



## YES CHEF

At the tender age of six, while the rest of us are trying to figure out how to get the green bits out of dinner, Matt Knoops was deciding he wanted to be a chef.

"It sounds a bit silly, but I guess I decided in primary school – yeah, about six," he says.

As it turns out, he was right, and now he's staring down the barrel of Collins Square's most exclusive restaurant, Chiara, as head chef. Like most seasoned chefs though, it was a long path to get here. There were many hands to be burnt and saucepans to be dodged first.

"As a teenager, I started off as an apprentice at Sebel Melbourne Treasury where I earned my stripes peeling prawns," he says jokingly.

"After this I moved to Harveys in South Yarra. I was 17 and would catch a bus to a train, then a train to a bus, and worked about 90 hours a week for \$200. It was worth it – I learned so much."

Taking me through his story, Matt rattles off kitchen after kitchen, each with their own tale of how he found himself there, and little moments he's recalling as if he hasn't thought about them in a while. They're all important chapters in his (cook)book.

There's the Sebel Heritage in the Yarra Valley, where he worked with local produce, hung out with kangaroos and served country club politicians and celebrities. There's The Lincoln in Carlton, where he learned about butchery and dry-aged meats. And there's the Hotel Lindrum, where he worked as a chef de partie before being promoted to head chef.

What followed was a stint in the UK, where he had another chance encounter.

"I was working in a job over there where everyday was the same; it was so monotonous," he says.

"One day I got talking to this guy from Lithuania and said, "Why don't you come and work at the restaurant I'm from?" – it turned out to be the shiny new seafood spot, Angler.

"They were doing about 20 covers a night and within four months we got a Michelin star and had 100 covers for lunch and 100 for dinner."

"The UK is tough – if you're no good, they'll just get rid of you and find someone else, so not only do you want your food to look and taste good, but you have the added pressure that if it's not, you'll lose your job."

"The UK was one of the best parts of my career."

After he had his time there, Matt returned to Australia, working at the iconic Little Creatures Dining Hall and the Arts Centre before accepting the head chef title at Chiara.

"At Chiara, I try to get a lot of input from the other staff – it's a collaborative effort," he says.

I wonder if it's different running a kitchen in a commercial precinct like Collins Square, versus a destination restaurant. Apparently it is.

"There are a lot of new things you need to keep in mind here. For example, we try to keep it all very neat and tidy because we know our diners aren't going to want to go back to work with tomato-splashed shirts."

"We also aim to change the menu about once a month, because we have so many regular clients coming from the offices, that we want to keep it interesting for them."

### Here's what you'll need:

- 150g Japanese pumpkin
- 100g parsnip
- 150g sweet potato
- 100g eggplant
- 100g zucchini
- 100g purple carrots
- 150g red beets
- 150g yellow beets
- 50g red onion
- 50g mushrooms
- 50g brussel sprouts
- 2-3 cloves of garlic
- Roasted sesame seeds, to drizzle
- Veggie crisps, to garnish
- Caramelised vinegar dressing, to drizzle
- Carrot hummus
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Unlike many chefs of today, Matt doesn't give off the impression he's in it for the stardom. He's not arrogant by any means. Rather, he's young and laidback, and his approach is modern and adventurous – all of which comes through in his cooking.

"Chiara is classic Italian, so I try to keep those classic combinations, but presented in a way you wouldn't expect," he says.

"I look through a lot of cookbooks for inspiration; one of my favourites is by Eleven Madison Park, which is the number one restaurant in the world right now. I flip through and think about how I could present my dishes differently."

"We're doing a classic pork sausage right now, but rather than presenting it simply, we'll do it in a red wine-soaked roasted pear. Our goal is to give you something you're yet to see."

Finally, when asked that trademark question – what he loves most about being a chef – he answers in his trademark laidback way.

"Honestly? I just absolutely love cooking."



## THE LONG SHOT (FAMOUS) ROASTED VEG SALAD

*It's no accident that this is one of the most ordered dishes on the menu! Now your favourite lunch can become your favourite dinner too, as Long Shot lets us in on their secret recipe. Prepare your tastebuds for a vegetarian feast (but if you want to add meat, that's OK too).*

### Here's how it's done:

1. Preheat oven to 200°C
2. Slice veggies into desired size or shape. Drizzle with olive oil and top with salt and pepper.
3. Cook each vegetable separately as they all have different cooking times – roughly 10-15 minutes per veg (pumpkin generally takes a little longer).
4. After roasting, split up the vegetables into individual servings, before drizzling with the caramelised vinegar dressing. Pop it back in the oven to roast for a further 3-5 minutes.
5. Channel your inner Master Chef and pipe out three dollops of the carrot hummus onto a plate.
6. Arrange vegetables, and sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds.
7. Garnish with veggie crisps and serve.