he has a degree in acting from the University Of Central Lancashire but after backpacking for 18 months had his first eureka moment.

"I was living the hippy lifestyle and didn't see myself settling down," said the Tottenham Hale resident. "But then in 2012 on a trip to California, I saw Tesla when it was still in its early days and the car blew my mind. I had an absolute lightbulb moment of 'this is it', a complete 180-degree paradigm shift. I knew I had to go to London and help launch it there."

After "hassling" the recruitment team he landed an entry-level sales position in March 2014 and in four years rose from product specialist to sales advisor, store manager, regional coach and finally senior regional sales and delivery coach for central Europe. He had a hand in opening various sites (including the Canary Wharf branch which closed in 2019) and sat shoulder to shoulder with CEO Elon Musk.

Ross said: "He really inspired me to do my best work. You can't use the word impossible around him unless it actually breaks the laws of physics. It can't be in your vocabulary.

"The kind of rearranges the paradigms of what's possible and you start to believe that anything is. One of the proudest moments of my life was pitching him an idea he liked and wanted to roll out.

"You can't buy that kind of experience and I learnt so much from him. What impressed me most was his ability to hear an employee explain something he has never worked on, listen, deconstruct and analyse this complex process in a millisecond and then challenge them on improvements that need to be made. He had that immediate, super-smart understanding and response. I remember sitting there thinking: 'How have you done that?' and then just being amazed by it."

Tesla has just displaced Volkswagen as the world's second-most valuable carmaker, after its market value rose to more than \$100 billion (£76.1 billion). Ross said the firm's mission to electrify transport for environmental reasons used to be what "got him

2 Branches of Halo Burger currently trading in London. The brand is also currently in residence at Butlers Wharf Chop House in Bermondsey

