



feels like home

One of Australia's top chefs, Michelin-starred **Bruno Loubet**, has found a home away from home in Ascot's beloved Baguette. By Kerry Heaney.

FRESH FROM a stint at Noosa, chef Bruno Loubet returns to Brisbane, easing into the top job at Baguette.

"Baguette is such an institution," says Bruno. I am happy being here. It's nice to work with Francis Domenech (Baguette's owner). We connected very quickly and seem to agree all the time.

"Usually when a chef comes in they want to do it all their own way. We have made some changes straight away but the goal is to improve, not just change."

Bruno has a culinary pedigree that's hard to match in Australia. He trained in France before heading for London where he was quickly named Young Chef of the Year. After a stint as head chef at Raymond Blanc's celebrated two-star Michelin restaurant Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Bruno went on to win his own Michelin star at Four Seasons Inn on the Park.

Michelin stars are one of the most recognised and influential culinary ratings in western Europe. Stars are awarded to a small number of restaurants of outstanding quality and the addition or loss of a star can mean a difference in turnover of millions of euro.

Bruno's own Bistrot Bruno in London has also received numerous awards. He was seeking a change of pace when an invitation by legendary foodie Stephanie Alexander first put Australia on Bruno's list.

"There was a lot of attention but it came with a lot of pressure. It was like running in the Olympics every day. The time came when we had enough of working 14 hours a day, every day," he says.

"With the profit from selling our property in London overlooking the Thames we could make a fresh start. For the French, Australia is very exotic. There is the feeling that everyone

goes jogging each morning and eats lots of healthy food."

The Loubets say they thought about Melbourne but it looked like a small London, Perth was too far away and Sydney was too much of a rat race.

"Brisbane was a smaller but interesting city on the up with great weather and good schools for the girls."

In 2001 Bruno moved to Australia and opened Bruno's Tables at Toowong. He became *The Courier-Mails'* Chef of the Year and received two stars from Australian *Gourmet Traveller Magazine*. During Bruno's two years at Berardo's at Noosa, the restaurant won the Gourmet Traveller's Best Regional Restaurant in Australia for 2005.

Bruno's passion and enthusiasm for food, his insistence on using only the best ingredients and his respect for local produce has resulted in some exciting additions to Baguette's menu. Next time you dine, look for beetroot ravioli on black pudding, horseradish froth and balsamic syrup; or pequillo peppers filled with salt cod brandade, with fried garlic and walnuts – both on the entrée list. In the mains, classic French treats such as house-made pheasant boudin blanc, green lentils and apple ragout; or pot-roasted rabbit with braised wild mushrooms and macadamia nuts are proving popular.

But it's the cassoulet special on Wednesday night that has diners driving across town.

"Baked beans like you have never had them before, typical of south west France," says Bruno.

Time to pop into Baguette and see what all the fuss is about!

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