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THE KITCHEN RULES

Hotels are turning to the restaurant kitchen like never before as the race to lure the gastronomic traveller heats up. To find out how, HM asks two of Australia's leading regional hotel chefs for their top trends for 2011 – and if your restaurant's on the back burner right now, then be prepared to be left behind.



HUGH WHITEHOUSE
Executive Chef • Saffire
Freycinet Peninsula, TAS

There's no doubt that restaurants, cooking classes and all things food are three very important focus areas for hotels in 2011. That's for good reason – thanks to television shows such as *Masterchef*, *My Kitchen Rules* and *Iron Chef*, the restaurant kitchen has become a stage, while the person in the white has become the actor, director and everything in between.

Hotels that have embraced the new stage during 2010 have set themselves up for what's looking to be a big summer, while those who haven't will be left wondering about 'what might have been'.

When Hilton Sydney first opened in 2005, glass Brasserie quickly became the city's hottest new culinary destination and its open-kitchen design, which at the time was an emerging trend, has become the standard.

The opening of glass also signalled the return to popularity of the hotel restaurant in Australia, a trend that is continuing to gather pace like the day spa revolution in the early 2000s.

Nowadays, new properties from 4-star and above need to have a 'dining destination' within their hotel, resort or lodge to entice travellers not only for the views but what's on the plate for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Two new luxury regional properties that have firmly embraced the gourmet experience, Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa in the Blue Mountains and Saffire on Tasmania's Freycinet Peninsula, are decisively winning over a new breed of traveller – those looking for gastronomic experiences alongside the luxury trimmings.

To find out how, why and what's next, *HM* spoke to the Executive Chefs of both properties, Dwane Goodman and Hugh Whitehouse

A former Hotel Chef of the Year winner at the **HM Awards**, and a former Blue Mountains local, Hugh Whitehouse is well known in the accommodation industry for his focus on local produce.

It was that emphasis that saw Whitehouse and his former restaurant Darley's at Lilianfels receive nationwide acclaim, including such awards as Australia's best regional cuisine and several chefs hats from the Sydney Morning Herald's *Good Food Guide*.

Now at his new home at Saffire on Tasmania's Freycinet Peninsula, Whitehouse is continuing a focus on local produce in quite possibly the state's most stunning location.

"Saffire is a truly unique destination, at the very beginning of the Freycinet Peninsula," Whitehouse told *HM*. "It is far enough away from the major population centres to create that sense of journey - something that has been lacking in travel in this age of commercial airliners and characterless airports.

"An arrival at the front entrance literally leaves guests speechless, as the vista of the Hazards Mountain range stretches before them, perfectly framed by the main building.

"You walk away from this view thinking 'how could this get any better?' which is where we step in. We've created a dining experience to complement the surrounds, not just the stunning architecture and sense of place

**Star of Saffire:
Hugh Whitehouse**

of the property itself, but also the neighbouring East Coast region.

"Great relationships with our suppliers mean guests can be taken to local producers (in the case of the Freycinet Marine Farm, decked out in waders) and allowed to meet the characters that supply the very food they will enjoy that evening.

"A relaxed service ethos compliments the farm to plate mentality that leaves guests with a feeling they have just enjoyed a great meal with friends," Whitehouse said.

Like Goodman, Whitehouse's top trends for 2011 circle around the themes of shared plates, informal dining and sourcing the best regional produce.

Whitehouse's top 10 trends include:

1: Tasmanian produce

"Tassie is renowned for its apples, pears, and vegies, and we're starting to see the return of some fantastic heirloom varieties grown by some fantastic dedicated farmers."

2: Provenance of food

"We're seeing a greater number of consumers interested in the provenance of their food, and are becoming more expectant of explanation when they dine, be it the varied techniques we use to prepare their dishes, or the stories behind our band of suppliers."

3: Shared plates and informal dining

"I think that formal dining will always have its place, but there is definitely a trend towards casual and shared dining, getting back to the true experience of dining. There's nothing better than food being the catalyst for shared conversations and shared experiences."

4: Second cuts of meat

"I've seen a trend towards the use of previously thought of 'second cuts' of meat (such

as shin, tongue, brisket, cheeks etc) used in more creative dishes."

5: Regional gastronomic travel

"Travelling to regional destinations within Australia to experience food is something I think is really going to take off. We've already started to see the success of regional cooking schools, and here in Tassie we've started to see an influx of 'food tourists' enjoying our seasonal produce."

6: Rare breed meats

"I'm using some fantastic rare breed meats in my cooking, the Wessex Saddleback Pig from Mt Gnomon Farm in the North West of Tassie as one great example. The dining public are becoming much more accepting of these products on menus now and understand they need to eat and enjoy them to keep them around."

7: Importance of a good wine list

"Aren't wine lists becoming a more considered publication? They really are becoming as important as the menu when it comes to the whole dining experience. Think back 10 or so years, we were lucky to have a choice of half a dozen wines by the glass. Now we have such a fantastic variety of wines to try and enjoy when we go out for a meal, it's great to see the Australian public (and its restaurateurs) open to enjoying and listing a fantastic array of quirky old and new world wines."

8: Emergence of fine teas

"While it's great to see Australia embracing the coffee culture, I think it's fantastic to see tea emerge as an equal rather than a necessary addition in beverage lists. We're seeing more and more establishments with a rich listing of teas, especially those blends that act as digestives."

9: Goodbye GM food

"I think we'll see a departure from genetically modified and hybrid varieties of food, if not for the ethical dilemma, then certainly for the amount of water they take to produce."

10: The unique 'catch of the day'

"I like to think that there'll be a greater demand for 'boutique' fishermen. Those that supply a select few establishments, and aren't there to simply top up the food chain."



DWANE GOODMAN

Executive Chef and F&B Manager

Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa • Blue Mountains, NSW

Dwane Goodman might only be 18 months into his stint as Executive Chef and F&B Manager at Emirates' Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa, but he's already making a fast impression.

Goodman's daily changing degustation menu is the talk of the industry, as is his focus on local produce and they were two of the many reasons why the kitchen star was crowned Hotel Chef of the Year at the **2010 HM Awards**.

"Unlike most large hotels and restaurants, our unique location in the Greater Blue Mountains allows us to create exciting dishes out of niche local produce," Goodman told *HM*.

"Our food celebrates unique Australian local produce, enhanced by our seasonal, regional and organic food philosophy.

"Even with our changing new menu every evening, we're able to deliver world-class standards in food and service night in and night out," he said.

Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa, winner of five gongs at the **2010 HM Awards** including Hotel Chef and Best New Hotel, is becoming increasingly well-known for its food on the back of Goodman's cuisine as it is for its luxury accommodations in the New South Wales Blue Mountains.

Goodman said there are a number of trends to look for in the hotel kitchen in 2011.

"I think that currently the industry has split itself into two distinct categories meaning that we have a number of different trends," he said. "On one side of the industry is the 'farm-to-fork' mentality and on the other is Molecular Gastronomy."

Goodman's top 10 trends include:

1: Food ethics/food vetting

"We are seeing more and more the need for our customers to know where the food is coming from and if it is being produced in a safe, ethical, humane manner. The old saying 'you are what you eat' is weighing heavy on diners these days."

2: Organic food

"Organic sustainable food is the way forward for a lot of our customers, and everywhere you look, people are counting their own carbon footprint. This is crossing over into the restaurants of the world, with guests demanding products that are no longer enhanced and manufactured with pollutants."