



Oui, Chef!

Massimo Mele

Executive Chef at La Scala on Jersey, Massimo Mele is bringing his modern take on traditional Italian dishes – while still sharing his tricks at the popular Tutti A Tavola classes and dinners.

'I'm Italian, so food has always been my world. When I was growing up in Tasmania, my parents had a restaurant, so from the age of 10, I was working in the kitchen washing dishes. As I got older, I would cook next to my Dad after school and work in a cafe on Sundays to get out of going to church – which is when I realised this is what I wanted to do.

I did my apprenticeship at Donovans. It is still the best kitchen I have worked in. Working under Roberto Castellani, I was exposed to some incredible experiences. While working there, I got to cook for my mentors like Maggie Beer and Stephanie Alexander, and I did my first catering event on my own there, too. I was only about 19 or 20 years old, and I was cooking for Stephanie Alexander! Afterwards she said my food was amazing – it was one of those moments when you realise you can do it! It's a good feeling to hear that from one of your idols!

In this industry, it's important to follow your heart and make mistakes! Plus, don't take yourself so seriously! People always ask about my success and think it's luck – I know a lot of chefs waiting in the kitchen for it to happen, but I'm out there chasing it.

Working at La Scala on Jersey has given me a home and a balance between my catering and other events. I now have direct contact with my diners through La Scala on Jersey and still get to meet and interact with all different types of people at my classes and catering. We have a great family here, and I am proud to have my name attached to it.

Next for us is a new site – with the same type of food but a different concept. Something like an Italian pasta bar that's fun, fast-paced and similar to a busy trattoria. People love the food we are doing, so it makes sense to bring them another style of Italian dining. People get and respect what I am doing here – basically I have created a menu of my favourite all-star dishes. They all ignite a sense of nostalgia – they date back to growing up in Naples and what my Mamma and Nonna would be making in the kitchen. That's why you will see Mamma's carrots and Mamma's meatballs on the menu – she's one of my biggest inspirations.

Being able to include and involve my mum in what I'm doing is fantastic. She does almost everything with me – the cooking, the TV appearances, everyone loves her!

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If I'm not careful, I'll be out of a job! It's nice to have her with me. I left home when I was 18 and never looked back, so she never really got to see what I was doing – she just knew the little I told her, but now I have the opportunity to bring her up from Tasmania and get her involved in what I do. Each time, she becomes the highlight of the event! It's good to have her in the kitchen – it brings authenticity to what I do. I'm definitely not embarrassed to have my mum with me! Plus, when she is in the kitchen she is happy.

I have a lot coming up for 2015 – with La Scala on Jersey, cooking classes, events, catering, pop-ups and, of course, the Tutti a Tavola classes and dinners. Tutti A Tavola is something I love to do. It really took off back when I was working at Hugos and just grew from there. It is guerrilla dining at its best – meeting Stefano Manfredi and working with Salt Meats Cheese has allowed me to have the perfect venue for it. I love doing the classes; it's hands on, interactive – and what food should be about, having fun!

One of the recipes that many ask about is my signature dish – my tiramisu. It is completely different to the traditional version everyone knows – it is layered differently, more textural with two or even three biscuits, four different types of alcohol in a coffee mix and a coffee mousse. I have totally re-created this traditional dish – it is opposite to everything it is meant to be, but once you taste it you can see how right it is! It's a bit like me – I break all the rules, but in the end, it just works!