

GREAT AUSTRALIAN

CHEFS

MIETTA O'DONNELL AND TONY KNOX

[Andrew Blake]

Keeps a varied Melbourne market happy with a strong and much copied style.

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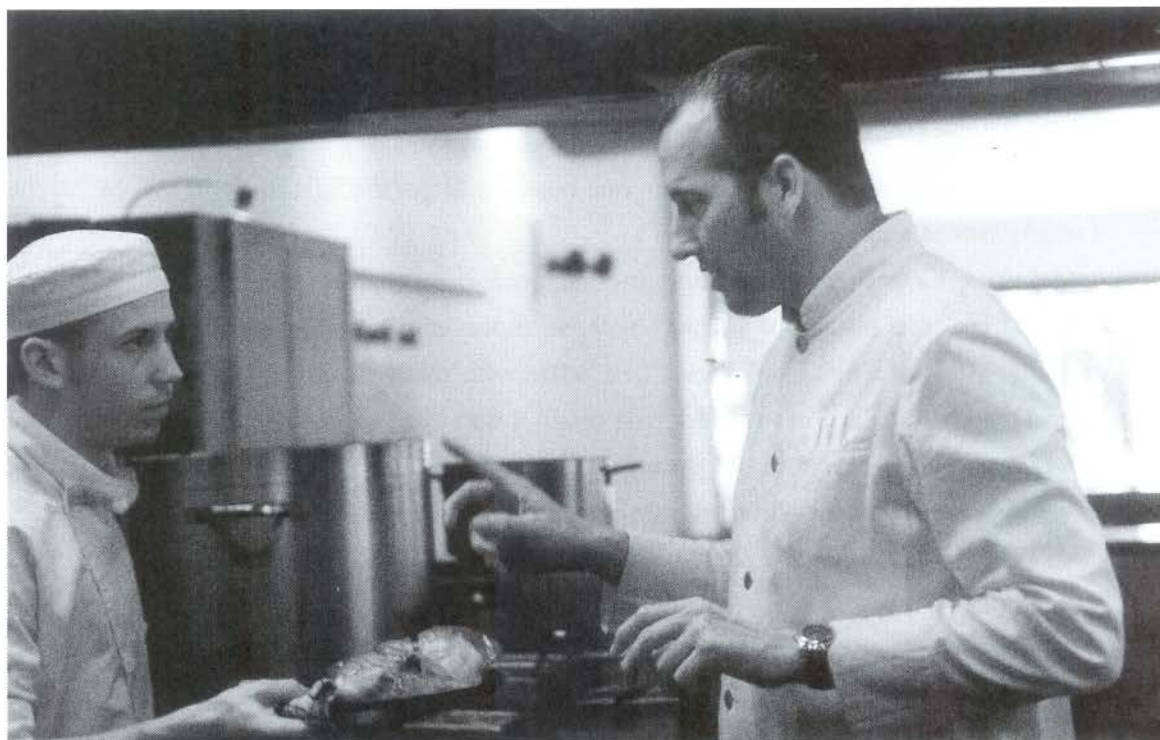
Andrew Blake has always stood out from the crowd. Not only is he tall, but he's continually been able to distinguish himself by his work. Starting in his early years at trade school where he led his year, to his successful bid for the prime restaurant position at Melbourne's Southgate, he has always been ahead of the pack, by a combination of talent and of being in the right place at the right time. Greg Malouf, a trade school peer, also remembers him for other reasons – "I remember how he would never shut up."

Greg also recalls Andrew from his time working with Gloria Staley at both 'Fanny's' and 'Glo Glo's' – "he had quite a bit of style in putting things together." Gloria Staley was the queen of style as far as Melbourne restaurants were concerned. She led the way for many years with her two restaurants, and Andrew was one of her young stars. He had come from "an inglorious apprenticeship at an out-of-Melbourne country club", which probably did more for his golf handicap than for his cooking abilities. After finishing his apprenticeship in 1980 he joined 'Fanny's' and worked his way up from the downstairs bistro kitchen. Gloria has always had a keen eye for quality so she recognised Andrew's talents. Her confidence in him was so high that in 1985 she put him in charge of the kitchen at Sydney's 'Chez Oz', her first restaurant out of Melbourne. From there Andrew never looked back.

