

# CHEFS EAT CANBERRA

Free Sample  
New book coming September 2024



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Photography Ash St George

# CHEFS EAT CANBERRA

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The Carousel Restaurant, Red Hill Lookout, 1970  
Home to Lunetta Restaurant from 2025  
Source, Australian National Archives

Canberra wasn't always this good.

I was fortunate enough to work in some wonderful restaurants in the 1990s and 2000s and although we have always had a smattering of high quality venues, it has never looked like this. This book is a testament to where we are now, as a city. It is the energy, creativity, and work ethic of so many chefs and restaurateurs that have made it better than ever to dine out in Canberra. I have been living in this beautiful town for half a century now. Indeed, people who are born in Canberra feel entitled to call it a town.

In the early days, the Sydney Building was home to the Blue Moon Café, opened around 1926 by Richard and Eleanor Prowse. It was one of the few places in the city you could go for a meal. It had a dining room downstairs and a boarding house upstairs. Emmanuel Gerakiteys ran the café in the 1950s, in partnership with Greek brothers Spyros and Peter Cassidy. It boasted a confectionery counter and a milk bar, with dining booths inside the café. On the southside, the Liberty Café was constructed by the Notaras family in the same year. It changed to become the Mogambo in the 1960s and in 1973, John Stefano named the restaurant Caphs, an acronym for each of the business partner's first names - Chris, Anthony, Philip, Helen and Steve.

Noah's restaurant in Civic was the place to be from 1961, nestled in the Town House Motel, one of the first commercial buildings designed by noted architect Enrico Taglietti. The Lobby was opened in 1968 by then treasurer Billy McMahon, just a hundred metres from Parliament House. In the early 1970s, the influencers of the industry, although they would be horrified by such a reference, were people such as Mez O'Neill, who ran the Labor Party endorsed Charlie's restaurant, where guests dined on veal chasseur and pork Normandy. They were the first restaurant in Canberra to introduce a daily changing blackboard menu of seven entrées and seven mains. At around the same time, Pipi's in Woden, with its distinctive extruding porthole windows, was cooking fresh seafood, and Malcolm Carlin was accumulating a large volume of collectable wines at The Hermitage. The Charcoal Grill was on its second round of owners before Ron and Noni Plewes took over for an extended time at the helm. Theo Moulis was cooking up a storm at The Bacchus Tavern, hidden underneath the tallest building in Canberra, MLC Tower. He later went a few hundred metres up to The Tower restaurant, where he stayed for a couple of decades.

Le Rendezvous first fired up its oven in Manuka in 1964 and Woodstock made its first Hawaiian pizza in Civic in 1981. Happy's has been serving Chinese food in Garema Place since 1962 - the same year as the Cuban Missile Crisis! This was also the year that Charcoal served its first steak with bearnaise sauce. There was a venue in Civic called the Esquire, which started as a café in the 1950s before evolving into a restaurant in the 1980s.

Former *Canberra Times* wine writer, Chris Shanahan, remembers places such as Captain Greg's seafood restaurant in Belconnen, and Joseph Cotta's Indian restaurant, Shalimar, being well patronised. Joseph (and his wife Gladys) went on to open Geetanjali at the back of the Deakin shops. Joseph was also a well regarded cook book author.



# WE ASKED THE CHEFS

*what they love to eat on their nights off and their nights out.*

*This book pays homage to the top dishes in town, as nominated by Canberra's top chefs and restaurateurs.*

*The recipes are included so that you can recreate the best of the best, at home. We have adjusted the recipes as minimally as possible, in order to maintain the unique character of each individual restaurant.*

It seems highly appropriate to start with eightysix.

Kicking off the new wave of casual but fine dining in Canberra just over a decade ago, Gus Armstrong and his opening team gave birth not just to a number of brilliant new dishes, but to the launch of a number of new hospitality careers.

