

**“Everyone’s
invited!”**



REAL FOOD REAL PEOPLE

A new batch of home cooks step up to the stove in 2014 in what promises to be one of the most hotly contested series in My Kitchen Rules history.

It's state versus state as teams of two attempt to out-dine and out-wine each other to determine whose kitchen rules.

Each team will take turns to transform an ordinary home into an instant restaurant for one pressure cooker night. They'll plate up a three-course menu designed to impress the judges and their fellow contestants.

Manu Feildel and Pete Evans return to host and judge this ultimate home cooking battle. And, this year, they're bringing some surprises to the table.

The MKR Food Truck, a massive red semi-trailer decked out with a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen, is just one of the twists the contestants won't see coming.

It's going to be one of the toughest challenges MKR contestants have ever faced. It's going to push even the best cooks to breaking point.

In another competition first, the knives are out when select MKR teams form a jury to judge other team's meals.

The judges table will see the return of familiar faces

Guest judges:

Colin Fassnidge

Guy Grossi

Karen Martini

Liz Egan



This year's contenders:

GROUP 1

New South Wales – Annie and Jason (Married cheese makers)

Western Australia – Chloe and Kelly (Well-travelled friends)

South Australia – Deb and Rick (Married 38 years)

Australian Capital Territory – Andrew and Emelia (Newly dating)

Queensland – Paul and Blair (Surfer dads)

Victoria – Helena and Vikki (Twins)

GROUP 2

New South Wales – Uel and Shannelle (Newlyweds)

Western Australia – Jess and Felix (Designer and miner)

South Australia – Bree and Jessica (Proud mums)

Tasmania – Thalia and Bianca (Besties)

Queensland – David and Corinne (Couple two years)

Victoria – Harry and Christo (Best mates)

The top-rating Seven production has built a huge following since it premiered in 2010. It has grown year-on-year and when Queensland husband and wife team Dan and Steph won the title in 2013, an audience of 3.270 million was watching.

The top two teams will again battle it out in the grand final where they will present their ultimate dining menu to a full restaurant. With \$250,000 in prize money on offer, it's the ultimate battle to decide whose kitchen rules!

My Kitchen Rules launches after the Australian Open tennis in 2014.

Keep up to date with all the My Kitchen Rules news on the show's official website www.mykitchenrules.com.au

Facebook: facebook.com/mykitchenrules

Instagram: instagram.com/officialmykitchenrules

Twitter: #MKR



Annie and Jason

Married cheese makers

NSW

Man-of-the-land Jason says he's as rough and ready as they come, but just like the cheese they make, this couple is all gooey on the inside.

"It was attraction at first sight," says Annie, 25, of meeting her now husband Jason, 26, for the first time at Wagga Wagga's Charles Sturt University in 2008.

The pair later returned to their roots in NSW's Hunter Valley where come 2011, a nervous Jason popped the question in the middle of Stockton's famous sand dunes, with a novelty ring and a bottle of cheap sparkling wine.

Tying the knot 18 months later, it didn't take long for Annie to cotton on to the fact that there would be a third party in their marriage... cheese!

"My parents and I own a boutique cheese factory called Hunter Belle," explains self-confessed rugby nut Jason. "I come from six generations of dairy farmers."

Regularly attending markets and food festivals to sell their wares, Annie - who works as a graphic designer through the week - has even taken on the role of Hunter Belle's mascot.

"I dress up as a cow," Annie admits. "I also do all the marketing for the factory. I get paid in cheese."

Needless to say, the pair's specialty is savoury.

"Because we have unlimited cheese supplies we do a lot of cooking with cheese," says Annie, who grew up helping her single mum care for her three younger brothers.

"We love canapés so if we have people over, we're most likely to do 10 courses of nibbles."

Adds Jason: "I love protein. My dad is Australian as they come so I've grown up with slaughtering our own meat and BBQs every weekend. My mum's side of the family is from Holland and the Dutch are quite famous for their spices so we try to cook with them as much as we can, too."

In addition to cooking for Annie's mum once a week, the couple like nothing better than hosting a dinner party - although their constant squabbling can sometimes cause more of a stir than the food.

"Our friends love it when they come over for dinner because they hear us bickering in the kitchen," says Jason. "Then we come out all lovey-dovey and they're all quiet and confused."

"We just yell at each other and then we're over it in two seconds," Annie smiles.



GROUP 1

Paul and Blair

Surfer dads

Gold Coast dads and high school teachers Paul and Blair are a couple of pranksters who love to surf.

They're easy-going Aussies who love the outdoors and cooking for their families.

One of three boys growing up in Queensland's Bundaberg, Paul's mum made sure her sons went out into the world armed with some very special recipes.

"Mum sent me away from home with a handwritten book of my favourite recipes that she would cook for me," says Paul, 46.

