

Super-chef stirs our pot

Superstar chef Michel Roux has stirred the Tasmanian pot with suggestions the State should aim to become a global centre for culinary education. Brought to the State by Brand Tasmania, following groundwork by Tetsuya Wakuda and Leo Schofield, Roux liked what he found. "What you're doing with your young chefs and Tetsuya is a great thing, [but] it's only a start," he said. "Your cookery colleges should be aiming to become centres of true international excellence. ... bring great chefs in to spend time with your chefs and students. Pay for your young chefs to go out in the world and bring that experience back."

Roux had afternoon tea with the Premier, Paul Lennon, and set him thinking.

Graeme Phillips reports:

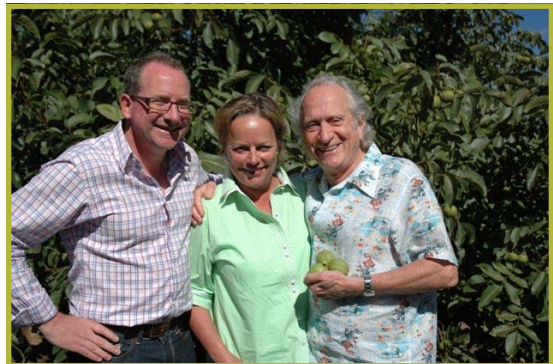
It's not every day that you get to sit under a heavily laden walnut tree and share a grilled blood pudding and poached egg breakfast with one the 20th century's most influential chefs.

Michel Roux – of the famed Waterside Inn in Bray, England - and his Australian-born wife, Robyn, were touring the State as guests of Brand Tasmania. They'd been to Cradle Mountain; eaten wagyu beef with the Hammond brothers at Circular Head; shared great chardonnays, pinots and crayfish with Apsley Gorge winemaker Brian Franklin in his cliff-face cellar door above the waves at Bicheno. They had relaxed in the stunning beauty of the Freycinet Peninsula.

Robyn rang a colleague from Coles Bay to say they were sitting on the balcony at Freycinet Lodge in the late afternoon with a glass of crisp, white Tasmanian wine watching the sun slip gently away in the west. She and Michel were watching a young couple playing expertly with a frisbee on the beach; having so much fun that it seemed an intrusion just to be watching. Robyn described the scene and the atmosphere as "totally idyllic."

Apparently Stanley had been even more enjoyable. They'd also enjoyed what Michel said was one of their best breakfasts ever in Stanley. Michel said he had one of the finest breakfasts of his life there, while Robyn said: "If we'd stayed another day in Stanley, we might never have left."

For someone who has achieved everything a culinary career could possibly offer, Michel Roux is an engagingly modest man. A month previously, he'd dined with the president of France. A week following his return to England, he was to be the dinner guest of the Queen. This day, he was perfectly at home breakfasting *sur l'herbe* on a sparkling sunny morning among Webster's walnut trees outside Swansea.



Roux was born in 1941 in Charolles, home of France's famed Charolais cattle. He started as a pastry apprentice at the age of 14. "We worked 70 hours a week, and there was no machinery. Even the vanilla ice cream was churned by hand." At the end of his shift he remembers sleeping like a baby.

After working as a sous chef at the British Embassy in Paris and as chef to the Rothschild family, Roux and his brother, Albert, opened their first restaurant, Le Gavroche, in London in 1967.

In his autobiography, *Life is a Menu*, he recalls his first experience of English food.

“One of the most chilling experiences of my life was discovering the British pea. I happened on this fluorescent green object soon after arriving in London. Through a window I saw plates with these peas, a dollop of tomato ketchup and bleached white bread ... I was appalled not only by the sight, but also by the fact that people were tucking in with such gusto. Like a witness to an atrocity, I told myself I had to put this out of my mind.”

He did just that at Le Gavroche, offering *truite fume* at 75p and entrees priced at £1.75. It became the first restaurant in England to win three Michelin stars. Roux says London restaurant prices have now become ludicrously expensive.

