



# Simmer away

Brigid Kennedy is a legend on the Australian food scene. A chef, restaurateur and author, she is a connoisseur of fine foods. Jamie Doyle sits down with the chef extraordinaire to discover her secrets to the perfect wedding.

**F**ine dining and Brigid Kennedy are synonymous. The chef and owner of Simmer on the Bay in Sydney's Dawes Point, has spent her life preparing beautiful dishes for special events and weddings.

Her love of food started at an early age, but it is her passion for people that has made her the success she is today.

Brigid started her career in the early 80s when, as she says, "Martha Stewart ruled the culinary world and food was about more than taste.

"It had to look great, and be served in a fabulous setting, sit on beautiful china, as well as taste divine. Food was about the lightness and textures, about flavour and crispness."

"It was the catalyst for what I wanted to do, to deliver the entire occasion and be involved in the whole event and bring to life an experience

for the client. I wanted to do more than just cook in the kitchen."

She started her cooking career as a caterer, before moving to Le Cordon Bleu school in London to hone her skills.

"I really had a passion to be involved in the whole experience of catering, so instead of working in a restaurant peeling potatoes for another chef, I took jobs across London, the South of France and other places in Europe, working on private yachts for high-end clients."

Brigid says the experience of working directly with her clientele helped her develop the skills to discover what people loved and how to transfer those ideas on to the plate.

"When it comes to food, each person is different. They have a different background, culture and palate.

"My philosophy is about discovering those differences and tailoring my menus to harmoniously match those thoughts and tastes."

## The Simmer effect

It was this philosophy of difference that Brigid has brought to her current role – as the owner of exclusive event space and cafe Simmer on the Bay.

"When I returned to Sydney after my time in Europe I started up the Simmer cafe and a small high-end catering business, then I came across the wharf, where Simmer is today. It's one of those amazing spaces, a blank canvas where people can create their own thing, and it had all the ingredients – water, pier, and parking."

Now famous for weddings, Simmer on the Bay is one of the few locations where a couple can choose absolutely anything they want, and no two weddings are the same.

The point of difference at Simmer is definitely the menu. Instead of creating a set menu for couples to choose from, Brigid has created couple questionnaires, which she gives to each couple that comes to Simmer on the Bay.

"The questionnaire allows me to find out more about each couple, their likes and dislikes, their favourite food, their favourite restaurant, and then we create an entire menu just for them," she says.

"For example, if their favourite food is Italian, we can conjure up a fabulous rustic Tuscan feast, or if they love fusion cooking we can develop a impressive Asian-inspired menu. It's about getting into their heads and finding the ingredients that express who they are."

When it comes to the menu, Brigid says her team can create anything. And they're all about personal service.

"Fresh produce is a given, but the style we use is fairly simple."

## The new foodie

Over her years as a chef and author, Brigid has seen quite a few changes in the culinary and wedding industries.

"The biggest change, especially in



## BRIGID'S TIPS:

**Brigid gives us her tips for making your wedding feast extra special:**

- **LOVE YOUR ENTREE** After canapes it is the entree that the guests see first and it is your first opportunity to impress your guests.

I always like to do something fantastic and arty, it gives your guests a glimpse of what is to come.

- **RESPECT YOUR GUESTS**

They have come to your wedding for good food and good company. If you take the time to plan a really special menu, they will notice.

- **CONSIDER MEAL REQUIREMENTS**

Just because some of your guests are vegetarians or have special diets, doesn't mean they can't eat something wonderful.

## READ ALL ABOUT IT:

Brigid's first book, *Small Food*, is a contemporary selection of unique Modern Australian canaps, peppered with a hint of Asian and Middle Eastern influence. It provides inspiration for all budding hosts and hostesses.

Her second title, *All Fired Up*, is a must for all barbeque lovers from novices to connoisseur. Brigid is currently working on her third title, *Slave to Flavour*, a take on the



Australia is the rise of the foodie," she says.

"Australia is really exciting when it comes to food. The quality is good, the produce is good and people are willing to be experimental. Couples are also a lot more involved in their wedding planning. Gone are the days when parents paid for the wedding and they had to bow to their parents preferences.

Nowadays most couples pay for part or all of the weddings themselves, and so they have much more control."

She says the rise of the celebrity chef and now the idea of the 'common man' as a superstar, thanks to programs such as *Masterchef* and *My Kitchen Rules* has educated Aussie's about the importance of good quality food, and has made cooking and eating a serious matter.

## Sweet and simple

And when it comes to weddings, Brigid says the best events are without a doubt, the simplest.

"My advice to couples is always, 'you don't have to have an extravagant event for it to be memorable' simple is always best, as is the wedding that truly expresses who you are."

"At Simmer, a couple can transform the space so everything about the venue is unique them, and we can help plan that unique vision."

But at the end of the day, no matter what the theme or the decorations, Brigid and her team are all about really good food.

"Yes we have a spectacular venue, and yes the wedding reception is about celebrating your marriage but what we want is our guests to walk away talking about the food, feeling full and feeling special." ◊