"She did one for each of us and it ultimately had a big influence on my cooking. Growing up in the 70's and 80's, mum was cooking a lot of Asian and Mediterranean flavours before it was cool to do it. She was ahead of her time."

Meeting fellow school teacher - and now close friend - Blair only increased Paul's appetite for experimenting in the kitchen.

"Before we both had kids, there was a group of three of us and every Tuesday we'd have a rotation where we would cook at one of our houses," explains Paul.

Joint family holidays and boys' only surfing trips to Bali also revolved around cooking up Asian feasts.

"Our wives are friends and now our two sons are friends so we've always done trips together and we're cooking there," says Blair, 37. "It's a bit of a tradition."

"We like healthy food with a bit of punch," says Paul. "A lot of our cooking started with Balinese recipes. Then we started growing our own herbs and that's where that real passion for curry started."

Specialising in physical education - and residing on the sunny Gold Coast - has meant that Paul and Blair are never far from a sporting field or the beach. Their athletic backgrounds have also made for a very competitive nature.

"We really hate losing," says Paul.

Adds Blair: "We can't go for a surf together without counting how many waves we get."



GROUP 1

Helena and Vikki

Twins

Helena and Vikki, the “sassy twins” as they call themselves, ooze confidence.

“We handle pressure really well,” says single gal Vikki. “We’ve worked in bars and nightclubs for years looking after intoxicated people, so cooking for 12 people is going to be pretty easy!”

Knowing what each other is thinking at all times will also serve as an advantage in the kitchen.

“As a team, Helena and I are like, ‘Bam bam bam!’ I can read her, she can read me,” says Vikki. Adds Helena: “We’re so close my boyfriend Michael feels like he’s dating both of us.”

Helena and Vikki, 24, like to party until all hours on their European holidays, but by day these twin sisters are all business, determined to succeed at whatever cost.

Vikki is studying graphic design and Helena attends radio school and runs a market stall selling desserts.

But now they’re on *My Kitchen Rules*, all roads lead to a career in food.

“Food is now our life,” says Vikki. “Coming from a Greek family, food is around you 24/7.”

Learning the tricks of the trade from their Greek grandmother, it’s no surprise that the twins’ specialty is Mediterranean food.

“We visit our grandma in Greece every two years,” says Vikki. “We also learn cooking techniques off our aunties and grandma’s siblings. We enjoy watching people eat our food.”

Helena loves the freshness of the cuisine: “In Greece, they get the real olives from the olive trees and they get tomatoes from their gardens.”

By competing on the show, the twins are also hoping to make their mother proud. Losing their father when they were 12 years old saw the girls mature quickly, taking up extra duties in the kitchen.

“We had to cook for ourselves and help with cleaning around the house,” says Helena. “We want to make Mum proud.”

In their spare time, the girls like to stay in shape – but also indulge in sweet desserts together.

“We’ll say, ‘Let’s make a chocolate caramel tart tonight,’” says Vikki, who loves to raid her grandma and mother’s wardrobes for vintage clothes.



GROUP 1

Deb and Rick

Married 38 years

Deb and Rick's wicked sense of humour and enduring commitment to each other has seen their marriage span nearly four decades.

They might be the oldest team in the competition, but childhood sweethearts Deb, 55, and Rick, 56, are still young at heart.

"Deb's known as the 'Naughty Nanny,'" says Rick cheekily.

"My sense of humour is very naughty," smiles Deb. "But at home, we're just Nan and Pa and that's sweet. The family come around and the first thing they do is hug us and say, 'What have you been cooking?'"

And as Deb points out, with four children and 10 grandchildren, that's a lot of mouths to feed!

"We've been married for 38 years," continues Rick, who grew up on a farm in Lismore before moving to Sydney when he was 16. "We were married a week after my 18th birthday."

Meeting at the local swimming pool in Sydney's St Mary's, Deb knew she had to act fast to catch Rick's eye.

"My girlfriend and I saw him at the pool and thought he was pretty hot," says Deb. "She wanted him and so did I, so I drew his attention by running and jumping in the pool."

Things progressed quickly for the young couple, who were married nine months after the birth of their first son in 1975, when Debbie was just 16.

"We were babies having a baby," says Debbie. "It was extremely hard."

Proposing outside the jeweler's in St Mary's, Rick cringes when Deb urges him tell the story.

"I wouldn't let Deb get the ring she wanted because it was too expensive," Rick says. "It was an extra \$5 and that was a lot of money in those days."

But the ring stood the test of time and so has their marriage – which former hairdresser Deb puts down to good communication.

However, learning to work as a team in the kitchen has resulted in fireworks, as Rick is not as experienced as Deb as a cook.

"I was a latecomer to the kitchen," admits Rick, who works as a sales manager for a beer company.

Adds Deb: "All of a sudden he's reading all the cookbooks and focusing on the technical side of things and questioning how I'm cooking!"