In 1972, Michel opened the Waterside Inn in Bray, Berkshire, which has held its three Michelin stars for an unbroken 23 years. In 2001, he passed the kitchen to his son Alain and now indulges his passion for writing, travelling and heading up the Roux Scholarship, a competition for British chefs started by the brothers in 1984. The scholarship pays for winners to spend six months working in the kitchen of any three-star restaurant of their choice in the world.

“Tasmania has in its natural beauty and quality produce, something we are rapidly losing in Europe,” Roux says. “It’s worth protecting and celebrating. But you have to do more with your food. And while what you’re doing with your young chefs and Tetsuya is a great thing, it’s only a start. Your cookery colleges should be aiming to become centres of true international excellence. You have the produce, but you’re a long way away from the rest of the world. Bring great chefs in to spend time with your chefs and students. Pay for your young chefs to go out in the world and bring that experience back. The success of our Roux scholarships and the influence they have had in Britain is one of my proudest achievements. You could do the same thing here.”

It was these ideas and sentiments that excited the Premier, Paul Lennon, in his discussions with Michel later that day; ideas that Brand Tasmania is now keen to expand and build on.

That night, they enjoyed what Michel termed a “perfect meal” at the Henry Jones Art Hotel. Michel complimented the Head Chef, Andre Krop, on his excellence in choice and preparation. The experienced travellers greatly admired the hotel, where all the staff did Tasmania proud.

The Rouxs were well over the baggage limit when they flew out of the State after buying wood design items and artworks at Mark Bishop's Stanley Artworks. They also spent up at the Tasmanian Wood Design Centre in Launceston for items to decorate their expanded establishment at Bray. So Tasmania will enjoy some extended promotion at one of the world’s most famous restaurants.

Cambridge is taking off

It’s one thing to have read the consistent flow of positive statistics about Tasmania’s economy in recent years, but quite another to see the physical manifestation first hand. There’s no better place than Cambridge, a once sleepy backwater 20 minutes from Hobart, to pick up the mood of confidence and vitality. A strip of second-class grazing land between the Tasman Highway and Kennedy Drive - forlorn and under-utilised for more than 30 years - is suddenly a hub of 21st century development. Cranes, trucks and bulldozers jostle; trades people with hard hats and springy steps bustle about; new roads appear; and modern, low-rise buildings spring up like mushrooms after an overnight shower.



A \$60 million homemaker centre being developed by Prudentia accounts for a lot of the activity. Its first operating tenant, K&D, opened a \$10 million trade and homewares store in March, creating 40 jobs. Harvey Norman sprung to life on an adjoining block a week later. Dozens of other retail tenants are poised to follow.

Nearby, a new \$25 million HQ building for Hydro Tasmania Consulting is the first Tasmanian office building to be awarded



a Five-Star Green Star rating for environmental excellence from the Green Building Council of Australia, which assesses environmental sensitivity and sustainability in new buildings. Around 300 staff will move from existing offices in Hobart’s CBD during April.

The General Manager of Hydro Tasmania Consulting, Mike Brewster, said: "The business is moving to premises that set the standard for the rest of the State and are at the forefront of green buildings across Australia."

Bovis Lend Lease completed design and construction of the project on time and on budget.

Meanwhile, planning is well underway for an IBM Data Centre, while Aurora is investing \$15 million in infrastructure just to ensure all these new businesses have access to the energy they need.

A traffic turnoff is operating from the Tasman Highway and a new roundabout has been commissioned on Kennedy Drive. Landscapers are planting trees through the pine bark in the car-park gardens. A wider revegetation program aims to offset emissions generated during construction.

Things are just as frenetic on the far side of Kennedy Drive. Cambridge Airport and such associated businesses as Par Avion, the Aero Club of Southern Tasmania, Wilderness Air and Helicopter Resources were once the only operations on the Barilla Bay side of the road. Now the older buildings are dwarfed by a new Aurora operations centre, complete with truck marshalling yards, black towers of conduit and great heaps of telegraph poles-in-waiting. All along Kennedy Drive, a thoroughfare once noted for its isolation and illegal drag races, sparkling new buildings have been put up for John Holland, Bilfinger Berger, Room to Move, Cope and RollFab. These newcomers complement pioneering investments in the area by Winemakers Tasmania and Marinova. There's a Runway Café down a side lane and a sign on one of the few remaining empty paddocks advertising "Eye Spy". The way things are happening, you wouldn't be surprised if you spied another new building there the next time you drive past.