After three years in Sydney, Andrew returned to Melbourne and established a name for 'Café Kanis' in Richmond, a trendsetter in its time. The young chef then went into partnership with the Kanis cousins to set up 'Kanis, Blake & Kanis', an upmarket deli in South Yarra. It was one of the first of its kind to market chef-made produce – jars of sauces and relishes, as well as cooked dishes for home eating.

'Blakes' opened in September 1992 at Southgate. It was an enormous investment for Andrew at that time, he was working round the clock, juggling different jobs to stay afloat. It has proven worthwhile, now securely established and consistently successful. He has had his disagreements with the precinct management, publicly criticising rentals and the facilities there. But now, after being there seven years says: "Every year it gets a bit better, a bit more consistent. It's a hard because there are so many places fighting for the passing trade, but if you are a destination restaurant it's great. There's no doubt that this is the place to be because the passing trade is the cream."

One challenge was not enough for Andrew Blake, so five years ago, in 1994, in conjunction with friends Geoff Lyndsay and Grant Van Every, his second restaurant, 'Stella', opened. It was just that, a quickly rising star, from very early days. At 'Stella', the East/West



"There is a danger that young cooks don't learn the classics in some restaurants. So they should read everything they can on food and should be out trying dishes at other restaurants."

combinations from Lyndsay, and the wine matches suggested by the respected sommelier, Van Every, brought a lot of attention to the business.

Andrew then created a café/bar called 'Tonic' in South Yarra in 1995, and in October 1997 renovated a derelict building at South Wharf to create the 300 seat 'Events Warehouse by Blakes'. Also in October 1997, Andrew and his partners at 'Stella' took over and renovated the café at Heide Museum of Modern Art, in Bulleen.

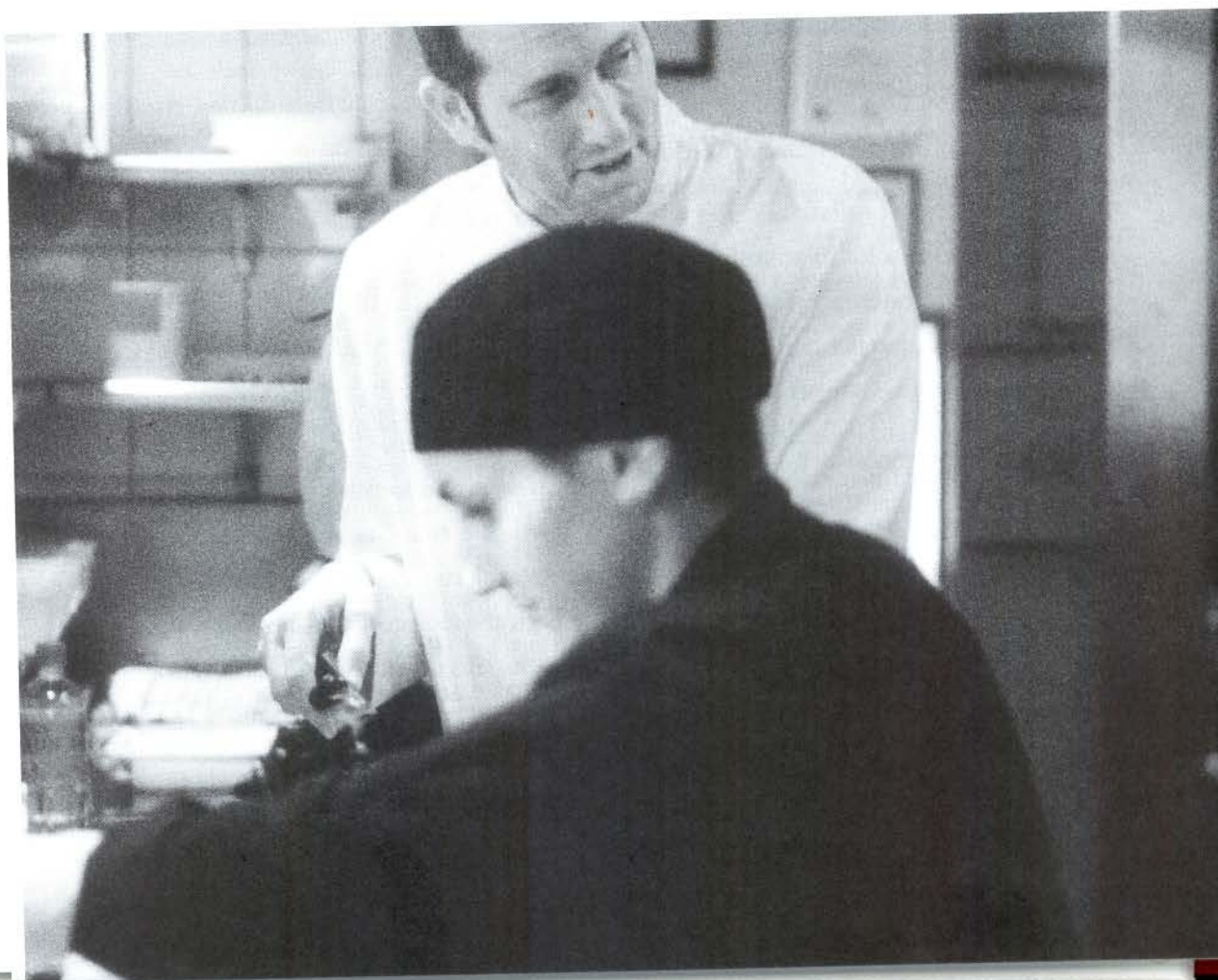
Each of the Blake businesses was very different in style and in product, and they were all trendsetters. But it has always been 'Blakes' at Southgate that has consistently attracted a dependable mix of affluent and conservative clientele, along with younger foodlovers. Part of Andrew's success has been in maintaining a high public profile in both the food and social pages. He regularly does guest chef promotions and donates his time to fundraising events. If all this was not enough for one, albeit tall, chef to do, Andrew also released his eponymous cookbook in October 1996.

