

Chef Damien Jones of Lydiard in Ballarat

By Maralyn Hill

While visiting Ballarat, I had dinner at the Lydiard Wine Bar, winner of a number of Golden Plate Awards, with Head Chef Damien Jones in the kitchen. After dinner, there was time for a brief interview, during which he shared one of his favorite recipes, salad of pomelo and prawns with lemongrass.

I'm also including photos of dishes I enjoyed at Lydiard during my visit. One of the incredible dishes we enjoyed at Lydiard

Maralyn: How did you get started?

Damien: I always knew I wanted to be a Chef and I consider myself lucky that I when I applied for my first job (at only 15 years old!) that I got it. Twenty-two years later, I still love cooking, so I thank the industry for being so vibrant and exciting – I am continuing to learn and grow all the time. I have lots of memories about being interested in food from a young age, with my father and grandmother in particular, so a chef apprentice was a logical step.

MDH: What is your favorite type of cuisine?

DJ: I actually have two favorites! Thai and French, both of which I have

trained extensively in. Thai food is fantastic because the seasonings and ingredients are tropical and vibrant – it's a cuisine like no other. French is naturally familiar to me! I enjoy the comforting nature and luxury of classic French food. Coming from cool climate Ballarat its hard beat beautiful French braise in the winter!

MDH: Do you have a favorite cooking utensil?

DJ: I do! A mortar and pestle – it is used by all cuisines and the task of pounding in a mortar and pestle is thoroughly enjoyable to me. It creates a flavour and aroma that is so much better than processing in



a food processor. My granite mortar and pestle that I got in Thailand many years ago is a wonderful companion in the kitchen.

MDH: Where do you go to eat when you eat out?

DJ: I like to eat out to be inspired. I don't often get a chance, funnily enough, as I'm generally in the kitchen or home with my young family. When I can eat out, I choose to go to Melbourne and I tend to eat in modern, professional restaurants where the chefs are cooking with intent and passion and pushing food boundaries. It's not so much a cuisine that I would be seeking out, but the restaurant itself, as I am interested in what they are trying to achieve in the kitchen with food and wine. I'm actually flying to Bangkok to have dinner at David Thompson's new restaurant, Nahm in April. I'm so excited!

MDH: Do you have a favorite spice?

DJ: I can't choose! Definitely vanilla and chili, but I also can't go past fresh bay leaves.

It's hard to imagine desserts without vanilla as it has a beautiful perfume and adds a depth of flavour to so many dishes.

Chili gives heat and although all of the Thai seasonings are great, chili is the platform to work off. You can add salty, sour or sweet and with chili as a base you can flavor a dish in a way that best suits the ingredients you are working with.

Bay leaves, again, can be used in so many ways. Fresh bay leaf is a wonderful, base spice to add to dishes, both savoury and sweet. Now on to Damien's recipe:

Salad of Pomelo and Prawns with Lemongrass

(serves 4)

This is a simple and delicious recipe that can be assembled in around 15 minutes. Best accompanied by a cold beer or a Riesling! It's a beautiful light lunch when served with steamed jasmine rice.

You will need to gather the ingredients first with a visit to the green grocer. Pomelo is an Asian citrus fruit that is similar to grapefruit, but not as bitter. It can be found at Asian markets, greengrocers and occasionally, supermarkets. If you cannot find pomelo, a good substitute is pink grapefruit as it is sweeter than normal grapefruit but still has the sourness required for this delicious salad.

Half a pomelo peeled and segmented (you will only need about half, so save the other half for breakfast the next day... or another round of the salad as you will love it so much!)

Approx 1 dozen fresh prawns, cooked

2 shallots (peeled and finely sliced)

One stick of lemongrass, remove the first 2 cm of the bottom/bulb end and peel of the first two layers to reveal the softer, younger heart of the lemongrass
Approx 5 lime leaves, finely sliced
Small handful of mint, washed
Handful of fresh coriander, pick and wash the leaves (you will use the roots in the dressing below)

Chop, slice and prepare the ingredients as above and you are ready to go! Put all of the ingredients into a large bowl and quickly toss and taste before you add the dressing. Use your own tastes and preferences to decide if there is too much of one ingredient

or not enough of another. If it tastes like there is too much mint, then maybe there is. You can make this salad your own by tailoring it to your tastes.

Red Chili Dressing (Green nahm yum)

2 coriander roots, cleaned, washed and chopped
2 fresh garlic cloves
pinch Sea salt
2 large fresh red chilies (de-seeded and chopped a little)
3 large limes, juiced (must be fresh, with no bitterness)
2 heaped tablespoons white sugar
2 tablespoons Fish sauce (Squid brand is best)

Add coriander, garlic, salt and chilies into a mortar and pestle and pound to a fine paste. (If you do not have a mortar and pestle, then use a blender – put all the ingredients in at the same time and give it a quick whiz – and add a mortar and pestle to your Santa list!).

Add lime juice, then the sugar and fish sauce last. Before dressing the whole salad, try some with a little of the dressing. The combination should taste sweet first, then a little sour, hot and salty. If it's a bit sour for your liking, add some more sugar to the dressing. If it's too sweet, add more lime juice. Do not be afraid to use what looks like a large amount of sugar – it is important to balance the flavours. When you are happy with the overall taste, splash the dressing with abandon over the salad. Pour another cold drink and enjoy!

To try some of Damien's creations:
Lydiard Wine Bar
15 Lydiard Street North, Ballarat,
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