

The humble cooking class has moved out of the realm of pedantic scientific method into the sexy arena of cooking with love, lust and unbridled enthusiasm.

**STORY: GAIL WILLIAMS**

# JUST ADD COLOUR

## **COOKING CLASSES USED TO BE ALL STARCHED**

aprons and tightly pulled back hair – a grey world of perfect order and stern lectures on lumpy bechamel sauces. No more. Cooking is undergoing a foodie revolution – and it's turned technicolour, saucy and seriously sexy.

Have you seen Nigella lately? Tossing her long mane about her chocolate mousse. Who says you can't mix food and sex?

Now young cooks are discovering the joy of chopping onions and julienning celery in a relaxed and positive environment. In essence, food nowadays equals fun.

Here in Perth, young students are enrolling in cooking schools where food prep is as different from domestic science as welsh rarebit is from roulade of rabbit.

One of those is 17-year-old Vivien's model Sam Doughty, who catered for her family of 30 last Christmas, preparing a smorgasboard of dishes she'd learnt over a series of five classes with Nico Moretti, who runs the Cooking Passions school with Urban Provider.

"I just wanted to learn more about food and took myself off to his cooking classes on my own," she says. "I loved the Moroccan Passions one so much I did it twice."

Doughty's contemporaries are whizzing and wokking like their last meal depends upon it, pounding away with pestles, turning chillies into green curry paste and hand-rolling their own pasta through rickety machines.

They're also jetting off to exotic destinations such as Vietnam, Tuscany, Spain and Faraway Bay in the Kimberley to learn the tricks of the trade in divine settings – which is what 18-year-old Alice Potter, who cooks most nights for her family of four, recently did in Phuket.

Australian chef Christine Manfield leads a conga line of faithful foodies through India while Kylie Kwong takes travellers back to her Chinese roots. Culinary expert Joanna Savill delivers the spicy flavours of Vietnam as part of a travel package offered by World Expeditions.

Students on a tight budget, like 20-year-old Jess Brass, learn their skills from cooking pro- >>



grams and hold regular dinner parties featuring several exotic courses. Brass was inspired by TV chef Jamie Oliver and uses dinner parties to entertain groups of six at home.

"Food should be appreciated," she says. "Holding dinners is a way to enjoy it without getting pissed. My dinner parties go on for hours. Eating is not a thing that should be rushed."

Of course, cooking courses are not new. But over the past decade they have blossomed right around Australia as a whole new generation of food lovers discover the thrill of cooking and the sense of accomplishment that comes with producing a tasty, well-plated dish. There's catering to all sorts of specialty tastes, ages and budgets.

There's the sexy Nico Moretti with his Cooking Passions classes; the pure whole food approach of Jude Blereau; and classes on traditional Italian, perfect pastry, bush food, edible art and cake decorating.

The teachers are a varied lot – from butchers, to professors, to maths teachers and housewives – but they all share a zeal for cooking and a steady number of students.

One of the young guns who has attracted a huge following with people of all ages over the past four years is the gregarious Iain Lawless.

His unstoppable passion for food is made even more appealing with his Scottish brogue, which accompanies his hands-on classes in Subiaco. The secret, he says, is to make it look easy in a user-friendly environment.

Groups of 16 prepare menus on themes such as Italian bistro, tapas, modern Thai and the perfect dinner party and then eat the results over a glass of wine.

Lawless tapped into this market niche after 20 years in the restaurant industry when friends started asking him to conduct workshops.

"I wanted to show people how they could cook like a chef in their own home," he says. "I don't like the way chefs make things look hard in their television shows. Cooking in itself is actually quite easy. I always show them the best way and leave it up to them."

Lawless said it was incredibly rewarding to see a group of under-25s come in and ask him to take them through a whole banquet menu.

"Instead of going out to dinner they wanted to do it all themselves," he says. "I taught them how to make focaccia, gruyere and onion tarts, panettone. They just loved it."

Moretti has a young clientele flocking to his BBQ, surf and turf and pasta-making classes. For \$100, he shows them the tricks of the trade before they tuck in and go home with five recipes.

"I had one mother-daughter couple come along," he says. "The mother couldn't cook and wanted her daughter to learn. She came along regularly for a couple of months and learnt so

much. I had a father-daughter couple come in as well."

Both chefs also report that the corporate market is huge – particularly with law firms – with the spin-offs for the company coming from staff bonding by cooking a meal together.