**When you opened in 2013, you had this venue where you played loud hip hop music, served unusual wines and the waiters wore flannel shirts and pretty much whatever they liked. That's not unusual these days, but why did you do it like that back then?**

We wanted to do a restaurant that we wanted to go to ourselves. We loved loud golden era hip hop, so that was the playlist. We made a choice to not filter ourselves. Of course the food and wine had to be good. Constant eating excursions to the best places in Sydney honed our palates, not just for food and wine but for the experience. The best restaurants have a strong heartbeat, so we gave life to a little corner on Lonsdale Street.

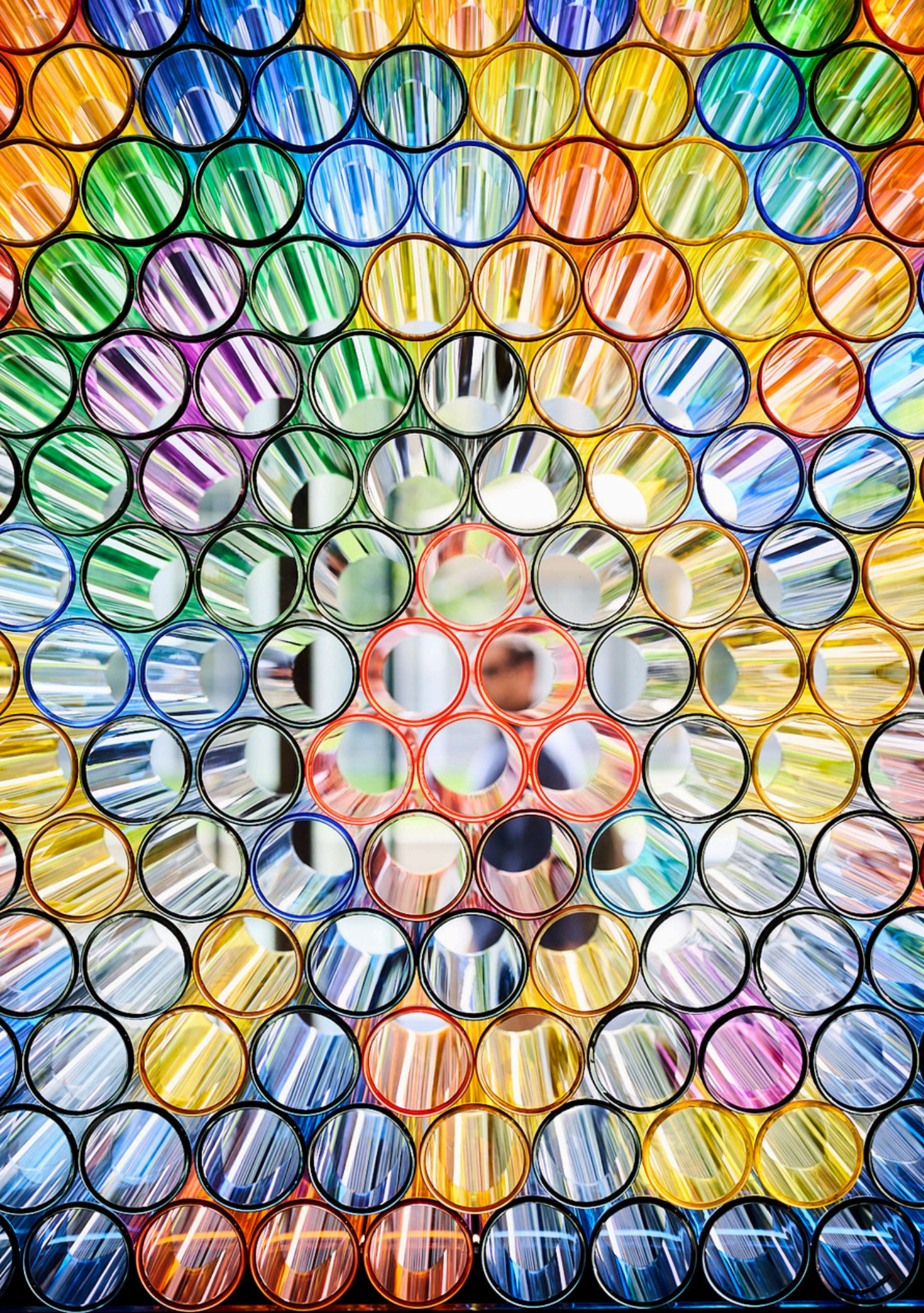
**So many alumni from the restaurant have gone on to open their own venues, or partner with others to create new concepts. What is it about eightysix that has led to it being the epicentre of so many hospitality careers?**

eightysix is Canberra's hospitality gateway drug. Its vibe is infectious and addictive. Some staff found their magic here. It gave them the belief to start investing in their own style and start adding to the fabric.