Beyond the roundabout where Kennedy Drive meets the Bass Highway and Hobart Airport's access road, foundations are in place and structures are taking shape for an \$8 million motel, caravan park, service station and restaurant complex being built on leased airport land by local entrepreneur Ali Sultan. Behind Mr Sultan's earthworks is the flat, open grassland earmarked for a \$50 million-plus direct factory outlet (DFO) project.

Scheduled for completion by Easter 2009, the DFO has been reduced in scale to 10,000 sq metres by proponent, Austexx, to comply with Federal Government requirements. It is still expected to feature more than 50 individual stores selling such brands as Fila, Esprit, Converse, Tommy Hilfiger, Sheridan, Jag and many others.

The older Cambridge industrial centre at the opposite end of Kennedy Drive has attracted businesses like Tasmanian Timber Engineering, Chickenfeed, Wursthaus and Pooleys Wines, as well as the Tasmanian Fire Service, over the years and there's precious little land left to develop there. Old Cambridge has never seen anything like the pace of development taking place on the other side of the Tasman Highway overpass.

Cambridge – and indeed southern Tasmania – will never be the same.

Whisky tours á go go

By Graeme Phillips

We're in the highlands, Tasmania's belly button. The BBQ is set in the geographical centre of the island and a couple of fillets of fresh lake trout, sprinkled with brown sugar and pepperberry liqueur, are gently smoking over peat hand-cut from the bog behind us.

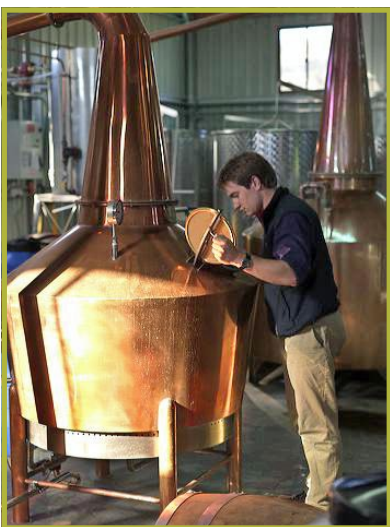


One of many high-country bogs, it's spongy and springy underfoot, like walking on a triple thickness of pile carpet. It was once a marsh where accumulated organic matter compacted and slowly decomposed over millions of years during and between Tasmania's three glacial intrusions. No one knows how deep the peat is, but Bill Lark, cutting into it with an authentic old Northumbrian peat shovel, reckons he's got enough in his 9ha lease to last 1,000 or so years.

Bill uses peat from this bog to smoke malted Tasmanian barley at his Mount Pleasant distillery near Cambridge to add an alluring sweet smokiness to his Lark Single Malt Whisky.

Back in its wild colonial days, Hobart Town boasted 16 distilleries. One house in every 20 was a pub and opium was a legal additive to beer. Then Governor John Franklin banned distilling in 1839 after his wife had complained that she'd "rather have the grain fed to pigs than see it turn men into swine." The ban lasted 153 years; until Bill and Lyn Lark succeeded in having it overturned in 1992 and filled their first barrel with spirit from their first hobby-sized 75-litre still.

Since then, the Larks have opened their popular whisky café in Davey Street, developed a range of 11 different whisky, gin and vodka products, built a new distillery at Mount Pleasant, 20 minutes east of Hobart, assisted six other distilleries to set up round the island and commissioned a new 600-litre still and an 1,800-litre copper pot still, both designed and built locally. Their daughter, Kristy, is now the head distiller, producing 250 barrels of whisky a year for export to Japan, Singapore, Scandinavia, New Zealand, England and, wait for it – Scotland.



The Larks' whisky has consistently rated 90+ in Jim Murray's annual *World Whisky Bible*. Recently their cask-strength whisky came second to a 16-year-old Highland Park whisky from Scotland at a big international Whisky Live event in New Zealand. Their Slainte whisky liqueur was the show's top-selling drop.