Says Lawless: "Minter Ellison and Freehills have done some classes with me. And I have worked with staff from the ANZ bank, KPMG and the Department of Corrective Services. That was a big one – 110 people."

"It is fantastic to see barriers break down when they all have to prepare a meal together and then serve it over a glass of wine."

Moretti, who has been doing demonstration-

group did workshops on Indonesian cookery as well as making their own spa treatments.

He also takes annual trips to Tuscany and Spain and – more locally – to Margaret River.

Upper Crust in West Perth adopts a more classroom style approach and participants can watch well-known Perth chefs, such as award-winning Hadleigh Troy from Restaurant Amusé, prepare dishes from their restaurant menus.

Despite the serious name, it's a very relaxed vibe at The Cooking Professor – a converted deli in Mt Lawley – where Peter Kenyon holds regular hands-on Gourmet Saturday sessions with 12 participants who prepare a three-course meal during the day and come back with their

partners to eat the restaurant-quality meal at night. The cost is \$80 for the student and \$70 for the partner, with BYO wine. The class sees groups of 24 hoe through five courses – a sample menu of which is smoked trout canape, Jerusalem artichoke soup with truffle butter, zucchini pudding, lamb stew and chocolate fondant.

Kenyon, an economics professor who works part-time at the Curtin Graduate School of Business, says the popular sessions followed on from his Cordon Blokes classes which he started two years ago at Tarts cafe in Northbridge.

"Guys would come along and prepare meals for their partners, so we decided to turn the class into Gourmet Saturdays which run from 10.30am till 4pm, including lunch, and then they all come back at night."

After 30 years of teaching Italian cookery, Giovanni Maiorana – known in the industry as the Gourmet Godfather – has seen a few changes in the demographics of his students. They're getting younger and younger and the students these days approach their food in a much more academic fashion. The new young cook is educated, well travelled and well heeled – and these are the punters who are causing a minor revolution in the food industry.

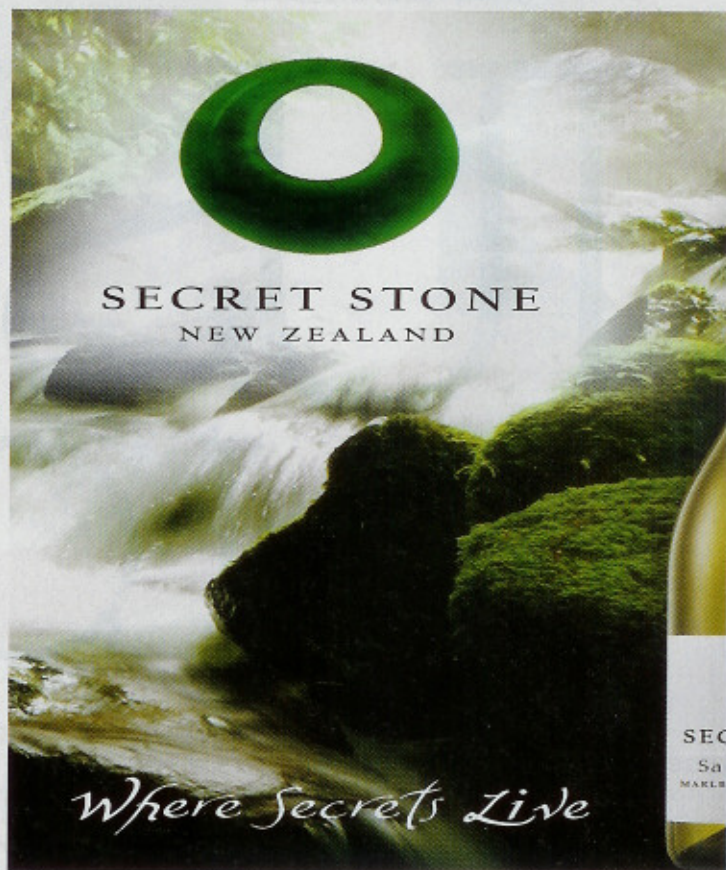
While a lot of Generation Y students attend his cooking classes at Designed Kitchen Appliances in Subiaco, Maiorana says it's those on the cusp of Gen Y and X who are driving the change.

"These are the people who know about food. They want good quality food produced with low chemical levels," Maiorana says. "They're reaching the age where their kids are going to school and they want the best for them."

"They are responsible parents who don't want to go down the food path that their parents did."

"They buy their food at fresh food markets, demand better quality food in restaurants and want to learn how to cook it themselves. It is great. We are finally breaking out of the mould."

