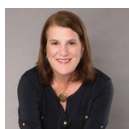


Food &amp; Lifestyle

# Father/daughter team behind Brookhaven Pub set sights on Babalu

Email Share LinkedIn Share Tweet Save Print Order Reprints Unlock Article



By **Susan Ellis** – Staff Reporter,  
Memphis Business Journal

Babalu has been purchased by the Spell Restaurant Group  
SUSAN ELLIS | MBJ

What happens when a pair of accountants get into the restaurant business?

It turns out pretty well, as it turns out.

And, what happens when that pair of accountants are a father/daughter team?

Well, that turns out pretty well, too.

**Rick Spell** and **Christy Spell Terry** are that father and daughter. They got into the restaurant business in 2004 with their purchase of Brookhaven Pub in East Memphis. When their latest deal — acquiring the five remaining Babalu Tapas and Tacos restaurants — goes into effect on Thursday, Oct. 24, their business will effectively double. The Spell Restaurant Group will now have the HR and marketing functions that are part of the Babalu deal.

"It was around 2011 that I was getting more and more involved in the restaurant day-to-day," Spell Terry said. "So, at that point, I made the decision to quit my day job and go to the restaurant full-time."

According to Spell Terry, she and her father initially took over Brookhaven Pub from its owner when he was being shipped to Iraq. That became the pair's M.O. — to take over successful restaurants whose owners are ready to move on.

With Spell Terry at the restaurant full-time, they looked to expand. Their first restaurant after Brookhaven Pub was George's in Alys Beach, Florida.

"At that point, it just sort of snowballs," she said.

After that, the Spell Restaurant Group acquired about two restaurants a year over three years. One, a breakfast concept called Grits and Grind in Seacrest Beach, Florida, they created from scratch. (And, yep, that's a Memphis reference.) The other restaurants the group owns are Edward's and La Crema Tapas & Chocolate in Rosemary Beach; Saltwater Grill in Panama City; and La Cocina in Alys Beach.

"With our accountant backgrounds," Spell Terry said, "we crunch numbers all day. That's what we're good at. We found that the level we purchase these, we're looking for cash-flow positive. These are not fixer-uppers."

They had read about the Babalu bankruptcy in the paper and reached out to owners Eat Here Brands LLC almost immediately. Spell Terry said they had always found the restaurant appealing and the food good. It seemed like a smart way to grow.

Spell Terry noted that one thing they have never dealt with before is a restaurant in bankruptcy. She called it a learning lesson and pointed out that the Babalu restaurants **that remained open are all profitable**. The remaining Babalus are in Memphis, Birmingham, Knoxville, and Jackson, Mississippi.

"Hopefully, we can give them the tools to do their job better," Spell Terry said.

As for the father/daughter dynamic, Spell Terry said she deals with the day-to-day operations and her dad is the deal-maker. He recently retired from his job at Raymond James.

"He's basically the teacher, and I'm the student," Spell Terry said. "He's tough on me. He's still pushing. He wants me to be the best of the best."