



MEET THE CHEF

# Aaron Carr

Images FRANCES ANDRIJICH

IT WAS THE SURF THAT FIRST ATTRACTED CHEF AARON CARR TO THE MARGARET RIVER REGION IN 1990 AND IT'S THE PRODUCE AND LIFESTYLE THAT'S KEPT HIM THERE. AARON SHARES A CHARDY WITH DIANNE BORTOLETTO TO CHAT ABOUT WHAT'S IN STORE NEXT.

Aaron Carr is an acclaimed chef whose passion for his craft has not waned over an impressive career that spans three decades. Regarded as one of Australia's best, there's little doubt that Aaron's talent has played a part in cementing the Margaret River region as a gourmet destination.

He's friendly in a country-boy kind of way and one of the region's 'Surfing Chefs', a regular contributor to Surf Aid (raising money for impoverished surf villages in Bali) alongside other chefs he considers mates – Dany Angove, Tony Howell and Russell Blaikie.

Aaron is also a regular in the star culinary

line-up of esteemed food festivals, including arguably Australia's most prestigious, the Margaret River Gourmet Escape, and the Truffle Kerfuffle in Manjimup which celebrates the Southern Forests' truffle industry, just to name two.

Further, Aaron has worked alongside the world's best chefs including Massimo Bottura (Osteria Francescana, Modena), Peter Gilmore (Quay, Sydney) and Matt Orlando (Amass, Copenhagen) and hosted esteemed dinners in Los Angeles, London, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sydney and Melbourne.

Yet despite his credentials, which include being

named The West Australian Chef of the Year 2015, Hot 50 in The Australian, Top 100 Restaurants in the Financial Review and Top 100 Australian Restaurant in Gourmet Traveller magazine, there's not a hint of arrogance. He's just a down-to-earth surfer who loves what he does.

According to The Australian food critic John Lethlean, considered to be one of the fiercest critics in the country, Vasse Felix, where Aaron was head chef for 21 years, set the benchmark for winery restaurants in Australia. It's quite the tribute particularly considering its source. It was the most positive review of any Western Australian restaurant written by Lethlean that I have ever read. Ever.

Aaron left Vasse Felix in May 2017 to realise a dream of having his own restaurant. He has joined forces with Snake + Herring Wines co-founders Redmond Sweeny, Sal and Tony Davis to create Yarri, a new restaurant in Dunsborough, due to open in early 2018.

The name pays homage to two blackbutt trees that were growing in the middle of the restaurant's building site; in the local Indigenous language, the name for blackbutt tree is Yarri.

"The name Yarri has meaning to the place and suits the philosophy of the restaurant of keeping everything as local as possible – local produce, local supplies and local suppliers," Aaron said.

"We're working with a young cabinetmaker in Dunsborough to use the wood felled from those trees for our dining tables, benches, on the bar and in as much cabinetry as possible.

"We've got a local craftsman in Yallingup hand-making our plates and bowls with an oatmeal coloured glaze, creating beautiful natural looking stoneware."

Aaron says that Yarri will be a smart casual restaurant and small bar with a menu catering to the different reasons for being there – be it a drink and bar snacks, some share plates, a charcuterie board or a five-course degustation menu.

"People like the tasting menus but we mightn't have that every night. I expect it'll take a while for Yarri to settle into its own groove and we'll adapt things to give our customers what they want," the 47-year-old said.

"There'll be a big charcoal oven, a bit like Fire Door in Sydney, and we'll keep the food fairly simple, really focusing on West Australian produce. In fact, I only want to serve West Australian produce – I don't think people come to Margaret River to eat Tasmanian salmon.

"I'd like visitors to look at our menu and say 'I've never had marron' or 'I've never had

Arkady lamb'.

"Food tourism is huge and I've learnt a lot from how they do things in Copenhagen; they use what's indigenous to the area.

"Once you learn about that, you discover producers and things just turn up when they're ready, and we'll use them. When they're finished, be it a fruit, grass, flower or whatever, then we'll use something else.

"Right now, I'm fermenting quandongs, I was given a heap of them when they were in season.

"I made some bottle brush ice-cream the other day – I made a tea with the stamen and then made an ice cream with it. It's also got some rose water in it to balance the flavour but



father-of-two said.

"Sometimes trial and error can turn out the most beautiful dish – of course sometimes it doesn't, but that's also part of the learning process. It keeps the team interested, the chefs motivated and it's what keeps me really interested too.

"We'll keep moving forward, learning and trying something new to keep things fresh.

"Doing the same dish over and over can become old really quickly, for both customers and for the kitchen team," Aaron said.

He doesn't just love inventing and creating seasonally based dishes that showcase Margaret River on a plate, Aaron loves to



## Aaron's Top Five Margaret River experiences

- Yallingup - see the cliffs in the morning
- Lake Cave - the caves in the region are amazing
- Boranup Beach and the tall timber Boranup Forest
- Eagle Bay, Point Piquet and Meelup Beach - stunning places for a swim
- Snake & Herring wine - of course.

it turned out a treat, it has a really interesting citrusy flavour.

"I'm making some Geraldton Wax oil, which works well with prawns, so that sort of thing.

"Yarri won't be entirely native, we're not out to become another Wildflower (the award-winning restaurant in Perth), but we'll incorporate foraged native ingredients working with local Aboriginal Josh Whiteland and we'll work within the six seasons.

"Yarri's menu will be nimble and change to reflect the produce available. We'll be focusing on small producers and those that have the same philosophy as us," Aaron said.

It's clear that Aaron loves his profession, which is as much about being an inventor and an artist as it is being a chef.

"What I love about being a chef is that I'm always trying new things, always learning," the

make people happy too.

"It's so rewarding when someone comes up to the pass and says they've just had the meal of their life. Not many people get rewarded like that in their jobs," Aaron said.

"If you make someone's day by cooking them a beautiful meal and pouring them a glass or two of great wine, you go home feeling pretty good. And that's the best thing about being a chef."

With that much passion, knowledge, experience and the accolades to match, I'm sure there's plenty of food lovers who, like me, cannot wait for Yarri to open. <#>

Opening January 2018

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