

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.

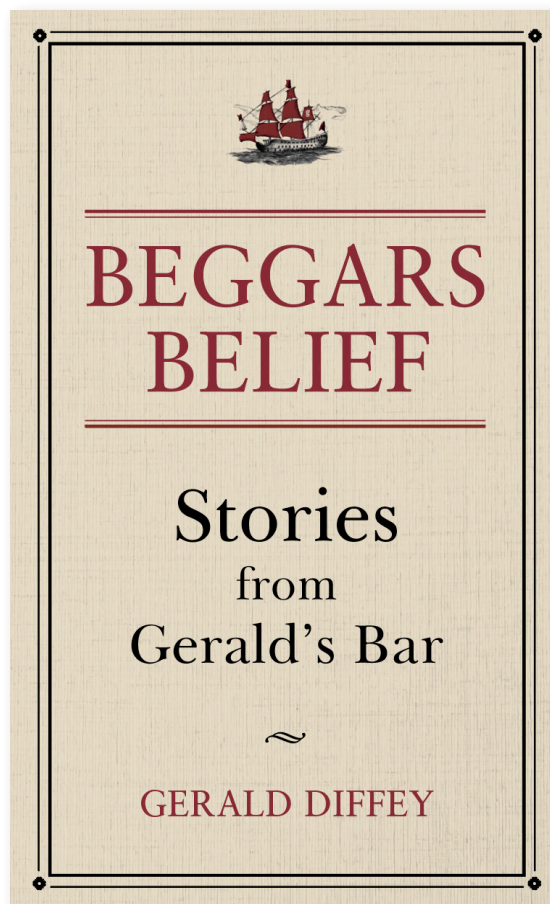
'Romance,' writes Gerald in the introduction. 'That's what I sell. Sensual pleasures. Sights, sounds, smells, touch, taste. Cyrano de Bergerac said: "I have tried to live my whole life with panache." If I said that, I'd sound like a twat. But you get the drift. I'm off to bone some quails.'

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

Max Allen has been writing about wine – and drinking at Gerald's bars and restaurants – for almost 30 years. Max is the wine and drinks columnist for the *Australian Financial Review*, Australian correspondent for *JancisRobinson.com*, and two-time winner of the prestigious André Simon Memorial Award: in 1998 with his first book, *Red and White, Wine Made Simple*, and again in 2020 for his latest book, *Intoxicating, Ten drinks that shaped Australia*.

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.

EVENIN' ALL



Right then. Here's what I want to do with this book: seduce you, dear reader, with all the collective experiences that add up to Gerald's Bar. The stories behind the details (it's all in the details), the stories of where I'm from and how I got here and why it is the way it is.

It's my house. That's how I see it. And my customers are my guests. They reward me and I them. It's not business, it's life. My house guests wouldn't stick their chewing gum under my grandma's table any more than my grandma would keep a filthy toilet.

I don't give people 'what they want'. I give them things they never knew they liked. They go away refreshed, engaged and happy to have spent their money. I give them choice.

The bar is my expression of all things *Gerald*, and if you 'get it' you're sure to like it.

Everything is considered and questioned – and I mean *everything*.

Other places serve coffee in Duralex glasses. I use bone china old tea cups: as any granny will tell you, the coffee tastes better, and the cups sit nicely on the table.

Simple, really.

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. The Bren gun blueprints, the yacht lamp Dad made in the RAF, the enamel milk boilers, the toy possum that stares down from the high shelf, the real gold leaf on the door. No vinyl lettering here. Why? Because you can read gold leaf from across the road—and in the sun, it shines like ... well, like *gold*.

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GERALD DUFFEY

I trade in romance. 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.

...

The stories in this book come in various flavours but not necessarily in any kind of obvious order. There are memories of growing up in Medway in Kent, stories of food and family; tales and tips from more than forty years working in hospitality; journeys and meals around the world, people and places; stories and recipes and drinks suggestions from Gerald's Bar in North Carlton and San Sebastián; vignettes, slices of life and random observations.

Like this:

MY FAVOURITE COCKTAIL

A bottle of gin.

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CUSTARD

In 1969, my neighbour Trudy Kelly, aged five, had a birthday party. All us kids were scrubbed and dressed in our best shirts, shorts and T-bars and told to sit still and not get dirty.

It was a top party: Jam sandwiches, lemonade, pop, the works. Games and presents and then dessert. Trudy was beside herself, as you should be at your own birthday. Totally wired.

Just before the cake, the pinnacle of any kid's party, came custard. Lovely thick, cold vanilla custard the size of a cow pat, served in a big bowl.

It was all too much for Trudy. Gripped with dizzying excitement, she threw the custard at the boy next door. It hit me smack in the face. Hilarious.

The china bowl that carried the custard hit me a millisecond later. The room went fuzzily silent, like listening under bathroom. I didn't know what was happening, but there was a lot of it. Mums were suddenly everywhere – never a good sign.

I was in a dream world. The only thing I was aware of was the flavour of cold vanilla and a curiously warm sauce of blood dribbling from my nose, mixing with the custard to create a food memory I can still taste today.

Utterly delicious.

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BEGGARS BELIEF

GUY FAWKES SUPPER

*Remember, remember, the fifth of November,
gunpowder treason and ...
... jacket potatoes. Possibly the best seasonal snack invented.*

The temperature must be below freezing. The potatoes must be consumed in the dark, in front of a big, big bonfire. The positioning is important. You should feel the cold pressing into your back with the same intensity as your face is starting to blister. The double-foil-wrapped big King Edward potatoes have been cuddling in the embers for an hour or so. The longer they cook, the harder their skin gets – and crunchy, like the cheese in the bottom of fondue, or rice in paella.

It is important to unwrap them with your fingers: the agitation and juggling improves the flavour. Once liberated, cut in half, then attempt to unwrap those little pats of butter in foil: as it's freezing, they will be solidly stuck to themselves. But placing them on your steaming potato will soften them up. And the cool butter on your burnt fingers is an extra treat.

As you can't really see much, you'll have to rely on your taste buds to know whether your potato is fluffy and delicious – or if you're eating charcoal. Or both.

The Humpty Dumpty version:

My favourite take on this wondrous repast is to cut the top quarter off the hot spud, and scoop out the soft interior, reserving in foil. Now pop in a butter patty, and then crack an egg and season

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Things we do not do at Gerald's

- make drinks with cream in them
- set fire to anything
- use plastic straws
- have skinny milk
- have light beer
- validate your frequent flyer points, dance card or entertainment book
- juggle
- play Abba

Sample pages from *Beggars Belief*

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Tel: (+61 3) 9662 2051