However, giving credit where credit's due, Deb - who dreams of having her own cafe - says Rick's homemade pasta is one to beat.

"He makes it from scratch and it's fantastic. My specialty is lamb shanks and soups. It's very old-school cooking," says Deb who plans to give the "youngsters" in the competition a run for their money.

SA



GROUP 1

Chloe and Kelly

Well-travelled friends

Not afraid to splurge on good food and wine, best friends Chloe, 28, and Kelly, 27, enjoy the finer things in life.

"I've been to 42 countries and every one of those countries I've eaten amazing food," says Perth born and bred Kelly.

Living in London for four years and travelling around Europe, South America, Singapore and India, Kelly has seen her palate improve with each experience.

"I had pig intestines in Brazil, blood sausages in Argentina, grasshoppers in Myanmar and I've eaten sweetbread, which is lambs testicles. I love cooking international food and nose-to-tail eating. If you're going to kill an animal, eat everything, don't waste it."

Meeting through Perth's social scene, the pair's now solid friendship had a not-so-solid start.

"We didn't like each other in the beginning," admits bride-to-be Chloe. "But we were always the only ones left at the end of the night so we had to talk to each other."

However, these days, they've swapped disco balls for arancini balls.

"We both love to cook and I think we bring a lot of different techniques and knowledge to the kitchen," says Chloe, who is a mum to seven-year-old Dylan.

"Because Dylan has a lot of allergies, I'm mainly into gluten-free, dairy free, organic food. I've just started a little business called 'Clean Kids' where I sell allergen-free treats."

"We've both been to a lot of Michelin-starred restaurants and three-hat restaurants," says Chloe, who spent her childhood skipping from one Western Australian mining town to another with her family, before settling in Perth.

"We enjoy really nice food and really nice wine."

Adds Kelly: "That's what we spend our money on. We've both got houses now so we've calmed down in terms of going out. When we cook for friends, we'll spend a fortune. It's really important to us, so we'll go all out."



GROUP 1

Andrew and Emelia

Newly dating

ACT

Their relationship is only new but Andrew and Emelia believe they've found 'The One'. Calling themselves the "sparkly ones", this quirky couple are ready to shine.

"We're here to put Canberra on the map," says Emelia, 29. "We're really colourful and bright – we're not boring people like you would expect from Canberra."

Dating since February 2013, the couple first met in October 2012 at an eating club. Emelia and her pals set it up to extend their network of friends. But sparks really flew when Andrew attended Emelia's Halloween party.

"She was dressed as Scary Spice and she looked goooooood," laughs Andrew, 32. "I liked what I saw!"

Cementing their mutual love of Canberra, the couple's first dates were all about the outdoors.

"We had the most amazing Canberra experience," says Emelia, whose job is to promote the Aussie capital as a destination for business events.

"We rode our bikes everywhere and went for walks around Lake Burley Griffin. It was like we were tourists. We're very much hiking and camping kind of people."

Despite having been together less than a year, Andrew has no qualms about putting his fledgling relationship under the microscope of My Kitchen Rules.

"It's the best relationship I've ever been in by far," gushes graphic designer and poet Andrew. "There's no underlying feeling of, 'Is this person right for me?' I never thought it would happen for me but it's finally clear as crystal."

Adds Emelia: "It was really awesome because I've never met anyone like Andrew before – he's just got such awesome energy. We're crazy and random."

Having lived in the Middle East and Sri Lanka before her family settled in Canberra when Emelia was 12, the Australian-born cook's heritage has encouraged her love of entertaining.

"My family has a long history of having dinner parties and having friends around and I think I've taken that from my family's Sri Lankan background," says Emelia. "I love to feed people."

"We're natural entertainers," offers Andrew. "We've had some ripper parties."

With a passion for spices, the couple pride themselves on being able to cook a diverse range of food.

"Andrew likes Cajun food and I love Moroccan and Sri Lankan food," says Emelia. Adds Andrew: "We try to mix cultures together and blend it in our own way."

Like his cooking, Andrew has broad tastes when it comes to music.

"I love everything from heavy space rock to Portuguese acid jazz," says Andrew, who moved to Canberra with his family in his early teens.



Uel and Shannelle

Newlyweds

NSW

It took five long years for Uel and Shannelle to notice each other but these young lovebirds wasted no time in tying the knot.

"It wasn't a love at first sight story," laughs Shannelle, 23. "We both had braces then and we weren't very attractive. I thought he was a little unfriendly."

Meeting in Sydney in 2005, Uel, 25, says: "Shannelle went to Pymble Ladies' College and I remember thinking, 'Oh, North Shore snob.' But we had the same friendship group for the next five years so we couldn't get away from each other."

Love eventually blossomed in 2010 when the pair began cooking weekly for friends.

"Uel had moved out of home and started having friends over," says Shannelle. "We became the chefs and so we started to hang out more."