And here's betting they know how to make a bechamel sauce – without the lumps.



style classes in his Balinese-inspired home for eight years, says the trend now is for firms to entertain their clients with a cooking session.

"There are lots of law firms who entertain this way," says Moretti. "A lot do it for end-of-year thank-yous. They find it a more relaxed way of dealing with people. It gives a focus and they don't have to talk shop all the time."

As long as they don't imbibe too much. He had one group of lawyers who were very well refreshed during the demonstration of a fish dish wrapped in baking paper.

"Unfortunately, one of the guys wasn't paying attention and when I served the dish he tried to eat the paper," says Moretti.

Moretti also leads overseas tours and has just returned from an eight-day trip to Bali where the



# Cooking classes

## **COOKING PASSIONS**

**267 Vincent St, Leederville.**

**Phone: 9228 0507**

Bring a bottle of vino and enjoy Nico Moretti's classes with themes such as parties, barbecues and surf and turf. [www.urbanprovider.com.au](http://www.urbanprovider.com.au)

## **LATASHA'S KITCHEN**

**745 Newcastle St, Leederville.**

**Phone: 9328 8184**

Learn authentic dishes from Asia's spice regions. [www.latashaskitchen.com.au](http://www.latashaskitchen.com.au)

## **UPPER CRUST COOKING CLASSES**

**1/77 Colin St, West Perth. Phone: 9481 4149**

Local chefs teach how to cook everything from cupcakes through to Spanish tapas and paellas.

## **THE COOKING PROFESSOR**

**161 Walcott St, Mt Lawley. Phone: 0411 274 712**

Peter Kenyon helps 12 people make and then try luscious food. [www.thecookingprofessor.com.au](http://www.thecookingprofessor.com.au)

## **COOKING WITH EMMANUEL**

**500 Hay St, Subiaco. Bookings through Kitchen Witch: 9380 4066**

French chef Emmanuel Mollois runs three-hour demo classes on how to master French pastry.

## **CUPID'S DELIGHT**

**1/153 Rockingham Rd, Hamilton Hill.**

**Phone: 9494 1794**

Learn cake decorating with Julia Pergoliti who can turn cakes into Ayers Rock or Louis Vuitton handbags. [www.cupidsdelight.com.au](http://www.cupidsdelight.com.au)

## **MATTERS OF TASTE**

**103 Harris Rd, Bicton. Phone: 9319 1097**

Watch the pros at work or get some hands-on experience. [www.mattersoftaste.com.au](http://www.mattersoftaste.com.au)

## **LAWLESS COOKING**

**531 Hay St, Subiaco. Phone: 0419 090 903**

Iain Lawless teaches basic skills and how to cook a perfect dinner party. [www.lawlesscooking.com](http://www.lawlesscooking.com)

## **COOKING WITH KURMA**

**Phone: 0411 104 083**

SBS TV chef Kurma Dasa can demo vegetarian cuisine at your home. [www.kurma.net](http://www.kurma.net)

## **COMESTIBLES COOKING WORKSHOPS**

**127 Kensington St, East Perth.**

**Phone: 9421 1222**

Local and national chefs display their skills for corporate clients. [www.comestibles.com.au](http://www.comestibles.com.au)

## **MONDO BUTCHERS**

**Cnr Beaufort St and Sixth Ave, Inglewood.**

**Phone: 9371 6350**

Vince Garreffa teaches how to debone, cure and cut meats and make sausages. Places limited. Email [princeofflesh@mondo.net.au](mailto:princeofflesh@mondo.net.au)

## **EIGHT HANDS COOKERY SCHOOL**

**5 Wellington Rd, Morley. Phone: 0416 126 829**

Chef Peter Tischhauser loves bush ingredients and European classics. [www.eighthands.com.au](http://www.eighthands.com.au)

## **DKA DESIGNED KITCHEN APPLIANCES**

**145 Hay St, Subiaco. Phone: 9388 9933**

Giovanni Maiorana and other chefs teach perfect picnics, seasonal produce and steam-oven skills. [www.dkashowrooms.com.au](http://www.dkashowrooms.com.au)

## **WHOLE FOOD COOKING WITH JUDE BLEREAU**

**13 Janet St, West Perth. Phone: 0411 886 614**

Jude Blereau teaches how to cook wholesome meals using real ingredients. [www.wholefood-cooking.com.au](http://www.wholefood-cooking.com.au)

**CAROLINE FRANK**