Now the Larks are introducing one-day, two-day and four-day tours they bill as "The ultimate Tasmanian malt whisky experience. A world of peat smoke and passion."

They offer visitors hands-on experience of every element of the whisky-making process. "It would only be possible in a small distillery like ours," Bill Lark says. "That sets our tours apart from those of the big, industrial Scottish distilleries where they're pumping out millions of bottles a year."

The ingredients for whisky are simple – barley, water and optional peat. Making whisky is also relatively simple, but the use of archaic and poetic terms have lent it a mystical quality. *Wort, mash tun, maltings, grist, foreshots, middle cuts and feints, lyne arm, low wine, worm and angels' share* all play their part. For some traditional but unfathomable reason, whisky barrels are still required by the tax authorities to be dated according to the ancient Julian Calendar.

Not so ancient is the practice of ageing and maturing the distilled clear spirit in barrels, a practice which softens, mellows and colours the whisky. This started in Scotland only around 150 years ago. Ageing the spirit in small 100-litre barrels, as the Larks do, produces the same mellowing effects in five years as the Scots achieve in 10 or 15 years using much larger barrels. The Larks are in the process of building their own cooperage at the distillery where they will assemble smaller casks from large old port, sherry and bourbon oak barrels. Once the cooperage is up and running, the Larks will have every stage of the whisky-making process in place.

Depending on the length of their chosen tour, visitors will be able to cut and collect peat in the highlands; use it to smoke malted barley; stir the mash to extract sugars from the barley starches; help ferment and distil the wash; cut the fores and feints; and - the ultimate - take home the heart of the run (middle cut) in a 20-litre barrel assembled for them by an in-house cooper from American or French oak staves that have been used to mature port, sherry or bourbon, according to each visitor's preference and personal selection.

The tours then finish with a comparative whisky tasting. The four-day tour finishes with a piped haggis dinner at the Davey Street café. Then you take your barrel home, stick it under the house and bring it out after five or more years so you can offer guests a drop of your very own, hand-made Tasmanian whisky.

This unique Tasmanian experience will be made all the more memorable by the highly entertaining tour leader, Tasmania's poetry-quoting, gourmet sausage and haggis king, Mark Nicholson.

Further information: www.larkdistillery.com.au

Boy from Tas hits the stage

Tasmanian 12-year old Josh Weiss Gates has secured the title role in the successful Sydney musical *Billy Elliott*. An enthusiastic dancer-singer-actor, Josh began rehearsals in Sydney in March and will take over the challenging and potentially career-moulding role later in the year.



Josh, who trains at the House of Dance in Kingston, near Hobart, is a born performer. When asked in kindergarten to recite the alphabet, he sang it and earned his first applause. He has relished the spotlight ever since and toured the country in 2006 as an understudy for the role of a young Peter Allen in *The Boy from Oz*.

Later that year, Josh auditioned with 3,000 other hopefuls for the lead role in *Billy Elliott*. The vibrant Tasmanian attracted lots of attention, but was told he needed more experience. Then, as the Sydney season lasted well beyond expectations, the producers realised they would have to replace the present Billy Elliott later this year. They organised a flurry of callback auditions.

The Boy from Tas won through, but had a trying time keeping the news to himself pending the formal announcement. "It has been really hard – I came back from the callback and they all said 'Did you get into *Billy Elliott*?' and I had to say 'I don't know yet,'" Josh told *The Mercury*. "I am nervous and excited, but it's all in a really good way."

Josh has some tough rehearsing ahead, even allowing for some slight hyperbole by the show's publicist J.P. Bolton.

"The demand on these kids is immense ... they are never off stage and they need to do singing, dancing, acting, gymnastics – at world championship level – ballet credible enough to be accepted into the Royal Ballet School and tap dance to the standard of Dein Perry [creator of Top Dogs]."

The person who knows Josh best, mother Michelle Gates, said: "He knows what he wants to achieve and I just taxi him to dance lessons, rehearsals and auditions."

More than 200,000 people have seen *Billy Elliott* at Sydney's Capitol Theatre.

Boyce unshackles history

By Christopher Bantick



There are some books which are arresting in their originality and vision. James Boyce's seminal, *Van Diemen's Land*, is such a book. This remarkable, astute and accessibly scholarly work is to be savoured like a salty breeze off the Derwent.