Engaged by May 2011, the Sydneysiders, who work as youth workers, were married in March 2012. And, like many newlyweds, they're all about comfort food and nesting.

"We love slow-cooked food," says Uel. "Our favourite thing is to put on a pot with some meat and let it cook for the whole day."

Adds Shannelle: "My parents were born in Indonesia and Uel's are from Singapore so I think our heritages are an advantage. We know what authentic flavours taste like."

Joking that they are lucky to have "fast Asian metabolisms", the couple admit that their dishes aren't the healthiest.

"Uel's favorite food is any kind of skin - so chicken skin, duck skin, pork belly..." laughs Shannelle.

Looking past the competition, the couple can't wait to have children.

"I always say that I want a huge, huge family," says clucky Shannelle.

The cute couple also share a passion for music.

"I play guitar and Uel plays drums," explains Shannelle.



GROUP 2

David and Corinne

Couple two years

Proving that third time's a charm, twice-married David says he's found true love in his girlfriend - and younger woman - Corinne.

While some people might frown upon their unorthodox relationship, carefree couple David, 53, and Corinne, 31, like nothing better than to make light of their 22-year age gap.

"My daughter's just turned 32, my son's just turned 30 and Corinne's in the middle," laughs David.

"People ask me, 'How old are your kids?' and I say, '30, 31 and 32.' My son, David, loves to introduce Corinne as his step mum. Jaws drop."

Ever the good sport, Corinne adds: "It's funny because I'm the mature one in the relationship. Although the kids and I like to gang up on 'dad' and tell 'dad jokes'.

Together for two years after meeting through mutual friends four years ago, Corinne gushes: "We're ridiculously in love," despite coming from very different backgrounds.

"I grew up in Blackwall, Central Queensland in the middle of nowhere on a sheep and cattle property," says Corinne, who now runs her own accounting business. "We did Distance Education and I had a governess until Year 7."

David spent the first six years of his life in Scotland before immigrating to Whyalla, South Australia with his family. At the age of 16, he joined the Navy where he served for 20 years, before settling into a career in finance in Cairns.

At home, Corinne happily waits on David, feeling guilty if he does his own ironing.

"I feel like I'm a bad housewife," laughs Corinne, who makes sure David has a linen napkin at every meal, as per his request.

Knowing he's onto a good thing, David says: "She's the love of my life. I'm super-lucky. She looks after me." Living in balmy Cairns ensures the couple enjoys alfresco dining.

"We've got an outdoor kitchen and a 22-burner BBQ," says David. "I love making lamb racks. It's not just the taste; it's the feeling of being out there working on the BBQ."

Having cooked with her nanna from the age of two, Corinne has a passion for desserts.

"I love to cook cakes and all that sweet stuff," says Corinne. "I got a mix master for my 10th birthday. I would play little housewife and plan out the whole meal."



GROUP 2

Harry and Christo

Best mates

Bachelors Harry and Christo are the total package: they're stylish, well-mannered, love their mothers... and cooking!

According to Christo, women like a man who knows his way around the kitchen.

"I think girls like a guy who can cook," he says. It is a sentiment shared whole heartedly by Harry.

The family-orientated Melbourne lads, both 26, maintain food is all about making memories.

"It's probably why I love cooking the most," says Harry. "Being able to bring a group of people together, and with food, create memories."

Friends since birth, the boys grew up in Victoria's Geelong, shadowing their mums in the kitchen.

"From a very young age I would watch mum make spaghetti bolognese, which I could never say, and then she would watch me do it and see if I was doing it right," says Harry.

"Mum had a rule that at 7pm the whole family would sit down as soon as dad got home and we'd talk about our day. It was very much family time and it's what made me fall in love with food."

Likewise, Christo: "My mum makes a delicious chocolate cake and learning to make that as a kid is one of my early food memories. I would always help out with dinner through the week, whether it just peeling a potato or chopping a carrot."

These days, their skills are somewhat more refined.

"I enjoy cooking Mediterranean, French, Italian and Greek food," says Christo, who recently started up his own sweet treats gifting business, Christy's Kitchen. "I also like barbecued food and light salads."

Covering all bases, Harry's specialties are curries, laksas and American-style food.

Growing up, the quick-witted boys were constantly in trouble for talking during class, mostly instigated by Harry!

"I'm sort of like the vacuum," Harry laughs. "Anyone who sits around me gets sucked in."

"We were always up to mischief," says Christo.

Now their nonsense usually involves pursuing women.

"We're single and ready to mingle," says Harry, who lives with his parents and works in real estate. "We're gentleman, but unfortunately I'm yet to be taken home to someone's mother."

Previously working in event management, Christo prides himself on being well-groomed and keeps fit by swimming laps up to five times a week.

Eager to share their belief that food should create a memory, the Victorian twosome hope to set up food trucks with unique dining options that create an "experience in itself."



