

By George! He's a true master chef

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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If you don't know who George Calombaris is, you probably won't be one of thousands of foodies flocking to the [Good Food & Wine Show](#) this weekend.



George Calombaris

Besides being one of the trio of *Masterchef Australia* judges, Calombaris owns five eateries in Melbourne, including his flagship [The Press Club](#), which has won multiple culinary awards.

On local flavour

Calombaris says he fell in love with the Cape Town when he visited with mates for the World Cup six years ago and is looking forward to “getting his teeth stuck into the culture” this time around.

One of the things he wants to do is taste is “schnook” or as we locals prefer to call it, snoek, with the ubiquitous apricot jam, of course.

On food fads

Calombaris’ whole persona lights up when he talks about his pet subject. “I get really excited by yummy food,” but he points out, he “has never been one to follow trends”.

Asked what he thought about the latest craze of fermentation, he says it's really nothing new – in fact he remembers his mother bottling and pickling using exactly the same methods when he was growing up.

So-called trends are part of the why he's gone off social media, because "if you follow people (read other famous chefs) you see patterns of cooking emerge". But he is also quick to point out, it really doesn't matter if something is a trend, as long as the food is delicious.

Despite his so-so attitude towards trends, he happily talks about what's hot and happening in his home town. "Fine dining has totally flipped," he says. People are looking for straightforward, accessible and quick food and "in every crack and crevice" there's something to sample.

"My real focus is on sustainability and it goes further than the food, it's about the experience." He explains that he tries to source as much local produce, as possible, and even the crockery in his restaurants is made by local craftsmen.

On Masterchef

He says of his fellow judges, Gary Mehigan, and Matt Preston: "We really do love each other. We're food nerds and obsessed with food."

"We are very much in control of the show, because it's our names are on the line. It's not like other reality shows, we focus on the cooking ability of the contestants and don't tolerate bitchiness," he says.

Despite being something of a celebrity himself, Calombaris is a tad wary of media. He explains the tall poppy phenomenon in Australia. The media can absolutely love what you do, but will just as quickly cut you down to size when they feel you're getting too big for your boots, he says.

"The TV bit just came along and it's a surreal, incredible time in my life." But he's quite pragmatic that it may not last forever, emphasising that he has stayed "close to the flame" and is still very much involved - along with a strong management team - in the everyday running of his business.

Calombaris headlines at the Good Food & Wine Show at the CTICC from 27-29 May.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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