



New Zealand Working Visit April/May 2009

My five week working visit started off in Auckland, where I started off at Dine by Peter Gordon. The team there was run by head chef Ben Mills who helped me settle in very well to a different environment than I was used to. Dine has got a very good reputation, and rightfully so, therefore it was a very busy restaurant with nearly every dinner service full. This allowed me to "Get stuck in" and jump straight into the services with all the guys who worked there. The food there really reflects on Peter Gordon's Fusion influence and was a good learning opportunity for me. I am very grateful to have seen it and I took a great deal away from it. I enjoyed my time there the most because it was my first restaurant and I was made to feel very welcome and at home.



One of Dine's most popular dishes "Scallops with egg plant puree and a mango and chorizo salsa".

My second restaurant in Auckland was one of an exceptional high standard "The Grove." This was led by head chef Sid Sahrawat. Sid's style and balance of cooking was exquisite, and the food at The Grove was a pleasure to see and learn from. I could not get as involved in the services as I could at Dine solely because the restaurant was just not as busy. However I did thoroughly enjoy my time there and was very grateful to Sid and his team for letting me join them for a week. Below is one of Sid's signature dishes, "roast cannon of Lamb with Celeriac puree and a parmesan risotto."



When I was in Auckland a special dinner took place which is influenced a lot by Peter Gordon, the "Dine For A Difference" dinner. This event took place at the wonderful attraction which is Sky City and involves chefs such as Michael Meredith, Al Brown and Martin Bosley, who put on a fundraising dinner in aid of cancer. Peter very kindly let me take part in this dinner working with himself and his two head chefs from Dine and The Providores, Ben Mills and Miles Kirby. It was a huge success and was one of the best catering events I have ever been involved with, And that was nothing to do with the after party where all the chefs got together and enjoyed a bite to eat and maybe a glass of bubbly or two! Here are some of the wonderful dishes that the chefs from the

evening produced.



Peter, myself and Ben plating a dish.

After Auckland I travelled north to Paihia and met up with Chris Hagan, a previous NZ-UK Link Foundation Culinary Challenge winner, and worked with him at both “pure tastes” and on a private island. The restaurant was again fantastic and the food had a very English/European feel to it, Maybe because Chris himself was a Brit. But, none the less the food there was very good, using very fresh and local produce.

Unfortunately Paihia is a small place which is built up on tourism and the week I got there seemed to be the week all the tourist went home therefore it was pretty quiet. All though Chris and I did manage a boat trip to a private island which we put on a private dinner for the couple who were renting the island for 2 days and I must say it was a great experience. Paihia was by far the most beautiful place I visited in New Zealand, the weather was fantastic and my apartment I got put up in was overlooking the ocean. It really was a special place where everyone was friendly; the food was great and the wines even better.



Left to right, Chris's Pork Belly dish, A scene from the private island and a view from my apartment. Amazing!

After Paihia it was off to the Capital for me - or “Windy Wellington” as what most people had described it to me as. First restaurant was the very popular Logan Browns. Al Brown is the Chef/Part owner of the restaurant but he leaves the day to day running of the restaurant to head chef Shaun Clouston. It was a pleasure to work with Shaun, he made me feel welcome and again, A bit like Dine, I was able to get involved with the services as Logan Brown is a very busy restaurant. The food there was not quite as Fine dining as lets say The Grove, but I don't think that's how it is intended to be. It is a very busy restaurant pushing out 200 covers a day and still maintaining a very high standard, using very hearty and comfort cooking using very fine ingredients. The ever popular “Paua ravioli” where Shaun himself would sometimes go out and dive for the Paua, is a clear indication of the passion that New Zealand and the Chefs over there have for produce. It was another great week for me and I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Logan Browns.



The famous Paua Ravioli from Logan Browns.

My Last but by no means least restaurant was Martin Bosleys " The yacht Club." This was a beautiful restaurant overlooking the Wellington harbour. It only had 8 tables and they would not turn them over therefore if you booked a table there, not only were you in for a treat, you were in for the night. I would have to say the food there was the best I had seen on my visit. The restaurant would do a maximum of 40 covers which allowed the chefs to put all their expertise and knowledge into the product and it was easily what we would call "A Michelin Star Standard." I really enjoyed working there and learnt a great deal.

Below are some pictures from "The Yacht Club".



I was due to do a bit of travelling after my five week working visit but instead I decided to come home, in order to save money to get back out there as ASAP. I thoroughly enjoyed my time there and, to be honest, I fell in love with New Zealand. It is a fantastic country with even better people. The standard of cooking out there is up with the best in Europe and I am truly grateful to everyone who made my trip possible. If I could change anything about my trip it would have been to go a little bit earlier in the year, maybe December/Jan time, just because that is the New Zealand summer and when it would have been the busiest for places like The Grove and Paihia. But none the less, I plan to move out to Sydney in the near future and will be definitely heading back to New Zealand while I'm there.

I met so many great people and have far too many to thank for making my trip what it was. I would like to thank everyone I worked for and with for giving me the time and support I needed. I would also like to thank everyone involved with the NZ-UK Link foundation and the HSI for the endless running around you all did for me, being driving to and from airports etc. I would also like to give special thanks to Peter Gordon who is a firm backer of this programme without whom, my trip would not have been possible, Long may it continue. Also to Phillipa Faloon and Francis King, who were both never too busy to make sure I was ok. Even on my worse day, when I got a bit homesick, they were both there to support me, A big thank you to you both. And last but not least Philip and Yvonne Townsend, who put me up in their lovely home while I was staying in Auckland, cooked me meals and even made my bed, a huge thank you to you all.

Chris White