GROUP 2

Bree and Jessica

Proud mums

Both mums of two daughters five and under, Bree and Jessica needed a push from their husbands to leave their families behind and follow their cooking dream.

Our husbands were both like, 'You guys need to do this,' says Bree, 34. "We're making an enormous sacrifice to be here, so we want it to be worth it for everyone involved. I've promised to buy my husband a motorbike if we win and Jessica promised her husband a ute."

First meeting through their ex-boyfriends 15 years ago, Bree and Jessica reconnected five years ago when they realised they lived minutes away from each other in South Adelaide.

"We've got heaps in common," says Jessica, 38, who works in administration at a TAFE. "We've both got two girls and we love to cook. We both like a clean kitchen and as a mum you have to have good time management skills, so that's an advantage."

Adds Bree: "We love entertaining so we're used to catering for a lot of people at kids' birthday parties. We've had up to 100 people at one party."

Enjoying knitting and going to the football in her spare time, Jessica owes her cooking skills to her nonna and her Italian background.

"My nonna came from war-torn Italy, so she knows how to turn simple foods into beautiful meals," says Jessica.

Self-confessed carnivore Bree also has her European roots to thank for giving her a helping hand.

"My grandmother was English, so roasts and hearty fare are my specialty," says Bree. "I've got German, Dutch and French on my father's side, so growing up, food was always an occasion."

At home, Bree prides herself on being a traditional housewife, blaming her controlling nature for not letting her husband lift a finger. Shaking her head at this admission, Jessica says: "My husband's not like that. He has to work and still do chores around the house."

With their fighting spirit and passionate talk of leaving their families behind, Bree and Jessica resemble a "Thelma and Louise" combo.

"Yes!" says Jessica. "We are empowered as women. We're not little housewives; we're strong women."

The close friends also have a keen interest in tourism. Until recently, Bree was a travel agent before joining her husband in their roofing business, while Jessica has a degree in tourism.

"We would like to do food tours with South Australia tourism," says Bree.



Jess and Felix

Designer and miner



Goal orientated, career driven, and unapologetically ambitious, Jess, along with her team-mate Felix, has her sights firmly set on winning My Kitchen Rules.

Self-confessed “strong personalities”, Jess, 28, and Felix, 34, have been friends for 10 years. Their friendship became more important when Jess split with her husband in June 2012, after 12 years together.

“We got really close probably in the last year and a half,” says Jess. “He’s kind of like my big brother. As much as I drive him crazy, I could call him anytime and he’d do anything for me. He’s got my back, for sure.”

Insisting that tough guy Felix is a big “softie” underneath, Jess does admit that he’s an acquired taste.

“You have to be pretty strong to manage his personality,” says interior designer Jess. “He’s a good guy, but he’s hot or cold. There’s no in between.”

Felix nods: “I can be very blunt.”

That said, Felix is eying-off a career in hospitality to be more involved with people.

“I can actually be quite friendly,” laughs Felix, who gave up his job as a diamond drill supervisor at a gold mine to compete in My Kitchen Rules.

Using cooking as a way of unwinding after spending time away from home working in the bush, Felix enjoys cooking meats and desserts.

“I think eating good food is one of the joys of life, so it’s good to provide that for people,” says Felix. “Jess and I always have a laugh and cook-up a feed.”

When they’re not hanging out together, food is still very much on the brain for these laidback mates, sending each other snaps of their latest creations.

“We text pictures to each other of food that we’ve cooked all the time,” says Jess. “We’ll say, ‘Check this one out!’”

Away from the kitchen, the pair - who both grew up around West Australia’s Armidale - are like chalk and cheese.

“In my spare time I like to go fishing and get some quiet time,” says Felix.

In contrast, Jess likes to surround herself with friends.

“I love going out, having a wine and dancing with my girls,” says Jess. “I also play netball and I’ve recently rediscovered music since I’ve been single.”

Jess isn’t the only lady in Felix’s life. He’s set to marry his girlfriend of seven years, Rebecca, in November this year.



Thalia and Bianca

Besties

Flying the flag for Generation Y, Thalia and Bianca love shopping, travelling and sport. And while both are single, the savvy pair don't have time for boys.

They're the babies of the competition, but University students Thalia, 21, and Bianca, 20, believe teams who underestimate them will be making a big mistake.

"A lot of people are leaving their small kids or a big job, but we don't have much to think about leaving behind," says self-assured Bianca.

"I think we're very experienced for our age. And I think it's an advantage in some ways because a lot of people aren't open to criticism if they've been cooking for 20 years."

Both growing up in "foodie families" in Adelaide, the girls met in Tasmania when Thalia transferred to Bianca's school in Hobart in Year 7.

"We went to school together, then Uni. We've also worked together and traveled together," says Thalia proudly.

The fresh-faced duo started cooking together following a gap year in Europe.