There has been many a legend through the doors and a handful now operate restaurants at the top of our local scene. Was it the heartbeat, the beautiful people, the zest for business acumen, the thrill of running the busiest door in Canberra, the fanatical approach to refining food until it blows your mind, or was it the late nights and the parties?? It's all a bit of a blur.

I have always taken the attitude that we have a commercial kitchen and fridges full of ingredients. Go and create something magnificent and when it's done, let's all taste it! My problem is that when I get interested in a particular dish, I get infatuated with it. For example, I'll eat a great pho and then I'll want to find the best one in town. I do that and then try to recreate it. But I'll turn it inside out and upside down and try to improve it. I think that I have an illness!

EIGHTYSIX





Ross, Mal and Dash



Such and Such is the brainchild of the Pilot crew - Dash Rumble, Ross McQuinn and Malcolm Hanslow. It's a casual affair and a superb spot for pre theatre, post theatre, or just go there and watch the theatre of a wonderful restaurant unfold.

In 2023 it was named the Good Food Awards New Restaurant of The Year, which is a splendid accolade and a testament to the attention to detail the team embraces. It's accessible, interesting and like all great works of art, open to interpretation.

SUCH AND SUCH

BAR ROCHFORD



Georgie, Nick, Ryan and Josh



MISS VAN'S

BREAD & BUTTER 12  
SMOKED CRAB VOL-NU-VENT,  
FUSCIETRA CAVIAR 11E

BEANS, AGRODOLCE,  
PIMENTUS 18  
COS, RADKCHIO, RADISH  
SALAD 18

TOUGO SOUP 52, KIPPLAS 40  
FISH HEAD MISO SUZE 38  
KINGFISH, SPICED PUMPKIN,  
CURRY LENTILS 40

FRANCH ONION CONSON  
GIM BUNGAK, TEFU, MISO  
FISH SKEWER, YUZU SHIMAKU 10

PEPPER

BAGEL  
ET,  
NET

GALLETTE, PHILM, ROE 24  
SUGAR SNAPS, AGO BLANCO 16  
MUTTON THROATRE KIBRAH NAVEH  
YOGHURT FLATS BREAD 28

CARROTS, LABNEH, CANNONILE,  
YERBANI CHIPOTLE 26

CHOCOLATE BASQUE 18  
CHEESE CAKE MARIASAND  
CROISSANTS  
PAIN PERDU, BUTTERMILK ICE CREAM  
MILK GARAME 18

ONZIEME



**Ingredients****1kg potatoes** (wash prior to peeling)**vegetable oil****250g philly cheese****smoked salmon roe****1 bunch chives****1 lemon****cold water**

*This dish has many variations and many names. Sometimes with cream or butter, cheese or cream, onions, rosemary. We serve ours with just three ingredients, then topped with everyones favourite, philly cream cheese and then to make it fancy, some smoked salmon roe. The type of potato is important. Potatoes are seasonal and certain species are used for different things (roasting, mashing, chipping). We use sebago from Ingelara Farm because they are low in sugar and moisture content and high in starch.*

## Potato galette with philly cheese and smoked salmon roe

*Makes 6-10.*

**Method**

Peel the potatoes and do not wash (it will remove the starch which acts as the glue to stick the galette together).

Slice on a mandoline no thicker than 1mm (do not wash the slices). Line 5cm deep baking tray with baking paper on the base and all the way up the sides.

Drizzle a small amount of vegetable oil on the base of the dish and start layering them at one end of the dish, overlapping each previous slice by at least half. (This is called scalloping). Do this all the way down overlapping both horizontally and vertically with the second row.

