

Awards for Excellence - A message from the judges ... part two

Each year the Tasmanian Hospitality Association in conjunction with the Restaurant and Caterers Association of Australia conducts an annual Awards for Excellence for the hospitality industry. The purpose of this article is to describe the process for selecting the best restaurants in Tasmania in the various categories for which nominations can be received.

There are various models used for judging restaurants. Publications like the various Good Food Guides in several states and the well recognised Gourmet Traveller awards use a largely subjective approach. Each restaurant is judged, sometimes more than once, by experienced food critics/journalists to achieve a star, hat and/or point rating. Thus three stars are considered the pinnacle. The Tasmanian Hospitality Association uses a different system which is used Australia wide to assess the best restaurant in a particular category. The system which is now called the Restaurant and Catering Evaluation system (hereinafter RACES) has been adopted from the system developed by John Maiorana in Western Australia in the late 1990s.

The RACES evaluation system consists of two separate measuring instruments for restaurants:

Fine Dining, and Informal and Casual Dining.

There are 65 objective and assessable criteria in the Fine Dining instrument and 55 criteria in Informal and Casual dining. The majority of restaurants in Tasmania whether they have entered for best seafood restaurant, best European restaurant, best informal dining or perhaps best contemporary Australian restaurant are judged using the Informal and Casual Dining instrument. Every restaurant is assessed on each of the criteria with the performance by the restaurant being compared to that of all other restaurants in the same category both at a state level and then nationally. For example the same criteria are used in all the Australian states and territories to assess the best seafood restaurant so if a Tasmanian seafood restaurant achieves the highest score it will be awarded best seafood restaurant on the national stage.



The relevant criteria

As I have said the Informal and Casual Dining form uses 55 criteria to assess the restaurant. Broadly each instrument examines separate criteria in five distinct groups representing different aspects of the dining experience. The broad groups are:

Pre- table, Pre-eating, Food, Drinks and Sundries

Within these broad groups are a number of different criteria. In assessing each of the criteria the judges use a six-point scale (0-5) where (0) means that the criterion **is not being met at all** by that restaurant where (3) means that the criterion **is being clearly satisfied** and where (5) means that the criterion **could not be satisfied any better**. In determining what score the restaurant should receive using the six-point scale the judges are provided with a set of pointers or indicators to be used for assessing each criteria. These pointers have been worded in such a way that the scoring is always in line with the principles of the six-point judging system. I have set out below three examples in the broad groups of Pre-eating , Food and Drinks to illustrate the criteria used in each group, the six-point rating scale and the pointers used by the judges in formulating a score for that criteria.

There are 16 separate criteria in the broad category of Pre-eating. They include criteria for assessing table presentation, general criteria including decor, atmosphere ,lighting, overall level of comfort generated and menu criteria which include the physical presentation of the menu, its appropriateness, whether it caters for vegetarians and the degree of innovation and originality shown. I've set out below two of the criteria relating to table presentation:

Table Presentation Criteria

Pointers

<p>Appropriateness & suitability of Crockery, cutlery & napery</p> <p>Crockery, cutlery & napery (CCN) are appropriate and suitable to the dining venue</p>	<p>0 1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p>CCN completely inapprop. & unsuitable to the venue. CCN not suitable or appropriate. Barely satisfactory CCN. CCN clearly satisfactory. CCN completely satisfactory and appropriate. CCN ideal for the type of venue.</p>
<p>Appropriateness & suitability of Glassware & other table items.</p> <p>Glassware and other table items (GTI) Are appropriate and suitable to the Dining venue.</p>	<p>0 1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p>GTI completely inappropriate & unsuitable to the venue. GTI not suitable or appropriate. Barely satisfactory GTI. GTI clearly satisfactory. GTI completely satisfactory and appropriate. GTI ideal for the type of venue.</p>

There are 12 criteria that are used to assess the overall quality of the food used in the particular restaurant. Clearly the overall quality of the food and how it is served to the diner is critically important to an enjoyable dining experience. The criteria used in this broad category attempt to evaluate the overall quality of the food used looking for produce that is as fresh as possible, its presentation, the overall level of taste satisfaction, whether the dishes were served at suitable temperature and whether they were served correctly. In addition the criteria examines whether the food was representative of the specific market, whether it provided comprehensive eating possibilities and whether the product was well handed and there is integration of ingredients. I have set out below two of the criteria together with the indicators the judges use in assessing the food served at the particular restaurant:

Overall Food Evaluation Criteria

Pointers

Overall level of taste satisfaction Degree of subjectivity may occur here. Looking for clean flavors, integrated tastes and complementary ingredients	0	All dishes clearly unsatisfying.
	1	Some dishes were clearly unsatisfying.
	2	Most dishes were very satisfying.
	3	Nearly all the dishes were very satisfying.
	4	Nearly all dishes were excellent.
	5	All dishes were excellent taste experience.
Degree to which descriptions were met Looking for a strong relationship between the description and the product served	0	No relation between description and dishes served.
	1	Difficult to see relation between description & dishes.
	2	Description gives some idea of dishes served.
	3	Description generally indicates dishes served.
	4	Very good description of most dishes.
	5	Excellent description of all dishes.

The service and quality of wine and other drinks provided in a restaurant is also important in the overall dining experience. The Informal and Casual Dining instrument uses 13 criteria to assess the restaurant in this broad group. Apart from the 2 criteria I have listed below additional factors are the relative value in the cost of drinks, the correct opening of wines, the continued quality of wine and drinks service, the supply and quality of drinking water, appropriateness of drinks provided and the quality of coffee/tea and its service:

Drink-related Criteria

Pointers

Level of pre-dinner drink provision Looking for a range of aperitifs or pre-dinner drinks served at a purpose built bar or in a separate area	0	No provision for pre-dinner drinks
	1	Very limited pre-dinner drinks served only at table
	2	Limited pre-dinner drinks served only at table
	3	Limited bar or area serving pre-dinner drinks
	4	Extensive bar serving a range of pre-dinner drinks
	5	Comprehensive bar serving a full range of drinks
Appropriateness of drinks provided Looking for a wide range of drinks that are appropriate to the food served at the venue	0	Drinks completely inappropriate to venue
	1	Drinks not appropriate to food at venue
	2	Some appropriate drinks for food at venue
	3	Most drinks supplied are appropriate to the venue
	4	A wide range of appropriate drinks are supplied
	5	Drinks supplied are in complete harmony with the food

The judges apply the six-point rating scale to all of the listed criteria in the Informal and Casual Dining instrument to achieve a raw score of the particular restaurant. A weighting factor is then applied to each criteria to reflect what are thought to be the more significant criteria in the whole dining experience. For example higher weightings are applied to food and drink quality and service in all areas. The weighted factor for each criteria is then multiplied by the level of assessment i.e. 0-5 in the criteria. The sum of all these products determines the restaurants score. The nature of this process produces a universal scale. This allows all restaurants to be assessed by the same instrument to produce a comparable score regardless of category. This in turn ensures compatibility can be obtained for the Tasmanian and national awards.

The RACES scale has proved to be reliable, valid and flexible. The critical factor to allow for compatibility of results is that the judgement of standards for each criteria is consistent. For this purpose, training for judges is essential. The RACES process has received a wide level of acceptance for many years around Australia and is seen as being fair, consistent and independent. We hope that you have found these articles to be of use in understanding a little more about how the dining awards are judged.