"We ate our way through Europe," laughs Bianca. "That's where we started cooking more and talking more about food together."

Regular trips back to Greece to visit Thalia's father in Crete (her parents divorced when she was 18) have only sharpened their skills.

"Our specialty is Mediterranean food because Thalia's half-Greek," says Bianca.

Adds Thalia: "It's what I've grown up eating and what I feel most confident about cooking. I go to Greece every year for a month and Bianca usually comes with me."

Both Bianca and Thalia live at home and cook for their families in exchange for board.

"Other people have to vacuum but my mum is like, 'Cook dinner!'" says Thalia.

Deferring their university degrees to compete in My Kitchen Rules – Thalia is studying Psychology and Bianca is studying Business and Science – the school friends also threw in the towel at their part-time job at the local fish and chip shop.

With dreams to start their own business together in the food industry, Bianca reasons: "Uni will always be there. We can be mature-aged students."

"We're both obsessed with online shopping," says Bianca, her eyes lighting up similarly to when she talks about her passion for cooking. "We love going to Sydney and shopping at TopShop and Zara."



PETE EVANS

Co-host / Judge

My Kitchen Rules judge and host Pete Evans admits contestants will be put through their paces this series. But he says, if the food is honest, it will win him over.

"I'm looking for food that not only tastes great, but is also visually enticing. The look and feel of a dish is just as important as the taste. We have several teams this year who have mastered both," he says, but admits a few teams are struggling to establish a level of consistency.

Pete believes contestants will be challenged by new competition elements including the MKR teams' jury and the MKR Food Truck, which are set to take competition to another level.

"I am particularly excited about the MKR food truck; it's unlike anything we have seen before on the show. It will certainly keep the contestants on their toes!" laughs Pete.

Pete is a man of many talents, in addition to co-hosting My Kitchen Rules since 2009; he is a respected chef, businessman, author and dad.

Born in Melbourne and raised on the Gold Coast, Pete's passion for cooking was discovered early on.

"My cooking life really kicked off when I turfed going to university and became an apprentice chef who surfed all day and then cooked all night."

After opening his first restaurant, The Pantry, in Melbourne's bay side suburb of Brighton in 1993, Pete moved to Sydney in 1996 to help launch the Hugos restaurant group. Pete's restaurants have gone on to win numerous awards, including the coveted Sydney Morning Herald Chefs Hat seven years in a row. His latest restaurant success is Melbourne's Bar Nacional, a contemporary tapas bar.

The keen fisherman and seafood devotee has a raft of cooking shows under his belt both locally and internationally. He even cooked for royalty, having prepared dinner for Princess Mary and members of the Danish Royalty. He has also cooked for Elton John, Martha Stewart and U2.

Pete appears annually at some of Australia's most acclaimed food events such as Tasting Australia, The Good Food Show and The Great Barrier Feast. He travelled to New York and Los Angeles for the G'day USA promotion in 2009 and 2010 where he appeared on the The Martha Stewart Show and CBS Early Show.

An accomplished author, Pete released his seventh cookbook last year and there's an eighth on the way. He is a regular contributor to magazine titles Home Beautiful, Fine Cooking and New Idea.

In recent years, Pete's love of fresh, healthy and organic food along with his passion for nutrition and wellbeing have influenced his recipes and cooking style. He owns the organic health and wellbeing store, B.U Organics in Sydney's Bondi Junction. Now a health coach with qualifications gained from New York's internationally recognised, Institute of Integrative Nutrition, there's no stopping Pete revolutionising the way we eat through his exciting new brand: pete evans – healthy everyday.



MANU FEILDEL

Co-host / Judge

Manu Feildel says the food is the star of the new series of My Kitchen Rules but concedes sometimes the personalities shine just as bright.

“The passion for food and the level of skill is outstanding this year but the real test will be seeing how the team’s relationships cope with the pressure cooker environment of the kitchen,” says Manu.

Manu says the cooking this year is heavily influenced by the lifestyle and heritage of the contestants, from surfers who love Balinese culture, to twins with respect for their Greek family recipes.

“You can tell when something is made with love and passion; it will flow through every element on the plate from the look, touch, smell and taste of the dish.”

Manu admits this series will see teams test themselves and whilst he encourages creativity and ambition, if you cannot pull it off in the finished product, the risk could see you ousted from the competition.

“There are a few risk takers here and I find that very exciting. In some cases it will result in high scores but not everyone will succeed.”

Manu is no stranger to innovative cooking himself. After completing a chef apprenticeship at his father’s bistro, he was bitten by the travel bug and packed his apron and headed to London.

Although he spoke no English, he began work at The Café Royal before rising through the ranks at restaurants such as Les Associes, Café des Amis du Vin and Livebait.

In 1999, Manu flew to Melbourne where he worked at Toofey’s for a short while before heading to Sydney.

