

In the kitchen

Celebrity chef, television presenter and author Benjamin Christie shares a recipe with an authentic Aussie theme

What inspired your love of cooking?

A. When I was young, my mother ran the kitchen at a wedding reception venue not far from home. I would often go there after school, till Dad picked me up and I always felt I was missing out on something as he would always arrive just prior to service. Later, in my teenage years, as a scout, nearly every weekend we went away hiking or camping. Most of the scouts did not know how to cook and I hated eating raw, burnt or food with soil in it. So early on, I gained the responsibility of cooking over the campfire and ensuring the meals were edible.

What do you love about Australian cuisine?

A. I love being at the forefront of the evolution and development of Australian cuisine, the challenge that this represents as well as promoting it around the world. Everyone has their own opinion about what Australian cuisine is and mine, unlike others, goes beyond meat pies and Vegemite! Australian cuisine is a combination of the ingredients of the Aboriginal people, carefully paired with the outstanding produce this country has to offer.



Benjamin says, "Paperbark is one of the most versatile natural food wraps available and imparts a delicate smokey flavour to chicken, pork, veal, poultry, kumara, oysters, fish, scallops etc. Paperbark works best with white meats and starchy vegetables, which are slowly cooked in the paperbark so that the smoke created when the natural oils in the bark combust are absorbed into the fats in the food."

What's the one essential item you can't live without in your kitchen?

A. I would have to say that I couldn't live without my ice-cream machine because I enjoy making all types of ice-creams and sorbets. Most people don't realise that the majority of ice-cream at the local supermarket is full of artificial ingredients, preservatives and chemicals. Some of the exciting flavour combinations that I enjoy making include wattleseed and macadamia nut ice-cream and Lemon Aspen sorbet with pear.

What is your personal philosophy of food and cooking?

A. I love cooking and creating something new and, like most chefs, I think about food all day long and often conceive combinations in my mind well before I create them. People ask me how I can "just" create recipes off the top of my head and that's a good question. I think it's about being passionate, knowing your ingredients and what you can do with them and having the determination to create something fresh, new and innovative. For me, food is the catalyst for relaxing and celebrating with others. No matter if it's yum cha with my partner, a BBQ with friends or the obligatory Sunday family roast, food is something that brings people together.

What's next for Benjamin Christie?

A. Lots. I've just finished designing my brand new website (www.benjaminchristie.com), which will become a portal for Australian food with information on native foods, recipes, cooking videos, wine reviews, cooking tips, competitions and much more! Together with Vic Cherikoff, we've just launched the Aussie Chefs brand and website (www.aussiechefs.com) in the USA and this will include a new TV series for a US cable network, two new cookbooks as well as making more cooking videos for Joost. Adding to this a rather hectic travel schedule cooking at food festivals overseas. It's a great job!

Visit www.benjaminchristie.com



Paperbark-smoked snapper fillets with Daintree pineapple and Riberry salsa

Ingredients

1 x 180g snapper fillet
5g Wildfire Spice
1 Paperbark Roll
Outback Salt
Vegetable oil

For Daintree pineapple and Riberry salsa (make the day before)

350g pineapple, finely diced
50g shallot, finely chopped
50g garlic, finely chopped
50g Riberry Confit
10g Lemon Myrtle Sprinkle
10g red chilli, julienne
50ml pineapple juice
20ml sesame oil
30ml olive oil
Pinch salt
50ml red wine vinegar

Firstly, combine all ingredients for the salsa well and allow marinating for approximately four hours. The Daintree pineapple and Riberry salsa is best prepared the day before if possible; if not, allow four hours at least.

Ensure that the snapper fillet is free of bones and that the skin has been removed. Season with Wildfire Spice and a little outback salt. Unroll the paperbark and cut a small amount to wrap the snapper. On occasions, the paperbark is so thin that you can actually separate the paperbark in half. Using the stringless side of the paperbark rub a little oil on the bark, then place the snapper fillet on the bark. Wrap like a present, then tie with string.

On a hot grill or frying pan, sear the paperbark until it starts to smoke. Turn the package over, then again wait till the paperbark is smoking. After that, place in an oven until medium. The times required can vary depending on how thick the snapper is. You can test the doneness with a skewer or similar.

When cooked, remove from the oven and allow to rest. Then cut the paperbark and serve on a plate with Daintree Pineapple and Riberry Salsa.