Now, at the end of the century, he has shed a few responsibilities and acquired others with the birth of another child. 'Tonic' was sold several years ago, as was 'Stella' in the city

in 1999. He seems content now with the one a la carte restaurant and the big bold canvas he has to play on with functions at 'Events Warehouse by Blakes' – "having more businesses just means more debt. I only need the one business to get the kids through school. Maybe I might look at something next year."

Meantime he is slowly compiling another book of probably 100 recipes, all based on dishes from the restaurant. "There will be more entrée-style dishes, small portions, tastings." Andrew's first book was a best seller with many of the dishes copied by chefs round the country. "I don't go back to it much, I don't like to stagnate. I like the energy of doing new things, new dishes. I dream about them, my mind is always making up things. I would prefer to be always trying things out, even if they fail."

INFLUENCES "I have never had any major gurus, but personal pride and respect and admiration of friends within our industry do more for me than anything else."



Rice noodle cannelloni of asparagus and blue swimmer crab meat with a ginger-soy butter

4 rolls fresh rice noodles
16 asparagus spears
250g blue swimmer crab meat, picked
½ cup coriander leaves, picked
2 knobs ginger, finely grated and juices kept
150ml soy sauce
250g unsalted butter

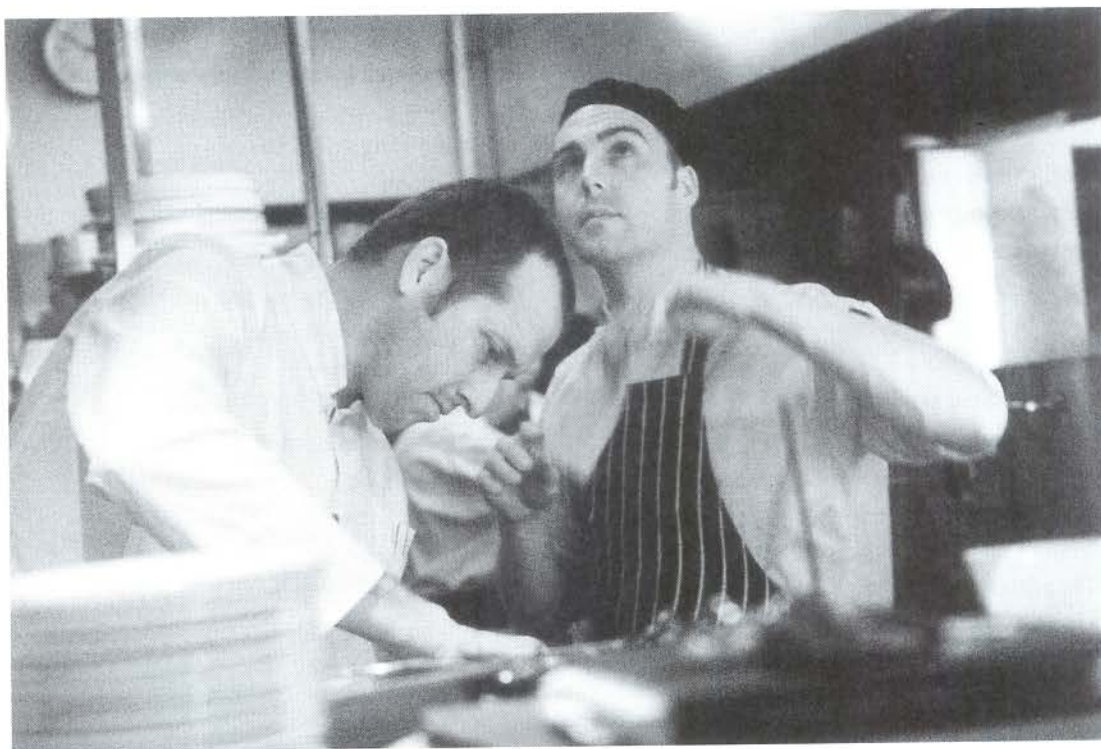