After six months working alongside fellow My Kitchen Rules judge Pete Evans at his Hugos restaurant, Manu opened the kitchen at Hugos Lounge in Kings Cross.

Manu ran the kitchen for 18 months before he moved to Restaurant VII. During his reign, the restaurant’s exciting fusion of French and Japanese cuisine earned a coveted Two Chef’s Hats from The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide.

In 2004, acclaimed Australian chef Tony Bilson approached Manu to open his new venture Bilson’s at the Radisson Hotel. In its second year, the restaurant was awarded Two Chef’s Hats and Three Chef’s Hats the following year.

More success followed with the opening in March 2009 of his own restaurant - L’étoile in Paddington, Sydney. Specialising in classic French bistro food, it too has been recognised with a Chef’s Hat.

In 2011, he released his first cookbook, Manu’s French Kitchen. He won Dancing with the Stars on Channel Seven; hosted the primetime show Dinner Date and was crowned Chef of the Year at GQ’s annual Men of the Year Awards.

He released his second book, Manu’s French Bistro, in 2012.

The end of 2013 showed no signs of slowing down with Manu announcing plans for his first Melbourne restaurant Le Cirque with fellow chef George Calombaris. Manu also became engaged to his partner Clarissa Weerasena.

Outside of television, writing for magazines and books and running his restaurants, any spare time he has he likes to spend with his son Jonti.



Colin Fassnidge

Judge

Dublin born chef and restaurateur Colin Fassnidge returns to the My Kitchen Rules judges table in 2014 with his famous straight-talking approach that drew the ire of some contestants last season.

Known for his nose to tail cooking philosophy, the cheeky and outspoken Irishman firmly believes the secret to cooking a great dish is planning and “having bit of love for the food.

“When you’re in the kitchen, you have to be three steps ahead of yourself. You need a plan and you need to stick to it.

“Last season, a few contestants came unstuck because they didn’t have a solid plan,” says Colin. He hopes this year’s contestants don’t make the same costly mistake.

Colin, who counts pork, potato, lemon and peas among his favourite ingredients to cook with, says he was drawn to cooking as a career at the age of 12 after seeing esteemed French chef Raymond Blanc on a television program.

“I love that cooking is an expression of you. You can do what you want. It’s hard work, but it doesn’t really feel like a job,” says Colin, who believes that passion and a willingness to learn are the markers of a good cook.

The eldest of three siblings, Colin recalls a Sunday roast being the first meal he ever cooked and says his passion for food was supported by his mother Colette and father Tony, who he says, are “both good cooks”.

“Food was huge in our family. Mum and Dad loved cooking. We always sat down and had dinner together as family.”

The 40 year-old father of two began his career at London’s Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons in 1994 where he completed his apprenticeship under his idol, Raymond Blanc.

Colin stayed in London for five years before heading to Australia after deciding to combine his love of travel with work.

Arriving in Australia in 1999, Colin worked at some of Sydney’s most acclaimed restaurants including Banc and est. While working at est, Colin he met his wife Jane, who hails from Northern Ireland.

In 2003 he took over Sydney’s famed Four In Hand dining room, transforming its pub fare into the 2-hatted restaurant it is today.

In May 2012, Colin opened the Sydney dining hotspot 4/Fourteen which has already established itself as a favorite among food critics and patrons alike.

Crowned GQ Magazine’s Chef of the Year in 2013, Colin will release his first cook book later this year.



Guy Grossi

Judge

Leading Australian chef, presenter, and media personality, Guy Grossi is back at the My Kitchen Rules judges' table eagerly awaiting the new dishes, and personalities, the show will serve in 2014.

"I think it's important that people cook in a way that expresses their own personalities, their likes and dislikes," he says. Heeding a little advice to the contestants, he adds: "I think if people try too hard to impress or follow trends they end up with an outcome they don't believe in. And if they don't believe in it, then neither will their audience."

"Preparing a meal for someone is in part a giving of oneself. I know when I labour over a menu or a dish that it's very much a personal contribution to my guests. I'm excited to get to know the contestants through their food."

Guy is the owner and head chef of Grossi Restaurants, including esteemed Australian restaurants Grossi Fiorentino, Mirka, Merchant Osteria Veneta, the new Ombra Salumi bar and Bangkok's Grossi Trattoria.

He began his career at an early age, learning under the watchful eye of his father, Pietro, a renowned chef himself. A champion of presenting Italian cooking in Australia, Guy was awarded the prestigious L'insegna Del Ristorante Italiano by the president of Italy in 1996.

Guy is frequently sought out to present his love and expertise in Italian cooking across many media platforms including international and national television and radio. As well as being a guest judge on My Kitchen Rules, he appeared alongside Neil Perry and Guillaume Brahimi on Iron Chef and with Maeve O'Mara as co-host of SBS' Italian Food Safari.

