BEGGARS BELIEF
Stories from Gerald’s Bar

by Gerald Diffey with Max Allen

Gerald Diffey has spent four decades immersed in the world of food, wine and hospitality, from early days waiting tables in old English hotels to establishing two of the best places in the world to drink and eat: the award-winning Gerald’s Bar in North Carlton – Heston Blumenthal described it as ‘a proper, proper old-fashioned sort of bar’ – and Gerald’s Bar in San Sebastian.

Beggars Belief is a collection of funny, poignant, insightful and just plain ludicrous stories from Gerald’s life in kitchens and behind bars: his formative years in the UK, memories of food and family; tales and tips from forty years of service; journeys and meals, people and places, from lunch on the side of a volcano in Sicily to dinner on a beach in East Timor; stories and recipes and drinks suggestions from North Carlton and San Sebastian; vignettes, slices of life, observations.

‘Romance,’ writes Gerald in the introduction. ‘That’s what I sell. Sensual pleasures. Sights, sounds, smells, touch, taste. Cyrano de Bergerac said: “I have tried to live my whole life with panache.” If I said that, I’d sound like a twat. But you get the drift. I’m off to bone some quails.’

Sunday was the night we went to Gerald’s Bar in Carlton. What a lovely thing to do: you’ve got all these trendy new bars everywhere, and then you’ve got this proper, proper old-fashioned sort of bar.

— Heston Blumenthal

(Gerald) displays what distinguishes every exceptional restaurateur: a great eye for detail.

— Nick Lander, author of The Art of the Restaurateur and On the Menu

The Co-author


In 2011 The Future Makers: Australian Wines for the 21st Century was named Best International Wine Book at the Louis Roederer Wine Writers Awards; in 2013 Max was awarded a State Library of Victoria Creative Fellowship; in 2016, he was inducted as a Legend of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival; in 2018, he was named Wine Communicator of the Year.

Max is currently an honorary fellow in history and teaches wine studies at the University of Melbourne.
EVEN' ALL

Right there stands what I want to do with this book: neither a memoir, nor a novel, with all the collective experiences that add it to Gerald’s Bar. The stories behind the details (all in the details), the stories of where I’ve been and how I got here and why in the end is it.

It’s my house. That’s how I see it. And my customers are my guests. They revel in it and I love it. It’s not business, it’s life. My house guests wouldn’t stick their choosing gazes under my grandmothers table any more than my grandchildren would keep a tidy triple.

I don’t give people ‘what’ they need. I give them things that never knew they desired. They go away refreshed, engorged and happy to have spent their money. I give them choices.

This is my expression of all things Gerald, and if you get it, you’re no in to like it.

Everything is considered and put together – all made everything.

Other places serve coffee in Onitsuka glasses. I serve them old tea cups – it’s a gesture, I tell you, the coffee tastes better, and the cups sit nicely on the table.

Simply, softly.

Our coffee is specially roasted for me. Chocolate is real chocolate, without cocoa, made by an Algerian Frenchman whose grandad was a nightclub dancer in the Berlin jazz clubs of the 1930s.

I could go on forever. Details. Details. The Frenchman has figured the exact lamp that made in the 18th, the cranberry milk bodied, the very porcelain that moves down from the high shelf, the cloud gold leaf on the show. No yellowing here. Why? Because you can read gold leaf from across the road—and in the sun, it shines like—well, like gold.

I make drinks with cream in them.

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