



Media Article

Moore on Food by David Bowden

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My heart increased a beat or two when the phone call came through asking if I would like to interview Michael Moore. The opportunities to interview celebrities are few and far between in Asia especially when you assume him to be an award-winning documentary filmmaker.

I soon discovered that the Michael Moore in question was a celebrity in his own field but the closest this one came to *Fahrenheit 360°* was in the ovens of The Summit Restaurant on the 47th floor of one of Sydney's tallest buildings. Englishmen, Chef Michael Moore is the owner and head chef of one of Sydney's best known and loved restaurants as well as being a celebrity chef on Channel 9.

The Summit is an iconic restaurant which epitomises a 'big night out' in a city that loves to dine out. The 110-table restaurant has managed to continually provide a highly-valued experience for two generations of Australians while trendy restaurants come and go with regular monotony in other parts of the city. This is not to imply that The Summit is not trendy, far from it, it's just that it consistently gets it right without having to turn to new gimmicks to lure the punters in.

Moore attributes this to the total package that the restaurant has to offer. "One thing I know is that, my guests don't come to The Summit because they are hungry", he claims. Upon elaborating he adds that his customers come for the view of one of the world's most stunning harbours, the beverages, the company, the ambience, the theatre of a big night out and, an almost unbeatable venue to celebrate. "Dining out is not just about the food but rather the total package and each component of the whole is just as important as every other", says Moore.

Moore was recently in Kuala Lumpur to conduct a series of cooking workshops for the head chefs of all Hilton hotels in the Asia Pacific region. These workshops were supported by Meat and Livestock Australia who carefully monitor the quality of Australian meat products in the market and, in doing so, contribute to regional dining trends. As food, or rather the lack of it, is a hot topic in these days of rising prices and food shortages, I wanted to explore with Moore some culinary trends that diners could expect to see in the coming years.

He elaborated upon his idea that people don't always eat out because they are hungry. Moore notes that this is a trend with many restaurants these days, especially the famous ones or

those which are home to celebrity chefs. Many diners want the bragging rights which come with dining in famous restaurants.

He notices that people eat less but want more from the 'package' especially from those restaurants in the high end of town. "Small is beautiful these days and pretty food is important for many diners", claims Moore. He continues: "Food is very faddish and we go through trends such as *cuisine nouvelle* and now molecular gastronomy. *Cuisine nouvelle* was a break away from traditional French cooking, portions and appearance and I now see a swing back to this; maybe we are seeing a period of retro *cuisine nouvelle*. And, in having just coined that I may have started a whole new direction in cooking trends", exclaims Moore.

Australians and many Asians are very discerning diners – they know what they like, what they don't like and, what they expect for their dollar when they dine out, says Moore. "There's a big emphasis on understanding produce; its origins, how it was produced, where it was produced and, what chemicals were used its production. Australians are eager consumers of food news and information and they follow the recommendations of the celebrity chefs. They know where the best local oysters are produced, for example, and expect to see them listed on the menu of their favourite restaurant", Moore claims.

He is a keen exponent of the variety and quality in Australian produce and recognises that many producers strive for quality and branding through local recognition. To him, Australian beef is one such example but sees that rising worldwide costs will impact upon sales as some chefs move into secondary and therefore cheaper cuts of meat in order to minimise their overheads while retaining their clientele.

Current hiccups in the growth of most world economies may also impact upon the revenue for many restaurants and Moore admits that most restaurants are not recession proof. While the bulk of The Summit's business in the early days depended upon the tourist trade (it was *the* place to go for a wholesome meal and harbour views), things today are different with some 85% being local diners. So if there is a drop in worldwide travel, restaurants with a local base will not suffer as much.

For Chef Moore listening to the needs of the guests is very important and while his team can lead with new cooking trends, they can't get too out of step with those of their customers. This means getting away from the stove and onto the floor to speak to and understand how he can improve the product. Accommodating special dietary requirements is one thing that the restaurant does with sufficient notice. "We need to be innovative and to deliver consistently to ensure that our diners return", says Moore.

Very few chefs succeed in becoming owner chefs but Michael Moore has done this despite various trials and tribulations along the way. He now operates a multi-million dollar business and has thousands of devoted fans around the world who make it a point to include The Summit on their 'must do' list when in Sydney.

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