Guy is a dedicated philanthropist and has fostered strong relationships with numerous charities such as HEAT (Hospitality, Education and Training), which he is patron; Starlight Children's Foundation, and the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation.

He is the author of three exquisitely presented cookbooks and released his latest title Love Italy in 2013.

Guy lives in Melbourne with his wife Melissa and their two children, Carlo and Loredana.



Karen Martini

Judge

My Kitchen Rules judge Karen Martini says contestants in this year's competition are "pushing all the boundaries," making the most of all ingredients on offer.

"Spanish and South American influences with zippy sauces and dressings are playing a strong part in food styles," explains Karen.

While impressed with the contestants choices in the pantry, Karen has concerns for their time keeping skills in the kitchen.

"The teams are underestimating the clock and mismanaging their time. We've had to judge quite a few unfinished dishes. This is such a simple error that could send a team home."

Karen believes the teams who succeed are the all-rounders. "I think it's important that a team is able to nail some old favourites, as well as being innovative at the same time. We're five years in now and it's a serious cooking competition for home cooks. They need to be all-rounders - they still need to bring old classics to the table done well, but then they need to be able to do dishes with their own twist too because it shows strength in their cooking skills and knowledge."

Karen is an all-rounder herself too: she is an award-winning chef, restaurateur, author and television presenter. Her food message is drawn from her professional cooking career, her Tunisian-Italian heritage, and from the challenges of feeding nutritious and stimulating food to her young family.

Karen was the founding chef at the critically acclaimed Melbourne Wine Room and Sydney's Icebergs Dining Room and Bar. As executive chef of both restaurants she held two chef's hats in Sydney and Melbourne, and won, with Icebergs, the 2004 Best New Restaurant Award from the Sydney Morning Herald. After 15 years at The Melbourne Wine Room, Karen and her partner, Michael Sapountsis sold in 2011 to pursue new projects. Karen and Michael still own and run St Kilda's much-loved pizzeria, Mr Wolf which they launched in 2004.

Karen was the food editor for The Age's Sunday Life Magazine for six years. She has contributed several articles to The Australian, and is the current food editor for The Age's Epicure lift out.

Karen is also the author of four cookbooks: the best seller Everyday, Feasting, Cooking at Home and Where the Heart Is. She also shares recipes and tips through her App as well as regularly publishing recipes, opinions, videos and news at karenmartini.com

For the last eight years Karen has been the resident chef on Australia's longest-running lifestyle television series, Better Homes and Gardens.



Liz Egan

Judge

Returning to the My Kitchen Rules judging panel for her fourth season, chef and restaurant owner Liz Egan is excited by the contestants' use of on-trend ingredients this season.

"I'm thrilled to notice the inclusion of quinoa this year, and more use of contemporary side dishes such as slow roasted carrots," says Liz who still hasn't given up hope seeing one of her favourite cooking techniques - hot smoking - feature in the competition one day.

With over 20 years' experience in the industry, Liz says her most important advice for contestants is to concentrate on presentation.

"As we've said every season, don't over complicate the plating up. Think carefully about which plates and bowls will enhance the dishes, such as keeping the sauce contained."

Liz also believes it's very important to picture the dish you are planning to cook, imagine its taste, and then balance textures and flavours. This balance is really the best way to sum up what she looks for in her home meals, her Becco menu, and is what she'll be looking for from the MKR teams.

She firmly believes that less is more when it comes to creating a dish. Liz argues three or four elements working in harmony are more memorable than a cacophony of ingredients all jostling for attention and resulting in disaster.

"I love to see a team pushing their boundaries, showing me their passion for innovation. But when it goes wrong, I don't enjoy being their guinea pig!"

While MKR is mixing things up this season, so is Liz. She has a keen interest in the role food plays in our health. Having raised two girls, she has always been mindful of making their meals not only delicious, but as healthy and nourishing as they can be.

"I've been doing some exciting consulting work with the fitness industry, moving into an area which is a bit of a passion of mine: delicious food that is also really healthy. I've been working with personal trainers designing recipes to suit clients' needs – super healthy, super nutritious, yet simple to prepare."

Liz grew up on Wantirna Estate vineyard in the Yarra Valley, surrounded by wine and food. Her mother is Italian and a wonderful cook, and Liz quickly learnt that the best way to ensure she got to taste everything her mother cooked at family dinner parties was to help in the kitchen.

After working in commercial kitchens almost by accident, Liz then moved on to form a catering company which ended up as Onions, a highly regarded restaurant in Melbourne's east. Onions was successfully developed into a two Chefs Hat venue and that recognition still counts as her proudest career moment.

Liz appears regularly in culinary publications such as Vogue Entertaining, Gourmet Traveller, Delicious magazine, Taste in the Herald Sun and Epicure in The Age. She was executive chef and co-owner of Becco in Melbourne until 2011.





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