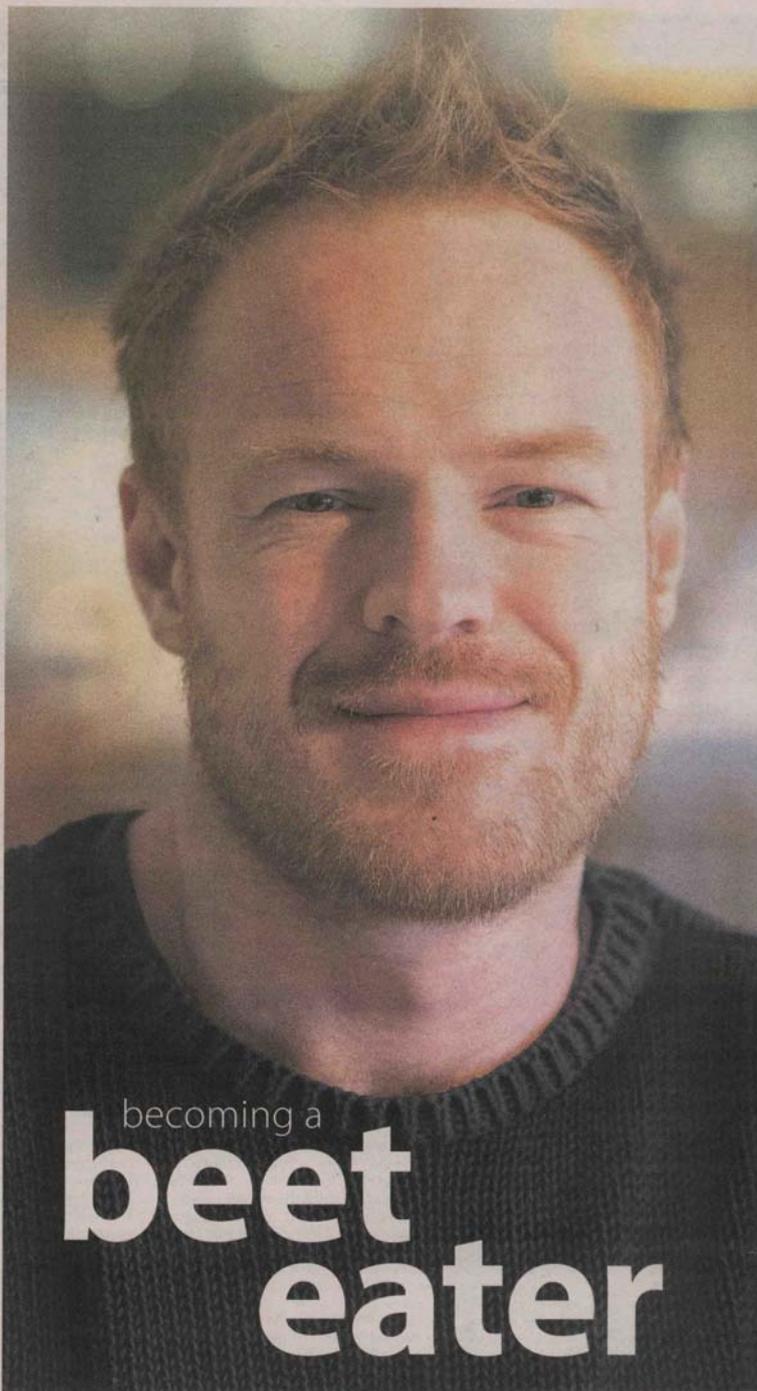


Image by Matt Grayson - find more of his work at graysonphotos.co.uk or @mattgrayson_photo on Insta



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Ross Forder swapped electric cars for grills and double-meat Subways for a plant-based diet as he launched his own vegan fast food business



Halo Burger is aimed at meat eaters who want to make the switch to a vegan diet

out of bed in the morning". But he decided he wanted to do more after discovering Beyond Meat during another chance encounter in California and realising the potential environmental impact of veganism.

"I used to be an utterly devoted carnivore and one of these guys who used to love going to the gym and then would polish off two double-meat Subways after a session," said Ross.

"If you asked my friends they would say I was the last person they would expect to go vegan.

"But even when I was eating meat I was disappointed by the quality of fast food burgers in this country. When I went vegetarian seven years ago the options were even more limited and I was frustrated. I was inspired to research and quickly came across some companies in California that were already doing these plant-based products. I came to the realisation that animal agriculture creates more greenhouse gases than all transport combined.

"I had been pouring my soul into Tesla but realised this was a bigger issue. When I bit into Beyond Meat's patty I had that same feeling of my mind being blown and knew it was the future."

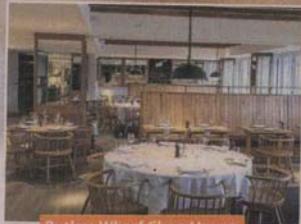
Ross returned to the UK and spent months researching and travelling to California for taste-testing to create his perfect vegan burger blueprint.

"I knew all the other elements needed to be plant-based," said the entrepreneur whose vegan top tip is Le Fauxmagerie off Brick Lane.

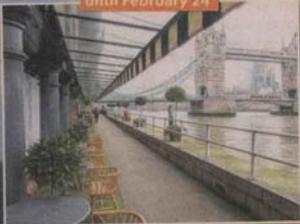
"The cheese had to be utterly spot on to convince 95% of carnivores they could eat it.

"They couldn't sink their teeth in and it taste overtly vegan. The sauce and the balance had to be right. It had to hit that spot where a carnivore would eat it and feel they didn't need to go to a meat-based fast food place the next day. A kale or quinoa burger doesn't satisfy that desire.

"I wanted people to feel there was no difference and literally replace the fast-food burger experience. The business name is intended to reflect the "halo" moment when people sink their teeth into the burgers and Ross purposely mimicked a well-known fast-food chain by using red and yellow decor and packaging."



Butlers Wharf Chop House will be serving Halo Burgers until February 24



14 days later
 plan your life from Feb 12-26



where?
 The Albany
 Deptford

STAGE | **Cabaret Playroom**
 Tricity Vogue hosts complete with her miniature guitars and other stringed sidekicks. Expect a blend of artists and genres, mon cher.
 Feb 25, 8pm, pay-as-thou-wilt, thealbany.org.uk

where?
 Brunel
 Museum
 Rotherhithe



SUP | **Valentine's Day**
 Food, cocktails and marshmallow toasting as Midnight Apothecary drinks to all things lovely. Includes live music from the Nathan Osgood Trio.
 Feb 14, 6pm, from £12, themidnightapothecary.co.uk



where?
 Canada Water
 Theatre
 Canada Water

GIG | **Nihilism**
 This quintet is a blend of energetic jazz and funk featuring the sounds of the soprano sax, violin, synths, bass, drums, electronics and voice.
 Feb 14, 7.30pm, £10, thealbany.org.uk

to do before February 12



Sink into a seat at Deptford Theatre on February 9 for Barry Jenkins' *If Beale Street Could Talk* which follows a young couple as they fall in love amid the racial tensions of the 1970s. Doors 2.30pm, tickets £6
 deptfordcinema.org

spot check worth a visit

Throw some shapes in The Yoga Room in Deptford or just sink into some Yin
 theyogaroom.london



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