

Stillwater named best of the best



Rod Ascui was presented the Bertie Tuccheri Award at the THA awards



James Welsh and Bianca Chellis bought into the business and have been instrumental in taking the restaurant in a new direction



Stillwater took out the Restaurant of the Year and Best Contemporary Australian Restaurant Awards at the recent THA Awards

Rod Ascui started Ripples Café in Launceston 27 years ago with \$2000 he borrowed from his grandfather and a pushbike.

He has since seen the business, now known as Stillwater, grow to become Tasmania's restaurant of the year and the best contemporary Australian restaurant, which was announced at the Tasmanian Hospitality Association Awards earlier this month.

Mr Ascui was also presented with the Bertie Tuccheri Award for contribution to the restaurant sector and the industry as a whole.

Stillwater started as a small café in 1984, serving crepes, pancakes and traditional café food.

Kim Seagram, who is now a business partner, became involved in the company 20 years ago and the pair shifted the café's focus towards local produce.

After battling red tape and selling their vineyard, the pair reinvested in the business and moved to a larger end of the building - enter Stillwater.

"In our 11th year, to celebrate best restaurant in the state is a real testament to our continued drive to keep it relevant, to keep it current and to keep it as fresh as we can," Ms Seagram said.

"We put a new kitchen in last winter, which was another quarter of a million dollars, and that was an investment in the belief of not only the restaurant industry in the state, but also the tourism industry and in the direction that Tasmania is going."

Mr Ascui said that three new partners in the business, James Welsh, Bianca Chellis and Craig Will played an integral part in winning the award, each having steered the restaurant in a more contemporary and professional direction.

"A good business has to have good front of house operations, great kitchen operations and a good marketing operation and they are all the departments that we cover," he said.

"In a lot of cases, and I've seen a lot of restaurants come and go, they're just lacking the

administration side of things.

"The compliance side of things is massive and I don't know how some restaurants cope - in some cases they just don't comply.

"We're really proud of what our partners have done and what our team has done."

Mr Ascui was instrumental in merging the Restaurant and Caterers Association and the Australian Hotels Association to form the Tasmanian Hospitality Association, which is just one of the many changes he has seen in the industry.

"It was a small industry (when the associations merged),

While Mr Ascui said he did not like too much attention for the award, Ms Seagram said he had given many young professionals the step up they needed.

"He has seen a number of generations come up underneath him and help them get their first start," she said.

"Even young ones that used to work in the café, he has directed them to get into the confectionary industry and now they've got their own businesses and they've come back to the state.

"Others have gone on to run ski lodges in France, to work in Michelin star restaurants through Europe and it's

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it didn't have much of a mouthpiece, but now we're such a big industry that we have our own minister for hospitality," he said.

"We've come from being a really disjointed industry with a lot of little voices that never got to be heard anywhere to becoming one of the biggest employers in the state.

"There are nearly 20,000 people working in the industry with a designated minister looking after the industry and it has been nice to be a part of that."

Ms Seagram said she had seen the industry grow from an option for people looking for work after school to an industry offering career opportunities.

"Only a decade ago we were talking about how we were trying to make hospitality a career and we've started to succeed at that," she said.

"We've got a really dedicated team of professionals with us and they're taking this seriously as their career move.

"It's so exciting to have seen that development over the last decade from the fill in after school job to being something that people are hanging their hat on."

really exciting to see these kids and give them such a solid grounding in Tassie that they can go anywhere in the world and work."

Stillwater provided business opportunities for more than just its staff, according to Ms Seagram, who said the business's focus of local food provided many opportunities for local producers.

"My favourite thing about being in the hospitality industry in Tasmania is you're actually the centre of something that is much larger than just a coffee on the table," she said.

"You have producers who are trying to get up and running and you're helping introduce them to the public and helping them grow their business."

"You're helping the next generation of entrepreneurs find their feet and their passion in the industry and you're creating something for the locals to be really proud of and be able to show off to their friends that come to visit and the rest of the world that we can do it down here just as well as you can do it anywhere else."