The weight of this magisterial study is in its clarity of argument. This is an entirely new take on Tasmania's past. While the historical antecedents are there of the convict prison and the outrages of incarceration, there is also a measured looking back to see forwards. Boyce moves beyond the "indelible stain" of the convict past.

This is not to say that he does not acknowledge it. He notes: "Van Diemen's Land thus needs to be understood as a convict society. It is not best exemplified by the well-known penal apparatus – chain gangs, Port Arthur and hard labour – but by the everyday lives of the ordinary people of the colony."

Boyce is courageous to take on the received wisdom of the past and challenge it. While he can say: "Popular images of Van Diemen's Land largely reflect fiction, or more accurately, a single work of fiction. One nineteenth-century novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, has done more than any history book to shape perceptions of convict life."

Where Boyce's book resonates is in its reappraisal of convicts. They were not merely the dross of Britain, but a remarkably resilient, imaginative, adaptable and creative group of humans who effectively laid the foundation stones of Tasmanian society. Importantly, they found a benign and welcoming place in which to improve themselves. In this, Van Diemen's Land was exceptional.

Boyce is unambiguous on the significance of this point when he writes in the introduction: "The hypothesis of this book is that the character of the island which became the enforced home of over 72,000 sentenced criminals (42 per cent of the convicts transported to Australia) does matter."

He writes later: "The convicts' hell was, thank God, a human creation alone. This book is about the tension produced by siting the principal gaol of the empire in what proved to be a remarkably benevolent land."

The narrative approach Boyce has employed is largely dependent on him following the chronology of settlement and the administration of Van Diemen's Land's colonial society. Uncharacteristic as it may be to refer to Tasmania as a veritable "Eden", when compared to the deprivations of England during the industrial revolution, the reality the convicts found was remarkably different than the forbidding perception of a cruel and hostile land.

Boyce has done Tasmanians a service in writing this splendid book. He says, truly, that "Van Diemen's Land was not only the convicts' prison, it was their one source of hope."

Boyce has gone some way towards setting us free from history's leg irons.

Van Diemen's Land. (Black Inc, \$49.95)

Governor sworn in

The former Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Chief Justice Peter Underwood, AO, was sworn in as Tasmania's 27th Governor on 2 April. The Premier, Paul Lennon, announced in March that Queen Elizabeth II had approved Chief Justice Underwood's appointment to assume the vice-regal role.



"Justice Underwood is a man of integrity and intellect who has the qualities to serve Tasmania well as Governor," Mr Lennon said. "He has had an outstanding career in the law and has been heavily involved in a wide range of community activities."

Mr Lennon said he had honoured a commitment to consult Opposition parties and the President of the Legislative Council on the appointment and it had received strong bipartisan support. Governor Underwood takes over Government House from Mr William Cox, another former Chief Justice, who restored stability to the position following a brief but tumultuous governorship by the former United Nations weapons inspector Richard Butler.

Governor Underwood is a graduate of the University of Tasmania who was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court in 1984 after a distinguished legal career. He became Chief Justice in December 2004. Governor Underwood has served as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Friends' School and as Chair of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Board. He is married to Frances and has four children and three stepchildren.

Growth leads nation

Tasmania had the highest increase in economic growth in Australia in the December quarter 2007, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures. "Tasmania did better than even the resource-rich States of Queensland and Western Australia which are regarded as the economic powerhouses," the Treasurer, Michael Aird, said. "State final demand increased by 1.6 per cent in trend terms in the quarter, to be up by 5.0 per cent for the year ... On a seasonally adjusted basis, Tasmania grew by a whopping 3.6 per cent in the December quarter, well ahead of all the other jurisdictions."

Mr Aird said major investments still to contribute to growth included the pulp mill at the Bell Bay Major Industry Zone, the direct factory outlet at Cambridge, the new Royal Hobart Hospital, the Brighton transport hub, other road and rail upgrades and large-scale water development programs. "The future for Tasmania's economy looks bright," he said.

