



Sky's the limit for Gordon

New Zealand's master of fusion, Peter Gordon, has recently returned to his native country to open Dine at Auckland's Sky City Hotel. Paul Mitchell talked to him about his new restaurant and his stellar career.

Almost 20 years after his last venture in his home country, Peter Gordon, New Zealand's best known chef, returned to his roots earlier this year and opened "Dine" at Auckland's Sky City Hotel. Gordon, co-owner of London's famous The Providores and Tapa Room, said many people had asked him to open a restaurant in New Zealand, but only Sky City had what it took to meet his needs.

"They, of all the various people that have approached me over the years, are the only ones with the resources to make it happen as near to what I want as possible, as well as having a great training and apprenticeship scheme in place."

With best selling cookbooks and a strong media presence behind him, Gordon was conscious that to give his name to a venture in New Zealand it had to be a success. He said the team at Sky City had set his mind at ease from the outset.

"I have never once doubted that it would succeed and that they would make it work. All I'm after is to create a space, a restaurant, that will be amongst Auckland's best – and inspirational. I want it to be a destination place; a place that inspires other chefs and punters."

Gordon said he was pleased with how the restaurant had established itself since its opening in early April. He put a lot of that down to his head chef, Cobus Klopper.

"He is a dream," Gordon said, "very much of the same food philosophy [as me], very good with people, doesn't lose it, no aggro, but demanding of the best from the chefs and front of house. With him I am confident we will do well – it's in all our interests to make it work."

Born of Maori descent, cooking with freedom is Peter Gordon's philosophy, something he said was inherent to New Zealand's approach to food and dining. But his rise to become one of the world's master exponents of fusion cooking was propelled also by his apprenticeship in the multicultural city of Melbourne, Australia.

Gordon knew he wanted to be a chef from a young age. He left New Zealand in 1981 as a 17-year-old to seek an apprenticeship in Melbourne and his first attempt, while brave, fell foul of one of Melbourne's most famous culinary names, Mietta O'Donnell.

"I had a job with her as an apprentice waiter," he remembers, "and after a week I asked if I could be an apprentice chef. She sacked me on the spot for wasting her time. Fair enough I thought then."

Despite that early setback, Gordon got his start. He moved to Sardi's then to Kew's and later Rogalskys. To this day Gordon says Melbourne is his favourite food city in the world. It was there in the early 1980s that young Gordon was introduced to Italian cappuccinos, tofu, Greek spanakopitas, coconut milk, fettuccini carbonara, and an array of culinary tastes brought to Melbourne by Poles, Russians, Vietnamese, Indonesians and even Laotians.

"The food in Melbourne has always been brilliant, from cafes through to the top of the line. I never have a dud meal there."

After his apprenticeship ended in 1984 – and with Melbourne's multicultural cuisine firmly entrenched in his creative psyche – Gordon sealed his fusion future by back-packing his way through Asia for two years. The experience opened his eyes to what was possible in cuisine and he hasn't stopped experimenting since.

Gordon returned to New Zealand in 1986 and opened The Sugar Club in Wellington. It was such a huge success that Gordon and the owners decided to transplant the concept to the UK in 1995. London's The Sugar Club won a *Time Out* award in its first year of operation and propelled Gordon to fame. *The Sugar Club* cookbook became a bestseller and Gordon was soon writing monthly culinary columns and making guest TV appearances.

Gordon left The Sugar Club in 1999 and with Anna Hansen opened The Providores and Tapa Room in 2001, both in London and both to critical and public acclaim. Previous to those openings, Gordon had also established the annual charity event, "Who's Cooking Dinner?", to raise money for leukaemia research.

"I was a bone marrow donor to my sister, Tracey, in 1995. Tracey is alive and well and we have raised over £1.5 million from just seven dinners," Gordon says.

Given Gordon's hectic schedule, Tracey's probably lucky the doctors could pin him down long enough to take marrow from him. When he's in London, Gordon works full-time at The Providores.

"I work in the kitchen; I don't swan around being 'le chef'," he adds.

In future he will also be in New Zealand four times a year overseeing Dine's menu, and then working closely with head chef Klopper via phone and email while in London. The Providores also consults to New York restaurant Public, working on new menu ideas with head chef Brad Farmerie.

"Public is very much Brød's menu – we just offer support when needed these days. I also consult personally on Changa restaurant in Istanbul, in a very relaxed way. I'll talk through ingredients that have come into season, new ideas, new favourite recipes etc. with the owners, Tarik and Savas."

Gordon also consults to London's Gourmet Burger Kitchen, the most successful burger business, apart from the multinationals, in the UK. He consults to Air New Zealand on its London to LA route and, as a shareholder and consultant, he's also helping a fellow Kiwi set up a pie company in the UK.

"I write and photograph 10-11 issues every year of New Zealand *House and Garden* and I'm also a patron of Jamie Oliver's "Fifteen" charity and "The Children's Fire and Burns Trust" (having tipped a pot of boiling fat on myself whilst cooking dinner for the family when I was seven)."

Gordon's also working on a range of relishes and chutneys, does radio and television spots and has recently visited China to make a show about the cuisine of Guangdong. He also three years ago set up a young chefs fellowship – and none of this is to forget his cookbooks. London's *Sunday Times* is serialising his fourth book, *Salads: The New Main Course*, and his third book, *Peter Gordon's World Kitchen*, has just been re-released in the US.

Given his range of activities, it's not surprising that the one thing Gordon craves in his life is more free time. He says he does his extra-

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