

At home in Lydiard St kitchen

Ballarat chef Damien Jones tells KAREN KEAST how he once cooked for Gordon Ramsay and lived to tell the tale.

IMAGINE cooking for television's most fiery chef, Gordon Ramsay.

Ballarat chef Damien Jones did, and lived to tell the tale.

Damien was head chef at London's new hotspot the Nahm Restaurant, in the Halkin Hotel, when the Michelin-star chef walked in for a Thai meal.

"He's famous and a chef as well, which makes it a little bit of pressure," Damien said.

And how did Ramsay react?

"Positively I guess. He didn't come down into the kitchen yelling at me, so I am sure it was good," Damien said, laughing.

"It's great because it means you are doing something right when those kind of people turn up and they have heard about you or heard what's going on.

"He obviously came in to check it out and see what all the fuss was about."

Damien, 34, has returned to Ballarat after years spent working in Melbourne, Sydney and London, along the way racking up a Michelin star at Nahm.

Classically French-trained and well versed in authentic Thai cooking, Damien is making his mark on Ballarat as the head chef at the city's newest foodie venture, the Lydiard Wine Bar at the boutique hotel, Quality Inn Heritage on Lydiard.

Owner Gary Browning officially opened the hotel, in the former Bank of NSW building, in August.

Damien said the Lydiard Wine Bar brought a new eating concept to Ballarat with its range of shared-plate food complemented by local wines.

"There's lots of different

flavours and lots of different styles of dishes," he said.

"We came up with the idea of the shared food because it's a nice relaxed way to eat. It's fun and it can be anything you like. It can be a quick meal or a long evening."

Born in Ballarat, Damien began his apprenticeship at the George Hotel, "just down the road" from his latest kitchen venture.

"I was only 16 when I started cooking," he said.

"When I turned 18 I moved to Melbourne and qualified.

"I was just drawn into cooking and liked the idea, and of course as it turned out I made the right decision because I still enjoy doing it."

Damien finished his apprenticeship at French eatery Brown's Restaurant, which has since closed, before moving to London at the age of 20.

"I wanted to do well in my career and England and overseas has always been where chefs go to take the next step in their career," he said.

"I jumped on a plane and went to England. I had no job. I didn't know anyone.

"My head chef in Melbourne recommended a place to go to. I knocked on the door and said 'I'm looking for work', and they had a position available.

"I had my two-day trial and I got the job."

That restaurant was well known London establishment, the Bibendum Restaurant.

In the two years he was there, Damien began as the chef de partie in the cold entré section and worked his way up through the ranks to main courses.

"It was obviously a huge learning curve for me. Being in Europe, things were different — the produce was different and the seasons were different and there were all these fantastic ingredients that you would only find in cookbooks here."



GLOBE-TROTTER CHEF: Damien Jones has made a tree change back to Ballarat.

Damien returned to Australia and pursued a change in cooking style, taking up a position working for Sydney chef David Thompson at Darley Street Thai.

"It was fantastic. David is Australia's premier chef when it comes to Thai food," he said.

"After doing classic French, I really enjoyed the excitement of everything being new again."

Damien cooked there for more than three years before following David back to London, where David opened Nahm, which became the first Thai restaurant in the world to receive a Michelin star.

"It was really good. As well as

the excitement of doing food in England again I was enjoying the challenge of being a head chef and running a kitchen of 10 chefs in a boutique hotel, which was amazing.

"It was a huge challenge, very rewarding and lots of fun."

Missing home, Damien eventually returned to Australia. This time, with the intention of cooking his own style of food.

He was head chef at renowned Melbourne restaurant The Prince, before he began developing and writing his own menus, a mix of French and Thai, for Carlton restaurant Mrs Jones.

It was there that Damien met

his fiancé, pastry specialist Danielle Munzel.

The couple, who will marry at Daylesford in December, have a son, Mason, 15 months.

Damien said it was Mason's arrival that prompted the tree-change back to Ballarat.

"When you have a little boy things change," he said.

At the Lydiard Wine Bar, Damien and Danielle are now a husband and wife team in the kitchen.

"I think it's a really exciting opportunity for me, and the attraction that it's in Ballarat," he said.

"I am really happy to be where I am."

FAITH IN LIFE

Respect of parents begets self-respect

Honour thy Father and thy Mother. Of all the commandments given to Moses on the mount, the fifth one has been and still is quoted the most from the scriptures: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord the God giveth thee." (Exodus 20:12)

In 1943, Joseph L. Wirthlin, of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, shared his feelings regarding honouring parents. "The fifth commandment was one of the most basic in the Lord's training to his disobedient children, for upon it hinged the patriarchal order of the

family. It is the only commandment of the 10 that has in it a promise. . .

"All of the ancient servants of the Lord understood fully the significance of this commandment, for the writer of Proverbs declared: 'My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' (Proverbs 6:20-23).

"A son or a daughter who cursed father or mother in the light of Israelitish understanding of the fifth commandment had the

following hanging over his or her head: 'Who so curseth his mother or his father, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.' (Proverbs 20:20)"

George Albert Smith, a former LDS prophet, related a dream he had where he met his grandfather who had the same name. His grandfather had long passed away. He said, "When Grandfather came within a few feet of me, he stopped . . . he looked at me very earnestly and said: 'I would like to know what you have done with my name.'

"Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen." He went on to say: "I smiled and looked at my grandfather

and said: 'I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed'."

I too have been blessed with my Grandfather's name and hold it an honour. And just before my father passed away he spoke to us children and said, "Look after your mother." This we have done and will continue to do, till the day she is reunited with her husband and our father.

Respect for parents reflects respect for self. Respect for parents and self bring stability of character, stability of family, and ultimately stability of society. Wisdom is born of respect.

Bishop David Davie
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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