



Ochre Restaurant and Catering

Craig Squire

Craig Squire spent the early years of his career travelling around Australia, and his experiences and understanding of the country and its different cuisines are reflected in the exciting and eclectic dishes on offer at his renowned Ochre Restaurant in beautiful sun-kissed Cairns in Tropical North Queensland.

In 1994, after working in some of Australia and the world's best restaurants from London's The Orangery Restaurant at Kensington Place with legendary Albert and Michel Roux of Le Gavroche fame and a stint in the Michelin-starred restaurant of Austria's famous Sporthotel Reisch, Craig's success with the award-winning Red Ochre Restaurant in Adelaide led him to creating the then Red Ochre in Cairns. Specialising in the modern, indigenous Australian cuisine he helped to pioneer, Craig's menu offers diners from around Australia and the world a rare authentic taste of Australia.

In addition to running one of Cairns' best known and best loved restaurants, Craig's also employed his vast knowledge of regional produce and its potential to help establish Australian Tropical Foods, a Government-sponsored industry group dedicated to promoting the regional food industry which, after thirteen years of hard work and commitment, has culminated in the launch of Taste Paradise, Tropical North Queensland's own exciting regional food brand, showcasing the best of the region's abundant bounty, and featuring inspiring recipes from Craig and some of its best chefs. Find out more at <http://www.tasteparadise.com.au>.

Like macadamias and kangaroo fillet and the best of Aussie bush tucker, Craig himself has become an Australian green food export, called upon to present the best of Australia on a plate, with his innovative approach to Australian ingredients representing regions, States and the nation around the world. Now re-branded as Ochre Restaurant and Catering, his thriving business continues to be a Cairns tourist landmark - and a green food benchmark.

What are your opinions about bush tucker, as opposed to more conventional sustainable green food methods?

When people talk about sustainability in the food industry, they usually mention things like dual flush toilets or slow flow taps. But really, these things only have a minor effect on energy use. My attitude's that by using Australian native foods you're doing a lot more for sustainability, because Australian native foods don't require fertilisers, extra water, pesticides, they're in harmony with the Australian environment.

When we talk about things like kangaroo meat, the benefits aren't just environmental - although it's great that kangaroos require far less grain, grass or water than cattle, and make much less impact on the topsoil, and with their high protein and low fat content, they're ridiculously good for you. And they taste fantastic!



People tend to shy away from kangaroo because they think of Skippy! But perhaps Hindus in India would be shocked at our obsession with beef...

Yeah! Have you ever looked into a cow's big, long-lashed eyes? [laughs]. But their cuteness aside, cows fart an enormous volume of greenhouse gases like methane and carbon dioxide. Queensland's Darling Downs produce more emissions than many Australian cities! So you've got these creatures which require huge amounts of food and water, which itself has generally been transported long distances, and that steak on your plate has cost more in carbon emissions and miles than you could stomach. Kangaroos, on the other hand, are soft-hoofed so they don't impact on the soil, they don't require much water, and they can live easily and naturally off the land.

What about crocodile? Is that a sustainable food?

Sure, for a number of reasons. They don't take up much room. If they're farmed, the bulk of their diet is old, poor quality broiler chook, which would otherwise have been chucked out or processed into fertiliser. And they don't fart like cows, so they don't release a lot of emissions. The water they live in is usually recycled estuary water which is re-filtered and put back into the river system. And because they're locally grown and slaughtered, they don't require much transport.

What indigenous ingredients or bush tucker do you use in your cooking?

We use a whole bunch of bush foods, locally-grown and from around Australia. Locally, we've got lemon aspen, Davidson plums, lemon myrtle, native tamarind, Rosella flowers and wild finger limes. Further afield, you've got desert limes, bush tomatoes, quandongs, wattle seed. Obviously, Australia's a big country, so some of these ingredients need a bit of transport, but not as much as if they were imported from overseas.

What can you source locally?

We get a fair bit of local chicken, beef, pork. Of course, being right on the Barrier Reef, the seafood is amazing. We've been getting some awesome leader prawns - fresh, local, organic, wild and enormous! The more sustainable you get, the more local you get, the more you've got to be subject to seasonality, and the more flexibility you've got to have on the menu. Most restaurants in Australia probably use prawns and asparagus throughout the year. And the chefs don't even think about the fact that they're probably imported most of the year. My seafood suppliers tell me that about seventy-five percent of the restaurants they supply are using imported prawns from India or Thailand - mostly grown in sewerage. I've had this restaurant since 1994 and I've never used an imported prawn.

