

A CHEF'S TOUR

A VIEW TO A THRILL

KELLI BRETT TALKS TO AUSTRALIAN CHEF NEIL PERRY OVER A SENSATIONAL DINNER AT THE LODGE AT KAURI CLIFFS.

As I emerged from my cottage to take the short walk to dinner in the main lodge at Kauri Cliffs, a kūkupa (local Northern dialect for kererū, New Zealand's magnificent native pigeon) swooped across my path and back into the thick stand of bush. The bird's presence exemplifies the lengths to which the owner of The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs, Julian Robertson of New York, has gone to preserve the land he purchased five years ago as an investment for his children's future. (CUISINE, 2001)



IN MARCH 2001, Laureine Jacobs (then *Cuisine* food editor) visited a stunning lodge in the Far North. Fifteen years later I am taking that same short walk to dinner through lush green ferns, native trees and shrubs towards the impressive main lodge, overlooking some of the most beautiful ocean views I have ever seen. The difference is that tonight's dinner exemplifies the shift in focus from what was then widely known as a luxury golf experience with

Crispy-skinned fish from Neil Perry's master class at Kauri Cliffs



all the trimmings, including superb accommodation, tennis, heated pool, fitness centre and private beaches, to an event where world-class food and wine become the main ingredients. Earlier in the afternoon, we were treated to a master class with one of Australia's leading, most influential and philanthropic chefs, Neil Perry. It was an intimate affair where Perry shared his secret for achieving that irresistible crunch, crispy-skinned fish, and a technique for baking fish in herbs and the fresh flavours of citrus and ginger. Yes, there were a few partners tapping their toes and looking longingly out the window at that glorious fairway, but for the most part the guests were in it for the love of good food.

Food and wine are only just starting to compete with New Zealand's inclination to promote the great outdoors, sport and hobbies to lure the tourist dollar. Venues around the country are realising the advantage that offering a once-in-a-lifetime experience with a famous chef, highlighting premium ingredients and beautiful produce and wines, can give them. Especially during the off-peak season.

And so despite my lack of golf prowess, I settle in for what promises to be an amazing night of exceptional food, outstanding Dry River wines from Martinborough, and great conversation with chef Neil Perry.

Here are the dishes we enjoyed, with highlights from my chat with Neil.



KING PRAWN & NOODLE SALAD WITH STRANGE FLAVOUR DRESSING
2009 DRY RIVER GRAICHALL VINEYARD RIESLING

What do you see as the best way for New Zealand chefs to establish an identity to present to the rest of the world?
 "Work to your brilliant produce – the incredible ingredients out of the sea and from the land. People need to be cooking from their heart and their heritage. Let your multicultural influences come through in your food. But most important is for them to relax and cook what they feel is natural. There is a move in Australia towards native ingredients, but I think some of that has pushed the ingredients over their culinary value or flavour: Move towards these things slowly and make sure they work. Most importantly, communicate with each other and build a relationship between all of the terrific chefs across NZ and use your voice. It's a better place when we are all working together towards common goals."

GREEN LIP MUSSELS & CLAMS WITH SERRANO HAM, CHILLI, CARLIC & BUTTER BEANS
2014 DRY RIVER CHARDONNAY

On the question of sustainability...
 "The consumer will save the world, not the government. It needs to trickle down through restaurants into supermarkets – we have to take a view that together we need to change and focus on leaving a better place for our children and their children. Each individual needs to start taking



JOHN DORY POACHED IN COCONUT MILK & CARAM MASALA
2011 DRY RIVER PINOT NOIR

Describe the food of Neil Perry...
 "I do a lot of different styles and of course there are a lot of Korean, Chinese, Japanese flavours, textures and techniques woven through our food. Rockpool spans across Australia but then there is also Rosetta, Eleven Bridge, Spice Temple, Burger Project, consulting for Qantas and now transforming David Jones food halls. The DNA is constant within the whole business – how we look at our produce sourcing, how we treat our people, how we look at sustainability and how we work with communities. At home I cook very multiculturally but always in focus is using the best ingredients and the craft of cooking."

BRAISED OXTAIL & SKORDALIA WITH OXTAIL JUS
2009 DRY RIVER LOVAT VINEYARD SYRAH

On nurturing young chefs and hospitality professionals
 "That rite-of-passage attitude is not healthy. People don't have to give their life up for cuisine. You need to be passionate about it and care and put as much energy into it as you possibly can, but we don't want to burn our young people out of the industry. We need them to stay fresh. We focus



CARAMEL MILLE FEUILLE
1990 DRY RIVER BOTRYTIS SELECTION RIESLING

On work/life balance and his new book
 With a kitchen that runs at 44 per cent female employees, Perry feels strongly about supporting women who want to come back into the industry after having children. With a business that operates night and day, the group can be flexible around timings and allow parents to have reasonably full work lives and family lives that come together. When asked about his own work/life balance, Perry says he's created something that needs perpetual feeding and it's very hard to be able to switch off.

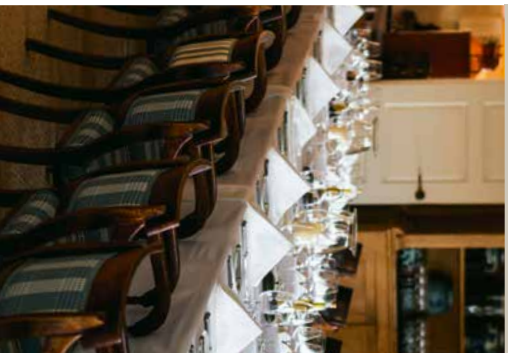
Perry's new book *Good Cooking* is out in November (see an extract on page 114) and is a reflection of the food he cooks at home, as well as the recipes that feature in his column in *Good Weekend*, which runs in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. A good stash of condiments in hisarder allows him to throw together fresh and fast food using the very best ingredients. As for that "strange flavour dressing" in the king prawn salad... it tasted of sesame, garlic, vinegar and chilli, but we were so busy talking, sipping and eating, I forgot to ask!

Gazline editor Kelli Birt travelled to The Lodge at the invitation of the Lodge at Kauni Cliffs. Find out more about their Events series Weekends at kaunicliffs.com. Listen to a special editor's podcast of the full conversation at soundcloud.com/fairfranz



AN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER

Neil Perry, Kauri Cliffs executive chef Barry Firth and his team and the incredible staff at The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs delivered an exquisite evening and an experience to remember. The cost for this event was \$1600 plus GST per person for double occupancy. The package included Friday and Saturday night luxury suite accommodation with pre-dinner drinks and canapes, Neil Perry's cooking demonstration, dinners including paired wines on Saturday night, full breakfasts and the guest's choice of either a day of unlimited green fees or a 50-minute spa treatment per person during their stay.



OPPOSITE PAGE: FROM LEFT Prawn and noodle salad; the oxtail dish; caramel mille feuille

THIS PAGE: Views to remember: the John Dory dish; the table; is set; Perry in action

