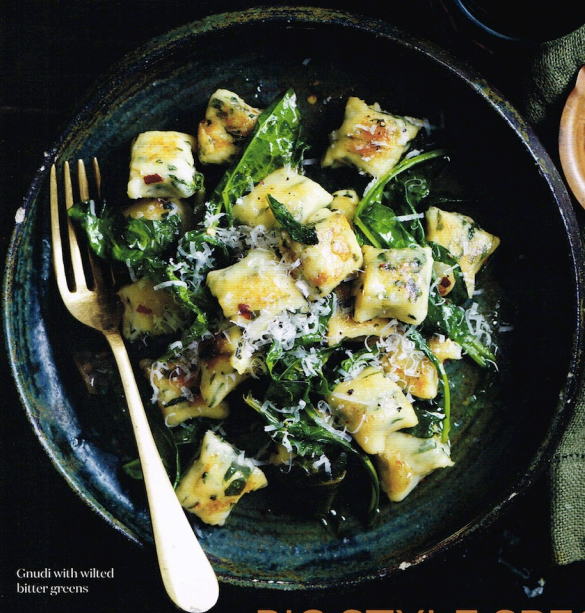


GOURMET

TRAVELLER

Simple comforts

Winter on a plate: slow-cooked favourites, new-wave Korean, hearty dumplings, sweet vanilla & awesome apple pie



Gnudi with wilted bitter greens

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BIG STYLE SPECIAL

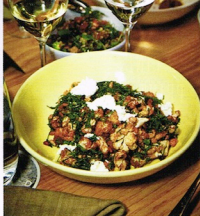
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Bedtime stories

Plates were shared and good-natured quips were traded about the nation's best beds at the launch of our first *Australian Hotel Guide*, in association with Nespresso.

Maybe it was the casual warmth of Sydney restaurant Nomad, a hip warehouse conversion with full exposure of kitchen, bar, pipes and pantry. Maybe it was the arresting line-up of wood-roasted pigs resting on a long bench. Or the truckloads of autumnal roses softening the industrial fittings. Likely, though, it was the combined wattage of Australia's pre-eminent hoteliers and travel industry figures catching up that launched the party even before shared plates emerged.

Our inaugural *Australian Hotel Guide*, featuring the nation's 50 finest hotels as well as our favourite lodges, retreats and long-stay digs, was launched in style at the Surry Hills restaurant. "We have a long and proud tradition of celebrating the country's best restaurants with our *Australian Restaurant Guide*," *Gourmet Traveller* editor Anthea Loucas told the audience. "This year we thought it was high time we turned our attention to the nation's hotels." As bookend guides, she said, "both titles are central to our commitment to identify and celebrate the most remarkable experiences Australia has to offer".

Peerless experiences were also the theme of guest speaker Nick Baker, Tourism Australia's chief marketing officer, who outlined a new international campaign, Restaurant Australia, promoting the nation's unique food and wine culture. Research shows the promise of great food and wine experiences rates with natural beauty as a key motivator for travel. "What makes Australia unique? We realised it's about the people, the produce and place," he said.

Those three elements also make a great party and, between courses by chef Nathan Sasi, there was energetic table-hopping and gossiping. Shared plates

included pork trotter croquettes, bonito escabeche and house-made charcuterie; more shared plates for main course centred on those roast pigs and robustly flavoured dishes of spiced cauliflower, barbecued carrots and wild watercress tabbouleh, with Taylors wines and beer from Peroni.

The good-natured banter continued on stage, where host Catriona Rowntree relayed quips between hoteliers about who has the nation's most comfortable beds. There were plenty of contenders, though we chose to celebrate the industry's peak achievers with nine awards including Best Large City Hotel (Park Hyatt Sydney), Best Regional Hotel (Lake House, Daylesford) and Best Hotel Service (Crown Towers, Melbourne). Best Boutique City Hotel was awarded to newcomer Hotel Hotel in Canberra ("so good they named it twice," according to our guide). Its general manager, Tracy Atherton, asked the advice of friends before she left her role as general manager of the luxury seaside resort Amankila in Bali. "They told me Canberra was Australia's best-kept secret," she said, "and after 18 months, I know this is true."

Other award winners were QT Gold Coast for best hotel breakfast, Shangri-La Sydney's Blu Bar on 36 for best hotel bar, Westin Hotels had the best in-room idea, Skycity Darwin had the best hotel pool and Sofitel Brisbane Central served the nation's best club sandwich.

The awards wouldn't be complete without our readers, who started voting online soon after the last Nespresso Martin was downed. They're in the running to win a trip for two to Tuscany, courtesy of British Airways and boutique hotel experts Mr & Mrs Smith. Watch for the winner to be announced in our August issue. 47

STAYING POWER

Australia's pre-eminent hoteliers and travel industry figures gathered at Surry Hills restaurant Nomad to launch the inaugural *GT Australian Hotel Guide*; spiced cauliflower with goat's curd; Tourism Australia's chief marketing officer, Nick Baker.