Is there a lot of confusion about the origin of such produce?

Well, a lot of chefs and people just shop by price. I think Australia's still pretty poor when it comes to making purchasing distinctions about the country of origin. I don't think we've got enough balls when it comes to legislation for labelling. It's there, but it's not strong enough.





Could Australia have its own sustainable fishing industry?

In Queensland - if we keep fishing at the current rate - seafood can be self-sustainable. Being mindful to encourage certain fishing practices is important, though. On the whole, if you couldn't import overseas products, I think Australia would develop its aquaculture more. But, more importantly, naturally the price would go up. And that's actually something that would do both the environment and our fishing industry both a lot of good, because trying to compete with these cheap imports forces the Australian industry's prices and profits down anyway.

But in comparison to the other costs involved in running Ochre Restaurant and the Catering business, like other produce, wages or utility bills, it's not a huge premium to pay. Seafood pricing is undervalued - I only pay about \$2.50 a kilo more for local prawn cutlets, than imported, and they are much better quality.

What are the benefits of doing what you're doing?

Actually, the number of environmentally-aware restaurant patrons in Cairns is only nominal. Unlike places in Sydney or Melbourne, there's very little marketing advantage in it for me to promote those issues - people come for the food, not the idea (or the sermon!).

By trying to source as much of our produce locally, it benefits and celebrates the community and region. It's a bit more expensive, but worth it.

That's a big contribution you're making to local producers!

Well, it's partly for my own peace of mind, but since we actively started trying to create a local green food movement and establish networking support for restaurateurs and producers with Australian Tropical Foods, it's started to generate its own momentum, letting people know there's a growing market for niche or specialty farming and products, and allowing them to make those connections and get it going.

What do you think are the next big things to happen for the Tropical North Queensland Green Food Generation?

Cacao and chocolate are going to be big. There's also exciting talk about lots of interesting projects, such as establishing an organic zone, where all the produce is certified, and no chemicals are allowed. We've got the biggest food-bowl potential in Australia: we've got constant water, a varied and tropical climate - look around, it's lush!

Venue

For over sixteen years, Ochre Restaurant has offered a fun and intriguing blend of culinary sophistication and natural simplicity. Warm Australian wood and ochre tones offer a welcoming and unpretentious setting for a menu of exceptional quality, imagination and innovation.

Reflecting Craig's passion for indigenous ingredients, Australian cuisine and green food, Ochre Restaurant offers local and tourists a rare taste of Australia - not just in the buzzing dining room, but also via its popular catering business, Ochre Catering, which since 1995 has been catering many of Cairns's most prestigious and popular events - even once serving up in the middle of a cyclone! But their original, healthy and delicious menu can be perfectly tailored to any occasion, from corporate shebang to intimate dinner.

You can even take a little taste of Ochre Restaurant home, if you purchase any of its

Tropical Spirit handmade in-house bush tucker products, like Pineapple Chilli Jam, a sweet and spicy condiment that's perfect with grilled pork; Native Dukkah, a fragrant blend of local native and imported spices mixed with roasted macadamia and coconut; or delectable Macadamia and Rocket Pesto, which balances the rocket's sharpness with the rich meatiness of locally-grown macadamias. You can also purchase specially prepared native spices, such as ground wattleseed, dried quandongs or fresh lemon-myrtle leaves, either at the restaurant or on-line. And if you're not quite sure how to use them, Craig generously offering some of his most popular recipes on both Ochre Restaurant and Australian Tropical Foods' websites, full of fresh and inspiring ideas.

The proof, as Craig might say, is in the Lemon Myrtle Panna Cotta, winning countless awards, including the Tourism Tropical North Queensland Best Restaurant three years' running; being included in the prestigious Mietta's Diners Club Australian Restaurant Guide, 2001 and 2002; Craig being included in Mietta's exclusive Great Australian Chefs, 2001; and, as a reflection of his tireless advocacy of Australian cuisine and native ingredients and his close and strong relationship with local suppliers and the wider Cairns community, being inducted into the Tourism Tropical North Queensland Hall of Fame.

Food and Ingredients

Craig proudly flies the flag for modern Australian cuisine and indigenous ingredients, seeking to showcase the best Tropical North Queensland's huge variety of produce in an environmentally sustainable way.