Lightly peel and trim asparagus spears. Blanch in lightly salted water until cooked but still crisp to bite. Refresh in iced water and drain. Cut a 12cm section of rolled rice noodle. Unroll into a sheet and scatter with ⅙ of the picked crab meat, and half of the coriander leaves. Place two asparagus spears along the edge of the rice noodle sheet and roll ⅙ up to form a 'cannelloni'. The asparagus should protrude by about 2cm. Repeat the process until you have 8 cannelloni. Place into a steamer until hot, then remove. Place two cannelloni on each of 4 plates. While cannelloni are steaming, put ginger juice and gratings with the soy sauce in a non-corrosive saucepan. Bring to the boil and simmer until reduced by half. Remove from heat and whisk in cold unsalted butter a little at a time. If need be, return saucepan to the heat and gently increase the temperature of the sauce. When hot, but not boiling, remove from heat and incorporate remaining butter by whisking in a little at a time. Spoon the ginger-soy butter over each of the cannelloni and garnish with sprigs of coriander.

Serves 4

Red thai peanut kangaroo curry with coconut rice

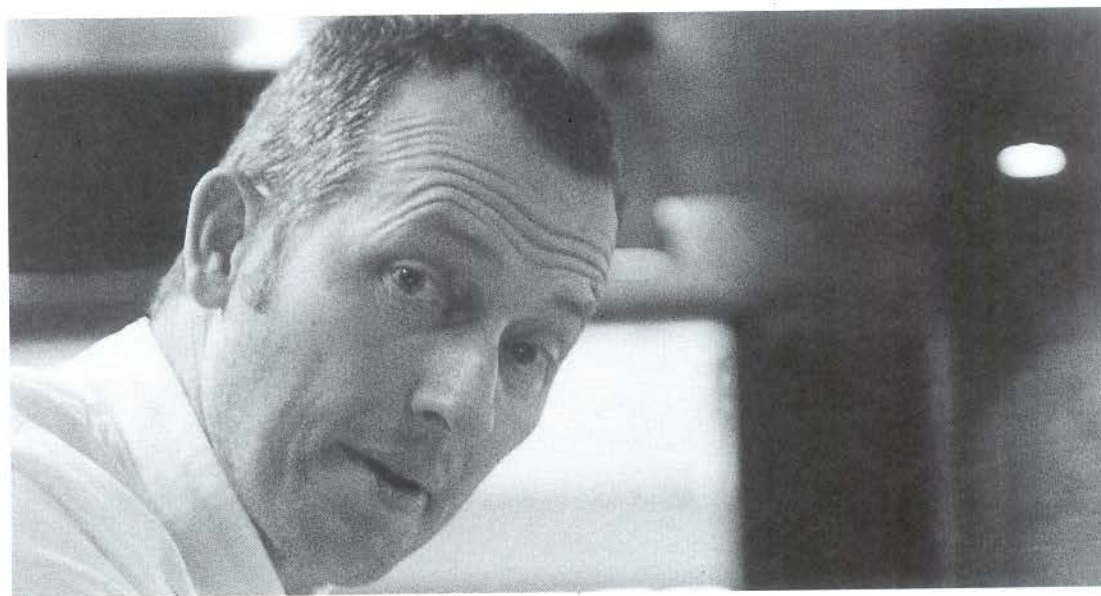
600-800g kangaroo fillet
4 red peppers
150g okra
150g Thai eggplant
75g raw peanuts, dry roasted and chopped finely
750ml thick coconut milk
300g long grain rice
10 kaffir lime leaves
625ml coconut milk
225ml peanut oil
2 cinnamon sticks
1 tablespoon coriander seed
2 teaspoons cumin seed
2 teaspoons black peppercorns
10 shallots, chopped finely
6 cloves garlic, chopped finely
8 bird's eye chillies, chopped finely
1 knob galangal, chopped finely
2 stalks lemongrass, chopped finely
½ bunch coriander root, chopped
2 teaspoons cayenne
2 teaspoons turmeric
2 teaspoons dry roasted shrimp paste
2 teaspoons salt

