

# Aussie sensibility Quay to who we are: Gilmore



RENEE NOWYTARGER

Peter Gilmore, at his Quay restaurant in Sydney, has embraced indigenous ingredients but insists they be used 'in a subtle, elegant way'

**JOHN LETHLEAN**

PETER Gilmore is considering that quicksilver of our national cultural life, an "Australian cuisine".

"Modern Australian food is much more than just discovering native ingredients," says our most celebrated chef, speaking at Quay, the Sydney restaurant he has made internationally famous. "We've got to ask ourselves, as chefs, what is our identity ... what is Australian cuisine?"

Thinking, cooking and writing over the past five years, with the publication of two highly impressive food titles, Gilmore is slowly answering that question for him-

self. "I don't think we'll ever get to a stage that we can say 'this is the repertoire of Australian dishes'. But I think what we can have is an Australian sensibility and style."

Gilmore, 47, who recently launched his second book, *Organum*, says a thread running through it is the nature of this sensibility.

"There may emerge some central themes in the identity of Australian food," he says.

"One of them is geographical, it's to do with our abundance of fresh produce. It's to do with our great seafood. It's to do with our multicultural society and how those influences have been interpreted."

One of the things Australian chefs have at their heart, Gilmore

**'We've got to ask ourselves, as chefs, what is our identity ... what is Australian cuisine'**

PETER GILMORE

says, is a sense of freedom to experiment and not to be "dictated to" by tradition.

"I don't see many other countries, for example, being able to embrace Asian cuisines in such a natural way as we manage here. There's an Australian spirit."

"I also think there's a sense of special ingredients that are unique to Australia."

Gilmore is relatively new to the use of indigenous ingredients, a light-bulb moment that happened for him during a workshop with foreign chefs three years ago led by Wardandi elder Josh Whitehead, near Margaret River, in Western Australia.

He now regularly incorporates fresh indigenous ingredients in his dishes, including barilla (Coorong spinach), lemon aspen, karkalla (a coastal succulent), munyeroo (a native purslane) and lilly pilly.

In the past three years, and particularly since internationally renowned chef Rene Redzepi, of Noma in Copenhagen, asked Australian chefs at a seminar why they were not using more of what has always grown here, indigenous

produce has been jumped on by chefs all over the country, sometimes with alarming results.

Gilmore prefers to crack the egg of indigenous produce with a teaspoon, rather than a hammer.

"I don't think they (indigenous ingredients) should be put up on a huge pedestal with a massive focus on them, because that is a recipe for a fad. And I don't think they deserve to be treated like a fad. I actually think they deserve to be integrated into our general cuisine in a subtle, elegant way, as opposed to throwing everything on the plate that's indigenous, no matter whether the flavours work together or not."

*Organum* includes a chapter on cooking with indigenous plants

**LOCAL FLAVOUR**

The 10 indigenous ingredients you're most likely to encounter in a restaurant

- **Lemon myrtle** (a spice)
- **Tasmanian mountain pepper** (a spice)
- **Wattleseed** (for baking, thickening and flavouring)
- **Quandong** (a peachlike fruit)
- **Fingerlime** (a citrus-like fruit)
- **Muntries** (a juniper-like berry)
- **Warrigal greens** (a spinach-like green vegetable)
- **Old man saltbush** (a protein-rich vegetable)
- **Karkalla** (coastal succulent)
- **Sea parsley** (saltwater-thriving native herb)

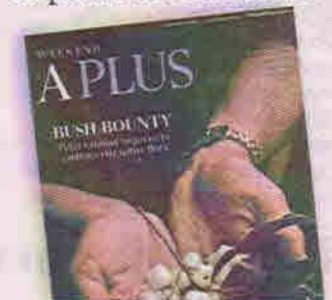


Lemon myrtle

Karkalla

**INSIDE**

In praise of bush tucker



In Weekend A Plus, inside Review

and meats, such as marron and wallaby. Gilmore says that, with maturity, a set of principles needs to be developed by every chef who hopes to achieve something in his or her career. For him, he says, coming to understand the miracle of nature and the cycles of plant life over the past 10 years has been fundamental to his personal style, one recognised internationally.

But, he says, all ingredients are sacred. "Chefs do live in a chef bubble and that's why it's so important to get out there and meet growers and suppliers and people that are actually nurturing and caring for the food you're about to use. It's so important, because you get so many different perspectives that can enrich you."