

FOOD PHILOSOPHY

*by Group Executive Chef
Matthew Haigh*

PETER ROWLAND

“It’s about simply delivering refinement and elegance...”

When Group Executive Chef Matthew Haigh cooks with the freshest seasonal and local produce, he is not only governed by mastery of technique but the intrinsic beliefs that underpin the Peter Rowland ethos.

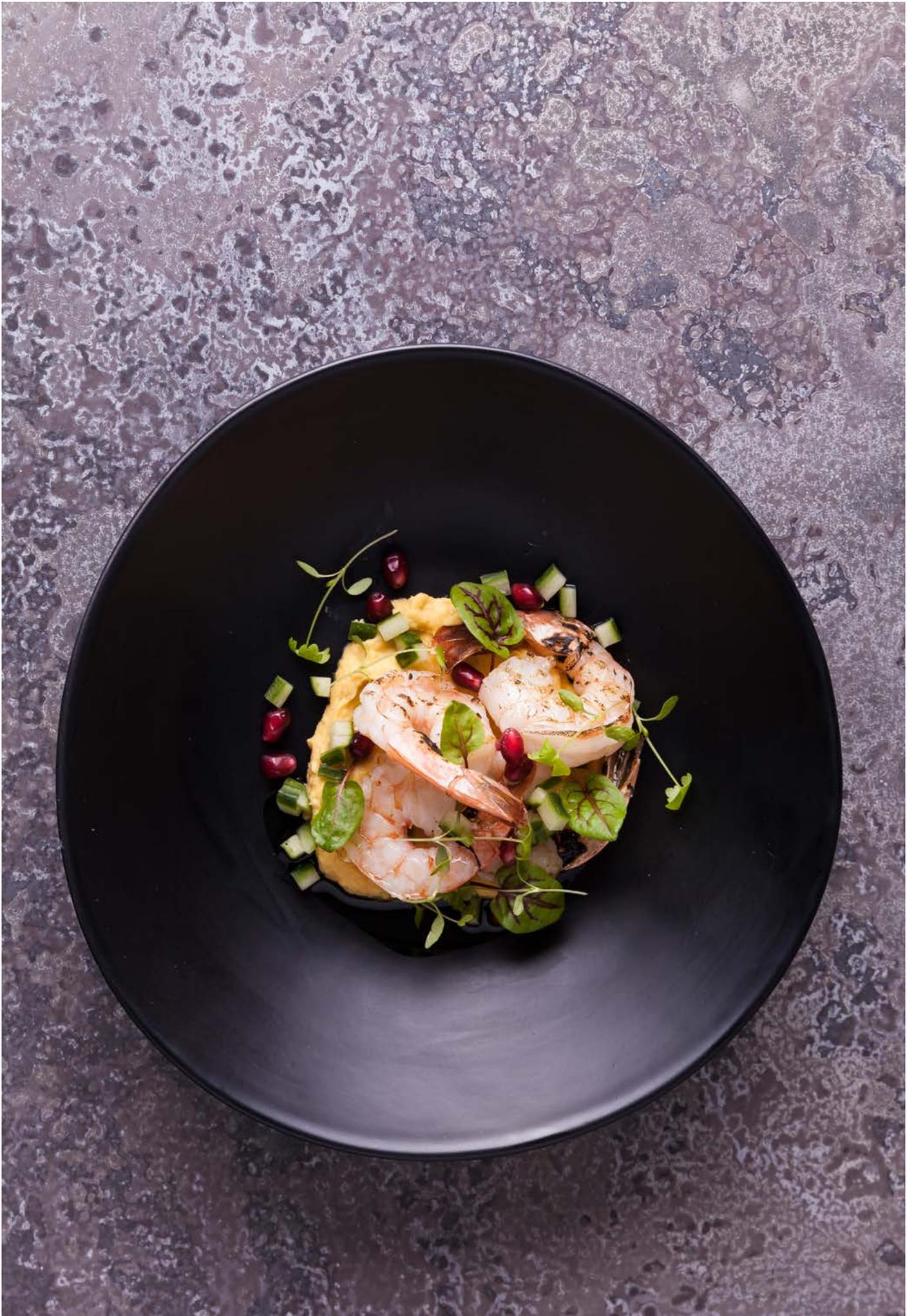
Chef Haigh has reinvigorated the kitchen and menu with his thoughtful Food Philosophy that combines maximum technique to produce maximum flavour. Its star ingredient is refinement to ensure the produce speaks for itself and celebrates the finest ingredients from Victorian local, regional and Australian producers.