His passion is reflected in Ochre Restaurant's eclectic and engaging menu. His Tempura Bugs from the Gulf of Carpentaria skewered on fragrant Lemongrass, or his Antipasto Plate of Kangaroo Terrine, Crocodile Wonton, Ocean Trout Gravlax and Emu Paté is almost like a landscape painting, featuring the very best local ingredients, including crocodile raised down the road, macadamias grown on local tablelands or cheese from one of Cairns's best dairies all supporting the equally passionate niche growers, farmers and fishermen whose sustainable, organic and small-scale ventures guarantee the very best. Of course, bush tucker is integral to Ochre Restaurant's menu - and singular popularity. Fresh finger limes, lemon aspen, lemon myrtle or bush tomatoes accentuate the truly unique flavour of the region and the cuisine.

The icing on the Wattleseed Pavlova isn't just the amazing taste or fantastic environmental benefits - despite the harshness of the Australian climate and environment, Australian Native Food's are highly nutritious and packed with health benefits. Despite having been ignored for most of European settlement, studies by the Australian Government's Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and the industry association Australian Native Food Industry Limited (AMFIL) have revealed thirteen fruits and spices including pepper leaf, quandongs and lemon myrtle, to be "super foods" rich with high concentrations of anti-oxidants, vitamins, minerals and other vital nutrients. Kangaroo meat's ninety-eight percent fat-free!



Salt and Pepperleaf Prawns and Crocodile with Vietnamese Pickles, Lemon Aspen Sambal

serves four as entree

ingredients

Salt and Pepperleaf Prawns and Crocodile

16 prawn cutlets, peeled
16 thin slices crocodile
1 cup potato flour or corn flour
1 tbsp sesame oil
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
1 tsp sambal oelek
sea salt
ground pepperleaf

Vietnamese Pickle Marinade

50ml rice wine vinegar
1 tbsp salt
2 tbsp coriander leaves
1 tsp fresh ginger, chopped finely
Flesh of half a lemon, rind and seeds removed
1 bird's eye chilli, with seeds included and finely chopped
1 clove garlic, peeled
1 tsp white sugar

method

Vietnamese Pickles (day before)

Cut all vegetables into thin strips, 8mm wide and 3mm thick. Mix marinade ingredients in food processor until puréed. In a non-reactive bowl, mix vegetables in marinade until thoroughly coated. Store in airtight container in fridge overnight - keeps for 2 weeks.

Lemon Aspen Chilli Sambal (day before, makes approximately 1L)

In food processor, make sambal by puréeing coriander, garlic, ginger, onions and chilli. Wrap blachan in foil and roast on hob until fragrant (about 2 - 3 minutes). Heat vegetable oil in wok, then fry blachan for a few seconds.

Add sambal and remaining ingredients, then simmer gently for an hour, or until mixture thickens. Allow to cool, then blend in food processor. Store in fridge overnight - you're making 1L so you can enjoy spicy delights for the rest of the week, but the Sambal will keep for up to 3 weeks in an airtight container in the fridge.

Salt and Pepperleaf Prawns and Crocodile

Remove Vietnamese Pickles and Lemon Aspen Chilli Sambal from fridge and rest to room temperature. Arrange a bed of Vietnamese Pickles on serving plate.

Cut crocodile into thin slices. Pat prawns and crocodile dry with kitchen paper, then toss in potato flour - if you don't have potato flour, you can use cornflour.

Deep fry flour coated prawns and crocodile in a pot of vegetable oil at 180°C until colour turns golden - about 2 - 3 minutes.

Quickly stir fry sambal oelek and garlic in sesame oil for 30 seconds until sizzling then add prawns and crocodile. While still in the hot fry pan sprinkle over sea salt and ground pepper leaf to taste and toss to mix through.

Serve on bed of Vietnamese Pickles, with small bowls of Lemon Aspen Chilli Sambal on the side. Enjoy with a lively Australian pinot grigio or fragrant semillon sauvignon blanc!

Vietnamese Pickled Vegetables

1 bunch bok choy
1/4 Chinese cabbage
1 carrot
1 red capsicum
1 small daikon radish

Lemon Aspen Sambal

2 tins tomato purée at 440g each
1/3 cup vegetable oil
1 brown onion
1 bunch coriander roots and stalk
2 tbsp tomato paste
1 tbsp sambal oelek
2 tbsp lemon aspen purée
4 birds eye small red chilli
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 tsp ginger, grated
1 tbsp palm sugar, grated
1 tsp blachan

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