

# Chef chooses broader horizons - and doesn't look back

James Broad is getting a life. He feels he's sweated enough of the typical chef's long hot hours in the kitchen and he's setting about creating for himself a career he describes as 'lifestyle chef'.

As director of 'Cuisine Concepts,' he bounces around the Bay of Plenty, sometimes further afield, catering, consulting, tutoring, demonstrating and on-call cheffing for the luxury property Ridge Country Retreat, in the Papamoa Hills, near Tauranga.

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He recounts what's kept him busy during one recent week, which he describes as typical; two days helping a new private hospital establish its food service operation, catering for a wedding at Katikati's Charlemagne Lodge, running a Food Hygiene programme at the Tauranga Citizens Club, conducting an epicurean workshop at local food equipment shop Culinary Council, tutoring at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic and cooking a breakfast for a group of conference organisers visiting Ridge Country Retreat.

Looking back, he's pleased he took a leap out of his comfort zone when, as a young chef working in his home town of Gisborne, he accepted a surprise offer for a tutor's job at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic.

"If I was back in Gisborne now I would be working in one restaurant as the chef or the owner/chef. I don't think I'd have the energy to do that. It's a colossal job to set up and run a restaurant, I don't think people out there have any idea how big it is."

He also enjoys teaching. "In my classes I focus on the importance of ingredient knowledge and technique, and don't worry about the recipe. With pastry, for example, if you build a good knowledge of the pastry products; the sugar, flour and fats, that gives you the basics to work in any pastry kitchen."

"I'm definitely an ingredients rather than recipe man. I'd rather focus on the importance of technique to get the

flavours from the product. All chefs worth their salt talk about good quality ingredients and simple techniques, it sounds like a cliché but it's a cliché for a reason – because it's true.

"I've never been a technical chef.

My food is very, very simple, I don't do sculptured food or twisty twirly stuff. Our seasonal food is great, strawberries, asparagus, scallops and when they are there, I capture them."

At Ridge Country Retreat, be it for two

order and how many staff I'll need. From their point of view once they have the food up here they can forget about the meal. They don't have to employ me full-time and I don't want to be there or anywhere full-time."

It's not that he hasn't done the hard, full-time yards. Back in 1992, Broad headed for the typical young Kiwi chef's London 'sabbatical'.

"For three and a half years I worked 90 hours a week, including three double shifts

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overseas guests, an exclusive corporate retreat, or a function for 100, he keeps to his 'simple is best' mantra.

"What I do have is a vast understanding of how to cook a good piece of meat properly and that's what I do – a simple, beef fillet, properly trimmed and cooked and rested, with merlot jus and gourmet red potatoes and green beans, properly seasoned and served on white clean plates. Most of my food doesn't even get a garnish."

"I'm very critical about my own food because I don't want to get it 90 per cent right I want to get the whole lot right. As chefs I think we have to be self critical, we're not always going to get honest criticism from our guests."

Broad enjoys the arrangement at Ridge Country Retreat. "They have copies of my menus the guests can build from. (Co-owners) Penny and Jo will let me know the numbers and I'll tell them what food to

a week."

He started at M $\acute{e}$ nage à Trois. "Every animal that ever lived seemed to come through that kitchen, complete with feathers, stomachs, heads and skin. The day I started five bins of green fish were delivered and I thought that's going to be a big job for someone. Guess who!"

Other London jobs included sous chef at The Chanterelle, managing a small London pub The Queens Head and chef de partie at upmarket French brasserie Le Palais du Jardin.

Returning to New Zealand was something of a culture shock. "I realised I preferred working with waiters who really cared, who polished the plates and mopped the floor without having to be asked, rather than with the people here who did not seem to care."

Broad says we have since moved on but sees two new threats affecting hospitality standards in New Zealand; the advent of



James Broad

cafés and the quality of tertiary education.

"As much as I love cafés, the café concept is responsible for dumbing down the quality of staff skills. Staff stand behind a counter and take your order and money and give you a number for your table. They don't know how to present a menu, take an order properly or deliver your meal."

"Some café chefs don't have foundation skills. They don't know how to make a basic hollandaise sauce because they use a commercial product. They don't even

understand the principle of why you make a reduction, and I think that's quite frightening."

"I think there is quite a deep chasm of knowledge and skills between café staff and good restaurant staff. Sure there are some very good people out there but for our industry's future it's a bit of a daunting space."

Tertiary education is struggling, and needs to evolve, he believes.

"They haven't taken on board apprentices, they are still taking on full

time students who work maybe one day a week in a restaurant and roll numbers are slowly declining. Students can get knowledge working in the industry. They get hands-on experience and money in the bank and rather than a piece of paper and a hole in the bank."

"Different polytechnic programmes, for example carpentry, have apprentices on their courses. I think the first polytechnic that puts its hand up to work with apprentices in conjunction with HSI will be a winner."

## CHEF PROFILE

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