His motto is “Good food does not necessarily mean complicated food” and you won’t find “fusion confusion” in his kitchen or on your plate when your waiter reveals your meal.

“It’s about simply delivering refinement and elegance and to bring out the natural flavours rather than over-complicating food,” he said.

THE FOOD PHILOSOPHY IS BASED ON 12 TENETS:

- 1| Refinement
- 2| Mastery of technique
- 3| Clean and fresh flavours
- 4| Enhanced rather than complicated flavours
- 5| Local and seasonal produce
- 6| Modern presentation with taste the “hero” on the plate
- 7| Unique ingredients such as jicama, a Mexican turnip
- 8| Close ties with producers and suppliers
- 9| Food miles and sustainability
- 10| “Gain and retain” clients and corporate partners
- 11| Strong investment in the supply chain
- 12| Training and nurturing of skilled chefs



Chef Haigh's trusted modus operandi motivates him every day he dons his crisp chef's whites from sunrise to sunset. "Every step of the way, from sourcing ingredients to producing food and the final plating, will reflect my drive for perfection," he said. "

Technique is crucial because it's easier to produce fussy food than refined elegance. I want to make sure the produce and flavours speak for themselves and are the star on the plate."

From overseeing curated bespoke soirees and large-scale major events to stand-up cocktail parties or seated banquets, our tailor-made menus celebrate international diversity while showcasing the finest and freshest produce.

"I envisage marrying quality seasonal produce, key ingredients and our collective expertise with technique to maximise flavours. We want our food to create lingering memories."

"...We want our food to create lingering memories"

Chef Haigh embodies the values established by company founder Mr Peter Rowland, OAM, in 1962. "It all starts with the belief of Mr Rowland. It comes back to him having this vision then letting us create. We've always been innovative, cutting-edge and on the front foot."

While honouring tradition and the nostalgic hue that precedes how generations of Melbourne families affectionately view the company, Chef Haigh is excited about using unique ingredients such as jicama, a Mexican turnip.

Driven by innovation, his favourite kitchen utensil is a blowtorch and not necessarily for creme brulee! He uses one to cook fish and prawns with grated palm sugar. The proof is in the pudding - or the prawn.

Just as Mr Rowland was passionate about the family business he created 55 years ago, the company is proud to support the family businesses of Victorian local, regional and Australian producers.

Chef Haigh, a devoted family man, is committed to an ongoing and convivial dialogue with producers and suppliers to maintain the renowned Peter Rowland excellence. "I love visiting local producers to source produce and make twice-monthly visits to the fruit and vegetable markets to speak with the produce suppliers," he said.

"I like to know about the local farmer down the road. We will be going to speciality farmers down in Gippsland. We can't be good unless our suppliers are good and that's why I like to talk to them. We've always had a good rapport with our clients and suppliers. We know them, they know us and trust us."

While our kitchen leader keeps one eye on the stove, the other is on the odometre to calculate the food miles from paddock to plate. His passion about local produce stretches for miles and miles. "Eighty per cent of our menus are from within a stone's throw from here. But sometimes you have to go further afield. You just don't get prawns in Melbourne so you have to go to Queensland."

The hungry diner who counts the minutes until the meal arrives on the table is just one part of the food chain. The company is mindful of its carbon footprint and community responsibility in supporting local businesses as an environmentally-aware good corporate citizen.



“Choose locally grown, locally supplied first”

Our policy is to “choose locally grown, locally supplied first”. This minimises transport and carbon emissions, and maximises the support of local businesses, family businesses and communities.

While food miles and sustainability have changed the sourcing of high-quality ingredients, Chef Haigh has always been ahead of the pack. “Even before this was a trendy word, we were always local,” he said.

When writing a menu for any occasion, his greatest motivation is the season. “It’s about knowing that in September when asparagus is growing in the garden it is at its peak. Why use asparagus in March and July? The flavours aren’t there.”