When you finish a layer, drizzle some more oil and sprinkle with salt. Repeat the process until you have 3 or 4 layers or until the galette is about 7cm high.

Cover with another layer of baking paper and bake in a preheated oven at 250.C for about 40 minutes or until it can be pierced with a skewer all the way to the bottom without resistance. When it is cooked, remove it from the oven and cover it with an identical tray and weigh it down overnight so it presses and sticks together.

The next day, remove the top layer of baking paper and flip the galette onto a chopping board. Remove the remaining baking paper and portion into rectangles about 6x2 cm. To finish the galette, deep or shallow fry in vegetable oil at 250.C for 3-4 minutes until golden brown.

To make the whipped philly, break up a 250g block and blend in a food processor. Slowly add cold water and keep blending on high speed until it is smooth but still thick. Season with lemon juice and salt.

Transfer to a piping bag, ready to pipe on the top of the galette.

*Finish with salmon or trout roe and some finely chopped chives.*





OTIS

Cara, Gough and Damian



CANTEEN



James Souter and John Leverink like ambitious projects. Beltana Farm sits just seven minutes from the CBD, but you could easily be fooled that you are on a meditation retreat. Surrounded by oak trees and the allure of the truffles that grow underneath them in the depths of winter, they have partnered with Doug and Alice O'Mara to create a wondrous country and culinary adventure.

**John, you are one of Canberra's most experienced chefs and have seen the cycles of Canberra's hospitality scene for decades now. Where were you dining back in the 1990s when your career started?**

To be honest, it was a pretty average scene in Canberra back then. Apart from a big night out at The Oak Room or A Foreign Affair, we would drive to Sydney to dine at places like Liam Tomlin's Restaurant Banc. It was a 'three hat' venue and as apprentices we would all pile into a car and park under Martin Place in order to spend all of our wages that we had earned from the previous week. I used to also love Bistro Moncur in Woollahra. They did this amazing dessert which was a mille feuille pastry filled with lemon curd and raspberries.

**This is a unique location, sitting within a truffle farm. What's the production schedule here?**

The farm has a mix of oak and hazelnut trees which are now over ten years old. They produce around 50kg a year and next year the farm will have its own truffle produce shop.



# THE BOAT HOUSE





*The main thing is that I love what I do. I always have a vision of what I'd like the restaurant to be, not just for the customers, but for the employees as well. I want to improve all the aspects of what the restaurant and myself achieve every day. For me it's always about looking and moving forward.*

**Hao Chen, Owner, Raku**

RAKU

## Duck liver parfait

*Makes 10-15 serves.*

### **Ingredients**

**2 kg duck livers**, cleaned  
**300ml red wine**  
**300ml port**  
**100ml brandy**  
**4g nitrate sodium** (pink salt)  
**24g salt**  
**4g pepper**  
**4 eschalot**, sliced  
**spring of thyme and rosemary**  
**1kg butter**  
**a few drops of red food colorant**  
(optional)

### **Method**

Marinate livers in the alcohol, and sodium nitrate and seasoning, and dry herbs (1 hour).

Strain the livers (keeping the marinade).

Heat up a frypan on medium with a mix of vegetable oil and butter (until butter is foaming and almost turning brown). Add half the livers (do this in two batches for optimal result). Do not shake the pan until the livers are nicely caramelised on one side then flip them to cook the other side (this should cook the livers to medium).

Transfer into a bowl to rest.

In the same pan, add sliced eschalot and the excess fat from the livers. Cook until golden, then deglaze with the alcohol (the marinade).

Add the food colour, and reduce by half.

Pour the reduced marinade back onto the livers in the same bowl.

Transfer some of the cooked livers and alcohol into a drink blender and blend adding the cold diced butter very slowly, until the mixture is glossy and smooth (blend the entire mixture in reasonable batches).

Pass through a fine sieve, transfer into a piping bag sitting in ice water to cool down and set.

*Serve on toasted brioche.*



# REBEL REBEL



Sean McConnell is from a family of Australian restaurant aristocracy, but he walks to the beat of his own drum. The venue can be rustic, romantic, raucus and ridiculously delicious.

