

Clubs power up with food

Australia's licensed clubs are upping the ante when it comes to the food they are serving, writes Ken Burgin.



'Most people assume clubs only serve roasts and schnitzels, but the hidden talent in club kitchens is increasingly finding an audience.'

FOOD and beverage is really coming into its own in the Australian club industry, with some club restaurants and bistros now seriously competing with pubs and owner-operated restaurants for the tourist and fine dining dollar.

Most people assume clubs only serve roasts and schnitzels, but the hidden talent in club kitchens is increasingly finding an audience. Good chefs are seeing clubs as no-longer a 'black mark' on their CV, but offering a much wider range of career options, attractive benefits, first-class facilities and serious management support. As restaurants struggle and economise, clubs are chasing variety, new concepts and expansion. While gambling is a significant source of cash, good food and service will always be 'the heart of the house'.

Clubs have always focused on training: seeking fresh and new

ideas, insights, inspiration, information and network widely within the broader hospitality industry, and the kitchen is now an active part of this development.

There are many interesting, creative and fun packed ways of learning, such as the recent two day Food and Beverage Management Summit, which I organised in Sydney for the Club Managers Association of Australia. In its fifth year, this summit was designed to put chefs and the back of house team up front and demonstrate to attendees the latest ways to develop and promote a productive, efficient catering profit centre.

I love creating opportunities to release this passion and in March 2012, for the fourth year, will be organising the Profitable Hospitality Food and Beverage Tour to Melbourne, coinciding with the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival (MFWF). Participants visit some of Melbourne's best restaurants, clubs and food and beverage operations. They meet with chefs, managers, experience back-of-house tours and participate in selected MFWF events.

Last year's tour generated some impressive results. One stand out was one of the participants, chef Greg Wilson of Toronto Diggers Club in the Hunter Valley who designed a "Diggers Degustation Menu" based on six of the dishes he enjoyed at Melbourne restaurants: Carrot and Maple Soup served in a shot glass, first tasted by Greg at The Living Room Restaurant in Malvern, Red Spice Road chef John McLeay's Watermelon topped with Sticky Pork & Prawn Relish was the inspiration for Greg's second dish, while a delicate pasta dish of Tiger Prawns, Zucchini, Mint and Olive Oil was a speciality of Italian chef Giuseppe Uva at Society Restaurant. Back to the Living Room Restaurant and a delicious interpretation of Snap-

per with Mussels, Chorizo and Pan Juice Vinaigrette, before Greg's stunning version of guest chef Chris Salans' Lamb Rack with a CocoJus, Porcini and Field Mushrooms. Chris was guest chef at Crown Casino's No.8 Restaurant for the MF&W Festival. Greg chose Chris' Chocolate Ricotta Mousse with Espresso Froth as the basis for his own dessert offering.

Describing his four day tour as one of the best experiences of his professional life Greg said Melbourne was a "whole new world for food and beverage". "In my opinion, the restaurant scene is well ahead of Sydney in regards to freshness, variety and culture," he said.

"The opportunity to see behind the scenes in some of Melbourne's leading restaurants and clubs, to speak with some very creative chefs, as well as tasting and reviewing some extraordinary dishes, has inspired me to make some exciting changes in my own kitchen."

In addition to the restaurants mentioned above, and following a stand out breakfast and back-of-house tour of The European, The Supper Club and rooftop Siglo, Greg and the rest of the group visited The Frankston RSL Club. This club breaks through most of the usual stereotypes, with a hugely popular restaurant and an innovative wine list featuring growers from the Mornington Peninsula and Margaret River.

Greg's enthusiasm on the tour and since, resulting in this impressive transition, shows what is possible, when progressive senior club managers and a supportive board of directors, encourage staff training beyond the usual narrow requirements.

Ken Burgin is a leading hospitality industry consultant. To find out more visit profitablehospitality.com or call 1800 001 353.



The FIA continues to raise the bar for the foodservice industry and connects people to allow for business and social events.

FOODSERVICE FORUMS

Our Foodservice Forums are educational and always interesting with great speakers. Fred Harrison, CEO Ritchie Stores will be presenting "Why Independent's Need to Exist" on Thursday 13 October 2011 in Melbourne. www.foodserviceindustry.asn.au/content.html



At Fine Food in Sydney, a joint Foodservice Forum was held with the FIA NSW, Food SA, FIA WA and the FIA Vic/Tas. This event attracted a HUGE audience with close to 200 guests in the room. A fantastic group of speakers presented and we extend our thanks to everyone who attended.



These awards are exclusive to FIA Vic/Tas and will be presented on Friday 18 November in Melbourne at the iconic NGV International, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

25 YEAR CLUB

The FIA has created a special club for those in our industry who have served 25 years in foodservice.

Do you know someone who should be in this club? Please let us know so that we can applaud their long service in our industry and give them the recognition they deserve.

Interested to join the FIA, please contact us for a special offer to assist your business to connect with the foodservice industry.

Bringing Foodservice Together

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