

The making of a menu, with Huka Lodge's executive chef Paul Froggatt



Courtesy of Huka Lodge

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What would you serve guests of royal ilk? It's a consideration Paul Froggatt, the executive chef of New Zealand's Huka Lodge is regularly forced to ponder.

Since the reopening of the lodge in the 80s, there's been no shortage of notable names making their way to New Zealand's Taupo and it's something Lancashire native Paul is no stranger to catering for, as his illustrious cooking career across France, Singapore and Hong Kong will attest to.

Rather than focusing on famous faces however, Paul turns his attention to the best seasonal produce that his locale has to offer when crafting the perfect menu for his guests — of which, thanks to the wild, natural surrounds of the lodge's location, there's a tangible abundance.

"[Creating a menu] is a very produce-based process and we must the change dishes with the change of produce," he explains. "As soon as we have a new dish on the menu, I'm already thinking about what's next to come."

That's because the shift of seasons comes that little bit faster in New Zealand, explains Paul, citing his inclusion of yuzu on a recent dessert menu which, at its peak, only occupies a three to four week run.

Considering his career has taken him to multiple Michelin-starred kitchens across Europe and Asia, it's little wonder he's had to readjust to the new array of local goods that the largely temperate (and summer subtropical) climates that New Zealand has to offer.

"It's taken a bit of time to find all the local produce, as it's a lot about knowing where to look and who to ask for it," explains Paul. "I'm lucky now I've made a lot of chef friends so that we help each other when we have new produce."

Paul also has the support and input of ideas from his own team at Huka Lodge: the team takes part in 'Test Kitchen Tuesday' which gives Paul's team a chance to dish up a menu option for his and his sous chef's tasting, with a view to introducing new ideas to the menu.

Although he personally loves a good exploration, Paul also has a handful of foragers on staff who make their way through both the North and South island, hunting down the freshest and most creative ingredients, a list that Paul says is "forever changing".

Despite the careful, inventive food that exits the Huka Lodge kitchen (which afforded the hotel an admission to France's exclusive Les Grande Tables du Monde listing), when it comes to making a menu for his family, things are a little more low-key.

"I love to cook simple meals at home," Paul explains. "I make a lot of pasta, gnocchi, noddles with my children."

"Also, I'm very lucky as my wife is from Singapore so we make a lot of Asian dishes. But the best [dish] is always something that can be placed on the table and shared as this is a time when the whole family should come together and enjoy."