In terms of having the most popular dishes in town, according to the chefs themselves, Rebel Rebel is the poster child.



EIGHTYSIX SOUTH

# GRAZING



Although this book is about chefs and restaurateurs, the hospitality industry has been closely entwined with the wine industry in this region since the early 1970s, when a small group of predominantly CSIRO scientists starting planting vines. When I first started working in restaurants, local wines barely featured on a Canberra wine list. Pioneers such as Edgar Reik at Lake George, Ken Helm at Helm Wines, Roger Harris at Brindabella Hills and of course, John Kirk at Clonakilla laid the foundations for the incredible quality that we drink today.

In the 1990s, the next generation blended with these early stalwarts and learned their craft to push the boundaries. This period led to the birth of a great time of camaraderie as emerging winemakers such as Nick O’Leary, Alex McKay (Collector Wines), Chris Carpenter (Lark Hill), Frank Van de Loo (Mount Majura), Nick Spencer (Eden Road), Bryan Martin (Ravensworth) and of course, Clonakilla’s very own Tim Kirk, put us not just on the national, but the world map.

When I first met Nick in the early 2000s, he was selling wine and I was unsure if he was going to pursue his passion for golf, fly fishing or winemaking. Luckily for us, Nick combined the latter two. Having launched his brand in 2007, the specialty wines such as the White Rocks Riesling, Bolaro Shiraz and Seven Gates Tempranillo are all named after Nick’s favourite fishing spots.

In 2023, a cellar door and restaurant, Heywood, was added to the business. Head chef Matt Fely trained and worked with Janet Jeffs at Ginger Catering for around a decade. Matt started washing dishes as an architecture student and decided to switch to become an apprentice chef in 2017, working his way up the kitchen ranks. He fondly remembers spending an evening cooking with Adelaide industry legend Cheong Liew and Janet. It was at around that point that his destiny was sealed. Janet has iconic status herself and has made a significant contribution to the Canberra dining scene for over three decades.

Meanwhile, out at Wallaroo Road, Nick is catching fish and making wine, while chef Matt is cooking up something that Nick has caught on the hibachi grill. General Manager Fergus Lynch is a bundle of energy and has found the perfect role that combines his love of wine, food, restaurants and people. Fergus started on the floor back at eightysix when he was an industrial design student. When his first child was on the way, he moved into the kitchen there in a full-time capacity and learned to cook. He moved over to work with Ben Willis when he opened Temporada, which was when he really found his love of wine. Fergus first met Nick here when he hosted his wine dinner, which started and cemented their personal and professional relationship, ultimately leading to Fergus taking on the role as the GM at Nick O’Leary Wines. He’s comfortable talking wine, carrying a plate, working on design and marketing projects or jumping into the kitchen.



MINIMA





OTTOMAN



*I usually replace a dish on the menu after a few months. When it's a new dish, everyone is learning how to create it and the focus is intense. After a while, chefs get bored with it and I have to pull everyone back to the task. That keeps it at the right level for a few more weeks, but after that, it's just time to bring out a new dish...*

**Mal Hanslow, head chef, Pilot**

## **This is not a cooking competition... well, it is, kind of...**

The Chefs Eat Canberra food photography prize is a creative prize which will be awarded to the six best photographs of recipes reproduced from this book. You can be as creative as you like, or just replicate a great photo from this book.

Can you reproduce Rebel Rebel's prawns with bay leaf butter and take a shot that captures the brilliant oranges, yellows and greens in this dish? Or how about Louis' potato galette styled on the park bench across the road from Onzieme? Are you able to cook Les Bistronomes' beef wellington and take a photo with the Eiffel Tower in the background? You'll probably win with that one.

There are six prizes in total, valued at \$1000 each. Each restaurant has kindly donated a \$200 voucher, so if you are one of our lucky winners, you will pick up a free dinner in five different venues!



To enter, simply snap the dish that you cook and upload to your Instagram page, tagging @chefseatcanberra and the restaurant whose recipe you have recreated. Our panel will select the top six photos, to be awarded \$1000 worth of restaurant vouchers each.

**Entries close June 30, 2025.**