



bistro basics

From sausage creator to chef/owner of a bustling neighbourhood bistro – Lucy Green talks to chef Jeremy Schmid about being back in a restaurant kitchen...

Photo by Mark Heaslip

When it comes to food, Jeremy Schmid is a man who likes to do simple things very well, and this is evident in his latest venture. Although perhaps best known as the creator of the award-winning Little Boys sausages, he recently fulfilled a longstanding dream by opening his own restaurant, Two Fifteen Bar and Bistro, on bustling Dominion Road on Auckland's city outskirts.

Although having worked at some of New Zealand's top restaurants (Euro and Vinnies among them) and winning several prestigious awards, he remains modest about his latest foray into the kitchen and admits feeling "a bit rusty" but "it's been really good being able to get stuck in again!"

Jeremy had clear ideas about what he wanted to achieve with Two Fifteen. "I've always wanted to have my own place, especially something I could start from an empty shell." After working as Chef de Cuisine at Orbit in SkyCity, which seats up to 300, he says he knew he didn't want a large space. "Service there was always really fun, but given the scale of the operation, I felt I'd lost touch with the food a bit."

So while working as a consultant chef, he was scouring Auckland for the perfect location. Creating somewhere with a neighborhood feel was a crucial aspect of his vision and when he found a popular Vietnamese restaurant for sale at the city end of Dominion Road in August last year, he was keen to snap it up.

"This is a residential area, so I expect to be busy in the winter with lots of people walking in. That's what appealed to me. It's close enough to town to be accessible but far enough away to retain a community feel. Plus there's room to expand which is exciting."

"I wanted to have a place where you come and you could enjoy it, but you wouldn't necessarily have to conform to any sort of particular dining standard. You won't get treated any differently here if you're having a three course meal or if you've just come in for a wine and a bite to eat. It's not about getting a 'spend per head' out of people, I just wanted to create a local place where people feel comfortable."

Divided into separate spaces, the restaurant has a warm and sophisticated feel. It has seating for 42 within the main dining areas, room to sample from the small plates menu at the bar and room for another 30 or so in a private room.

Jeremy says the restaurant has allowed him to come full circle in terms of cooking style. "I'm fascinated by molecular gastronomy, but you won't see that coming out of my kitchen. I'd rather spend more time doing the simple things than making everything line up perfectly on the plate. I don't have the patience for that!"

Instead, patrons should expect to find good, hearty food. "I like to make as much as I can from scratch. We do all our breads, pastries, desserts and stocks. We also do an air-dried beef down in Te Aroha (where Little Boys is based), we smoke chicken and we also cure and smoke our salmon."

"It takes real skill to create traditional food, like braising a cut of meat or curing something, making a good paté or terrine. Those are the sort of things that require time to master and that's the sort of food that I like to sit down and eat," he explains.

"They don't take a lot of effort, but they make a big difference. Plus they're little things I enjoy doing. It's as much about us having fun in the kitchen."

The menu is made up of familiar bistro fare, but with a modern twist, which is central to Jeremy's style. "I recently went to a cook school in New Mexico which was really inspirational. I wouldn't want to copy the food exactly, because I guess it wouldn't reflect me." The result? Soft tacos with confit duck, black bean purée and a spiced tomato sauce – a dish he describes as "simple, but nice and fresh."

The menu will be changing fairly consistently. "Every six weeks or so I'll take something off and swap it with something new," something he regards as an important feature of a neighborhood bistro menu.

He's also tried to keep prices reasonable with no mains over \$30. "Maybe not the best way to make money," jokes Jeremy, "but I would rather be full of people every night and keep them happy."

"It takes real skill to create traditional food, like braising a cut of meat or curing something, making a good paté or terrine."

Despite having been open just a few months he has more ideas brewing not only for the restaurant but the area as a whole. "I really believe that this area in Dominion Road can only get better. Meredith is just down the road and even though it's essentially just him (chef/owner Michael Meredith), he's already changed the feel of the area. If we could get four or five different European-style places in here we could create a little hub with a village-type feel."

"On the opening night there were three different groups of people here at different tables all chatting away to each other. That's exactly the sort of environment I'd hoped to create. Relaxed and friendly, but with nice, neat service."

Even with the new restaurant, he is still working on Little Boys. "I'm still involved with the business, but more on the Research and Development and PR side. Every week I get sent sausages and I can taste them and make sure they're up to scratch," he explains.

"My first passion is cooking and that's what I really enjoy. It's been nice to see all the hard work starting to pay off with Little Boys because it's a tough market. I really enjoy getting that positive feedback. It's like being here in the kitchen, you could have had the hardest day, but if someone says 'I really enjoyed your food' it doesn't matter how bad your day was up until that point. It makes it all worth it." ●

Two Fifteen Bar and Bistro – 215 Dominion Rd, Ph: 09 630 6474.