



16 JUL, 2022

## A taste of things to come

Illawarra Mercury, Wollongong



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## Ruby's chef up for national award

**BY CONNOR PEARCE**

EVEN after a full day of prep, Ruby's Mount Kembla chef Jeremy Lackenby's whites have no trace of a stain.

Instead, the 24-year-old's chef jacket is adorned with embroidered logos from various cooking competitions that he has won.

Soon, another logo may need to be added, as Mr Lackenby competes for the national Nestle Golden Chef's Hat Award after winning the NSW competition.

This will be the third time Mr Lackenby has thrown his hat into the ring of Australia's longest-running culinary competition.

Having had two attempts at the title already, Mr Lackenby says he has developed a taste of what the judges are looking for.

"You've always got to have a clean bench at competitions," he said. "They're very pedantic about a few things like not having a knife on your chopping board, because the handle carries bacteria, having tea towels around your apron because if you wipe a plate, then you wipe your hands, you cross-contaminate everything."

The precision required has rubbed off on Mr Lackenby, who emerges from the Ruby's kitchen without the hint of a mark.

On Wednesday, Mr Lackenby had been finessing two new dishes on the Kembla Heights fine diner's menu. The first is a scallop ceviche with locally grown finger lime, dehydrated garlic, squid ink tuile and an avocado emulsion. The second is whipped Meredith's goat cheese covered with chopped grapes and sitting on a broccoli stem emulsion.

Mr Lackenby then follows these up with two petit fours, Madeleines with Mount Ousley honey and Belgian dark chocolate brownies with whipped caramel.

The process for developing these signature dishes can start from a moment of inspiration, either at the dinner table of another chef or with a certain local ingredient.

Two weeks from the competition date in September, Mr Lackenby will be given a brief of what to prepare. Last year, contestants were required to make an entree without meat, eggs or dairy products.

The process is a far cry from what viewers may see on TV cooking shows, and the process for Mr Lackenby of preparing an award-winning dish takes months.

"People think it's just, 'They just put up a plate'," Mr Lackenby said. "But it's all

the things outside of work, coming up with menu ideas, trialling different things in your own time, seeing if they work and then letting the diners experience the whole overall vibe from the kitchen to the front of house."

Mr Lackenby began his career in kitchens working in his mother's Thai restaurant.

"That's what made me want to grow into her footsteps, and take after her," he said. "But I want to do more."

Incorporating what he learnt from his mother along with French cooking techniques, Mr Lackenby said he hopes to work overseas in a Michelin starred restaurant and one day open his own restaurant.

For now, diners can try his creations at Ruby's Mount Kembla for dinner on Friday and Saturday or lunch on Sundays. But his first boss remains his harshest critic.

"It's not her cup of tea," Mr Lackenby says of his mother's take on his cooking.



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**MAIN COURSE:** Jeremy Lackenby in the Ruby's Mount Kembla dining room. **Pictures:** Sylvia Liber



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**TIME AND PATIENCE:** Whipped Merediths goat cheese covered with chopped grapes on a broccoli stem emulsion.



**LOCAL CREATION:** Scallop ceviche with locally grown finger lime, dehydrated garlic, squid ink tuile and an avocado emulsion.