

Awards for Excellence

A message from the judges

The judging panel

In Tasmania the judging process is under the direction of the Chair of Judges. Judges and evaluators (judges in training) have been appointed to cover all the major population centres. Judges are required to travel all over Tasmania to assess the restaurants nominated for the annual awards and are chosen by the Chair of Judges based on specific criteria including:

- a strong interest in food and wine
- an ability to apply criteria referenced judgements
- high professional credibility and personal integrity.

Judges cannot be an employer or employee in the hospitality industry and it is essential for the integrity of the evaluation process that the identity of all judges is not revealed to the relevant State bodies administering the awards or to any other person. All judges give freely of their time and expertise, without payment, as part of their commitment to the promotion of excellence within the hospitality industry.

All judges are trained in the use of the judging system before they are permitted to judge. A judge receives a minimum of 10 hours training. The training of judges includes an introduction to the RACES system, clarification of the process used, establishing standards for making judgement on each of the relevant criteria, a restaurant visit where both the process and standards are discussed, a debriefing session on the first restaurant

visit with explanations, a session to prepare for a restaurant assessment, a second restaurant visit where processes and standards are applied and finally a review of the assessment.

Judging the restaurants

The Chair of Judges allocates two judges to evaluate each restaurant nominated for an award. The judging process usually takes about six weeks and covers all areas of the State. Visits by the judges are of course anonymous and the judges are required to assess each restaurant on all the relevant criteria. As far as possible the same person should act as a judge for each of the nominated restaurants in a particular category. This serves to ensure consistency across the various categories. The judges separately score each restaurant and then meet to finalise the overall score. The Chair of Judges nominates one of the judges to arrange the visit to the restaurant and in the event that there is a difference of opinion about the score on any of the criteria the nominated judge has the final say. However it is my experience that the scores of each of the judges is remarkably consistent and that very few changes are needed to reach a final score for the particular restaurant.

Once all restaurants have been assessed the score sheets are submitted to the Tasmanian Hospitality Association and the relative weightings for each criteria are applied by the National office. A final result, with a score out of 20, for each restaurant is then obtained and the final results published.

Following the publication of the results and the presentation of the awards each restaurant nominated in a particular category is entitled, upon request, to extensive feedback on their score and the assessment process. The judges who assess the restaurants make comprehensive notes of their experience noting not only the areas in which the restaurants can improve their service,

quality of food and drink provision but also highlighting areas of improvement since the last assessment, if any, and aspects of the dining experience that were done well. My experience in the last few years is that there has been, in general, a great improvement in standards of service across the restaurant industry particularly in the provision and service of wine including many more wines by the glass and a move away from commercial or standard wine lists to more innovative selections particularly of Tasmanian wines. Another important observation is that the quality of tea and coffee served at most nominated restaurants has improved out of sight. However the judges continue to question the extra payment required for good espresso coffee in some establishments.

Nomination forms for the 2011 awards will be sent out in October/November and the judging will commence early in February 2011. It is expected that there will be one new category available in 2011 and it is hoped that as many restaurants as possible will enter for the awards next year. As Chief Judge I welcome any questions, addressed through the Tasmanian Hospitality Association, from members wishing to enter the awards next year. It is particularly important that restaurants consider carefully in which category they wish to nominate. Restaurants may enter a maximum of two categories in the dining section as long as the restaurant meets the category criteria.

In addition nominees may separately enter for the Café award. It is important to remember that the same criteria are used to judge all of the restaurant categories, so the same criteria and indicators are used to judge restaurants in the informal dining category as in the best contemporary Australian restaurant category. So careful consideration is needed as to the appropriate category for your restaurant. Last year the Tasmanian Hospitality Association provided better descriptions of the various categories and they plan to refine those descriptions further for next year's awards as well.