Council duo honoured

Two Brand Tasmania Council members, Jane Bennett and Astrid Woottan, are among 17 Tasmanians chosen to contribute to the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd's, 2020 Summit in Canberra this month. The Federal Government has invited 1,000 eminent Australians to discuss and – if possible define - ways in which the nation should move forward in many different fields of activity over the next 12 years. A former Brand Tasmania Council member, Linda Hornsey, has been appointed to head the secretariat for the event. Ms Bennett is Managing Director of Ashgrove Cheese at Elizabeth Town, while Dr Wootton is General Manager of the Design Centre - Tasmania in Launceston.

Alomes heads RPDC

Greg Alomes, a former General manager of the Kingsborough Council, has been appointed Executive Commissioner and Chairman of the Resource Planning and Development Commission (RPDC). Mr Alomes assumed the role in March from Simon Cooper who had acted in the position for 12 months while also fulfilling his role as Chairman of the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal. "Greg Alomes comes from a distinguished career in local government which gives him a unique insight into the State's planning system," the Deputy Premier, Steven Kons said. "He also has significant experience as a consultant in the fields of strategic and business planning processes, project management, change management, organisational audits, management reviews and performance appraisals."

Duo is Amplified

A young electronic duo, the Scientists of Modern Music, won the award for Tasmania's Most Promising Act at the 2008 Amplified Awards presentation in Hobart in March. Music promotion company, Loud Music, collected the Outstanding Contribution to Original Tasmanian Music award. Other winners included: Adam Cousens (Best Songwriter, Best Song and Best Solo Artist); Red Rival (Best Up and Coming Act and Best Web Presence); The Scientists of Modern Music (Best Electronic / Dance / Experimental / Sound); and The Stoics (The Damien Greenwood Up and Coming Original Musician Award).

Apprenticeships boom

The number of Tasmanians starting apprenticeships in traditional trades rose by 32.6 per cent in the year to September 2007, more than doubling the national average rise of 15.5 per cent. Overall, around 7,900 Tasmanians started apprenticeships, compared to 7,400 the previous year. The Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett, said recent data also showed 65.8 per cent of Tasmanians completed their apprenticeships, the highest rate of any State and or territory.

Beer goes green

Australia's oldest brewery is now offering a certified planet-friendly beer, Cascade Green. The 15kg of greenhouses gasses emitted during the production and life of each carton of the new beer will be off-set by carbon credits, earning the "global cooler" certification under a national greenhouse friendly program. The green-labelled stubbies are being advertised nationally.

\$1.8m. pinot project

A Tasmanian consortium has been awarded a \$1.8 million Ausindustry research and development grant to improve the growing and production of pinot noir and other sparkling-wine grapes. Scientists and graduate students will undertake research for the project, mainly at Tamar Ridge's Kayena vineyard.

Storages shrink

March rains were welcomed by farmers, but did little to ease Hydro Tasmania's storage problems. Overall storages were 18.3 per cent full at the start of April, with only the use of Basslink and gas-generated energy having limited the annual deterioration to 2 per cent. Great Lake is 15.3 per cent full compared to 13.4 per cent last year, while Lake Gordon has fallen 10.5 per cent to 13.1 per cent. Hydro Tasmania's annual cloud-seeding program began on 1 April and will continue until November, except in the King and Pieman catchments where an impact study is underway.

Golf museum reopens

The Australasian Golf Museum at Bothwell was reopened in March after building refurbishment and rearrangement of its collection of more than 8,000 golf-related items. Instigated by celebrated golfer Peter Toogood, the museum now displays around 3,500 items. It has been visited by more than 20,000 people. Bothwell's Ratho golf course is the oldest in the southern hemisphere.

Hong Kong exposure

Tasmania is being portrayed as one of the world's "last paradises" in a series of five 30-minute travel programs on Hong Kong's most influential television station, TVB. The series, which exposes the State to 2.1 million viewers in Hong Kong and 60 million households worldwide, also features the Seychelle Islands.

Another jobs record

The number of people employed in Tasmania increased by 200 in February to a record 230,400 people, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports. Fulltime employment was approaching 160,000 and the unemployment rate had fallen 0.1 of a point to 5.1 per cent, despite more people having entering the workforce.

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