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How to spend it

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AND COLLECTED

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THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE

Niccolò Barattieri

The CEO of London residential property developer Northacre oversees more than £2bn in assets. The firm is lead sponsor of *What is Luxury?*, on at the V&A until September 27

My favourite place for a breakfast meeting is Forte dei Marmi, a resort town on the coast of Tuscany. A lot of our clients holiday there during the summer. I like to go to the beach club Bagno Piero, a local institution and a very "shoes-off" scenario. We'll talk about how beautiful Forte dei Marmi is over fruit, yoghurt and cappuccino, and then the conversation inevitably turns to London property and which are the most coveted apartments on the market.

In London I tend not to have breakfast meetings. Eight o'clock, which is when I like to eat in the morning, is too early for most of my clients. I prefer to discuss business over lunch and dinner and like to find new places; The Arts Club and Cecconi's have become a bit predictable, although I do like them too.

You have to be comfortable in the environment, and it has to be conducive to good conversation. My current favourite is Swans Bar at Maison Assouline [pictured] on Piccadilly. This is where we recently struck a deal to redesign a house on Chester Square. Aside from its publishing business, Assouline has a line of furniture and *objets* and we partnered with them on the interiors of our 1 Palace Street development, next to Buckingham Palace. It's a great place to eat: the food is light – you could have foie gras, but also a salad or small dish – and the environment sets the right mood for a discussion about homes and interiors, which is so much of our business. We aren't about creating spaces covered in wallpaper or wooden panelling; much of the time the art that our clients put on their walls – from Old Masters to Rothkos – will be worth more than the property itself.

When the weather is good I like to go to La Poule au Pot in Belgravia, particularly if the client lives nearby; often they don't want to come into Mayfair. The restaurant has some beautiful tables outside but I feel naughty when I go as the food can be quite heavy. I also like Cheyne Walk Brasserie in Chelsea because it's close to home. The decor is simple but beautiful, and it's right on the river.

I'm Italian and I love Italian food, but as it's a cuisine that's all about fresh, native ingredients, it can be difficult to replicate it well outside Italy. But I do like Lucio on the Fulham Road, which is particularly great during truffle season. I adore its Italian wines too, big and heavy ones like Amarone or



Capichera, a white from northern Sardinia with a beautiful golden colour.

Right now I also like taking people to Beast in Marylebone. You share tables and it's very informal. They have fantastic crab legs and the best steak in London, bar none. They import their grill from Texas and Nebraska and I think meat from the US is far superior to anywhere in Europe.

Restaurant choice often depends on how well I know someone. I wouldn't want to impose dinner on a client who'd rather be with family or friends. But often clients become friends – and then we'll have dinner. The Polo Lounge at The Beverly Hills Hotel in LA is an

old favourite, with a wonderful burger, lovely garden and great people-watching.

Another time I'll book dinner is when our shareholders visit London. Loulou's at 5 Hertford Street is a top spot and it's where we celebrated the acquisition of 1 Palace Street. The club has wonderful food – like the filet mignon – and you can smoke cigars in the courtyard. It's also still as rocking as it was in its first week and there's nothing else like it in London. Where else would you find a giraffe at the bottom of the stairs? Robin Birley's taste is over the top but it absolutely works. An evening can go on quite late. I've been there at 4am and been asked to leave because they're closing. **MARK C O'FLAHERTY**

Beast in Marylebone serves the best steak in London, bar none. They import their meat from Texas and Nebraska