Heat 125ml peanut oil and fry the cinnamon, coriander seed, cumin and peppercorns. Add the shallots, garlic, turmeric, shrimp paste and peanuts. Fry for a further two minutes. Puree the red peppers and add, along with the thick coconut milk, lime leaves and salt. Simmer for 30 minutes and strain. (This recipe should yield approximately 500ml curry sauce.) Wash the rice under cold water and drain. Place in a heavy-based saucepan and cover with coconut milk. Cover with a lid and simmer for 20 minutes after it reaches the boil.



Above — "At 'Blakes' we buy in whole lamb, goat and chicken and break it down. Chefs need to know how to weigh and to feel — not just open a vacuum pack and put it on the stove."

Below — "You always need to look, to play, to experiment. People get too familiar with the place and you have to keep breaking new boundaries."



Heat a wok over a high heat. When very hot, add a little peanut oil and sear the kangaroo for about 30 seconds, until completely sealed.

Remove the kangaroo from the wok and return wok to heat.

When it regains its heat, add a little more peanut oil and wok-sauté the okra and thai eggplant for about 45 seconds.

Add 400ml of the curry sauce and lower the heat slightly to simmer the sauce.

Cook the okra and eggplant in the sauce for about three minutes.

When they are cooked through, add the seared kangaroo and simmer for one minute.

Serve immediately, or the kangaroo will be unpleasant to eat due to overcooking.

It should be served underdone, because it is such a lean meat.

Serves 4

Mango napoleon with lime custard and passionfruit sauce

3 egg yolks

55g cornflour (20g wet with water to form a paste)

400ml thickened cream

100ml milk

1 vanilla bean

2 limes, zest grated

2 ripe mangoes

250g puff pastry

600g caster sugar

100ml passionfruit juice

100ml orange juice

cornflour

Whisk 100g sugar, egg yolks and 35g cornflour until thick and pale.

Bring cream, milk, vanilla bean and lime zest to the boil.

Pour cream mixture into egg yolk mixture and whisk. Return the mixture to the saucepan and heat, stirring over a medium heat for 4 minutes (until the mixture has thickened). Remove from heat and allow to cool.

To make the angel wings, preheat oven to 175°C. Roll pastry out into a large square about 5mm thick.

Sprinkle with caster sugar and roll pastry into logs about 4cm thick. Chill for about 15 minutes.

Remove the logs from the fridge and cut into 1cm thick disks.

Dust bench with caster sugar to roll on.

Lay pastry disks on caster sugar and roll to form an oval shape about 4mm thick.

Place on a baking tray and bake for about 15 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

For the passionfruit sauce, blend passionfruit pulp with orange juice and strain to remove seeds. Place juice into a saucepan with 125g of the caster sugar. Bring to the boil.

Whisk in 20g of cornflour to thicken.

Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Peel mangoes and cut 4 cheeks.

Slice each cheek 3 times lengthwise.

Place a teaspoon of lime custard onto 4 plates, lay an angel wing on each.

Then form layers of mango and lime custard.

Drizzle with passionfruit sauce and top it off with an angel wing on top.

Serves 4