Chef Haigh’s back-to-basics approach is just as applicable in commercial kitchens as it is in domestic kitchens for the home cook. And that’s how he began - as a very junior cook with great aspirations.

Ever since he was a child and played with pots and pans, Chef Haigh dreamt of becoming a chef. He is proud to call Peter Rowland home after an accomplished career with the company. “As a child, I always wanted to be a chef. I just love it.”

To realise his childhood dream, he completed an apprenticeship at the Cranbourne Hotel while undertaking a Certificate in Cooking at the Peninsula Institute of TAFE. He then worked at Simply French in Armadale as Senior Chef De Partie to assist the Head Chef and Chef de Partie to run the restaurant.

Chef Haigh joined Peter Rowland in 2000 as the head chef of the Restaurant at the Melbourne Museum, took a break from the company in 2003 and returned casually in 2007 to work with Peter Rowland major events. He returned to the company full-time in 2012 as Head Chef – Major Events and was promoted in 2014 to Group Executive Sous Chef.

Instagram has undoubtedly influenced the way food is styled and presented, and we do eat with our eyes, but Chef Haigh remains true to his core beliefs and will never endorse style over substance. Cognisant of the food styling expectations of the social-media generation, Chef Haigh remains current while melding trends with the signature Peter Rowland finesse and elegance.

Peter Likes to Party in your palate and refinement is the first invitee. Taste will always be the “hero” on the plate. “Definitely everyone wants a photo nowadays. It has changed the way food is plated up but I try and keep true to who I am. The first thing about food is that it has to taste good. Yes, the food needs to look right and people do look with their eyes first, but it needs to be tasty.”

Peter Rowland has cemented its role as leader in the catering and events industry by delivering world-class food and beverage service to our valued clients and corporate partners. Our “Gain and retain” ethos has ensured generations of Melbourne families, big corporations and the major-events industry continue to savour the Peter Rowland flavour.

Chef Haigh leads a talented and dedicated team at the company’s South Yarra headquarters and at Flemington for the Victorian Racing Club. Our motto is “Weddings, Parties, anything” and that’s “Anytime, Anywhere” that requires the renowned Peter Rowland panache.



Working closely with the creative Catering and Events team to weave its magic, the Peter Rowland napkin can be placed on your lap at a private residence for a special party or corporate headquarters for a boardroom lunch.

The exclusive caterer for some of Melbourne's most prestigious major events, from the Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival to the Melbourne Cup Carnival, the food we parade shines whether it is served as canapes, plated meals or grazing menus. Drawing on his long tenure with the company, Chef Haigh is committed to training and nurturing his team of chefs and kitchen staff to replicate his career trajectory with the company. This encompasses passing down recipes, including the secret recipe for the mayonnaise in the famous Peter Rowland chicken sandwich, to skills at the stove and chopping board.

An innovator on the plate and in the buffet of ideas, Peter Rowland presented the inaugural National Chicken Sandwich Day on November 1 and will continue to celebrate the best thing since sliced bread as an annual event on our calendar.

From the kitchens to executive corridors, the value equation for our clients is at the forefront of what we do and represent. Chef Haigh knows why clients return to Peter Rowland year after year. "We always listen to the client and I think some people forget about that. I have a good working relationship with clients and the big thing with that is that I listen."

After the dessert plates are cleared and last drink is poured, Chef Haigh is still hungry for his food to create lingering memories. Standing side-by-side his kitchen army, they are united in his vision: "I want every person that comes to Peter Rowland to walk away with the best experience they've had in their life," he said.

When it's time to hang up his jacket for the day, he remains true to his personal philosophy of keeping it simple and tasty no matter if it's breakfast, lunch or dinner. Or when the clock strikes midnight. His ideal midnight snack? It's an ode to John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich. "It's as simple as a toasted sandwich with ham hock, fontina cheese and a fried egg on nice multi-grain bread.

Chief Executive Officer Emma Yee hailed Chef Haigh's Food Philosophy as the cornerstone of the company's raison d'être and reputation in remaining the first and only choice for discerning clients and corporate partners.

"I personally look forward to seeing the Peter Rowland Food Philosophy evolve under Matthew Haigh's direction," she said.

"I want every person that comes to Peter Rowland to walk away with the best experience they've had in their life"



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