

# Free Range

Words and photography Ashley St George Recipes Tristan Rebbettes

An executive chef at just 27 years of age, Tristan Rebbettes talks about living out his childhood dream, his idols, and being a finalist in the 2022 Young Chef of the Year Awards.

Tristan Rebbettes was in his late teens when he moved to Australia from his home town in the UK. Now, almost ten years later, he's executive chef of a luxurious farm-stay accommodation, managing a team of people, growing and cultivating produce – and loving every bit of it, as you might expect from a young man who always knew he wanted to be a chef.

“When I grew up, you had Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay, Rick Stein and all that on TV and I was always watching them,” says Rebbettes. “I can't remember the age, but I was very young when I was always telling my parents that I want to be a chef. So they probably thought I just liked the TV shows and all that.”

With supportive parents, he started doing some cooking lessons for kids, and cooked regularly at home. “Instead of trying to push me away from being a chef, they drove me, helped me in any way so I could become a chef and do my qualifications,” says Rebbettes.

After college he did a stint in a pub while also working at a local fishmongers. “I got a lot of my fish skills from there,” he says. “I love cooking fish, and I think that stems from many years working in this little fishmongers.”

Then one day it all changed.

“I wanted to go somewhere. And I guess I thought, ‘well where's the furthest place to go?’” It happened to be Australia.

“I was down the pub one day with friends from college and I just said, ‘guys, I think I want to go to Sydney.’ And they were like ‘okay – can we come?’”

What began as a one-or-two-year working holiday turned into an Australian career. “Now I've gone down the whole road. I'm a citizen. Got my passport. I've lived here now coming up ten years,” he laughs. “September 26, 2013. That's the day we landed.”

Through college connections, Rebbettes landed himself a job at Rockpool, which was still located at the Rocks in Sydney at the time. He continued to build on his already impressive credentials, adding Sepia, Est., Cafe Paci and St. Peter to his name.

“I loved working in Cafe Paci. It was a pop-up restaurant at the time and I remember the dining room where everything was painted grey – tables, chairs, ceiling, walls, floor. So you'd go in there and the only colour really that would be there would be the food and wine.”

He found himself in a familiar place with his fishmonger background at St. Peter as sous chef. “[It was a] fantastic opportunity working with Josh Niland,” he says. “Understanding his kind of way of working with fish, which is just on a total different level.”



## MOVE TO THE COUNTRY

From working the big city life to running a kitchen on a rural property on the outskirts of Braidwood in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales, Rebbettes was drawn to country life.

“It just felt right to go somewhere a bit more rural. I grew up in a place called Sarisbury Green, which is in a county called Hampshire. It's a little village, very close to the coast, so it was always just a quiet place,” Rebbettes recalls. “Braidwood itself reminds me of home because of the climate, the look of the area, and especially Mona Farm being very British-inspired in the gardens,” he says.

The inspiration to go rural actually came from working in the outback between restaurant jobs in Sydney.

“I was doing a bit of farm work to get my second-year visa – a classic trip from Sydney to Cairns in a camper van. It was a fantastic time. At one point we had the opportunity to go to





Gregory Downs, which I loved. We spent a couple of months there, just in the middle of nowhere but in paradise,” he says.

“Like, one day I was picking things, another day I was cooking in the kitchen, another day sitting behind the bar... there was no kind of fixed job, it was just you do everything during the day.”

This eagerness for working so closely with the land is what has brought him to Mona Farm, a large estate with livestock, kitchen gardens, English-style forests and guesthouses. His role as executive chef sees him providing private dining to those staying in the guesthouses, or running experiences with guest chefs such as Lennox Hastie from Firedoor.

Rebbettes seems to thrive on such diversity. “It’s so different to a restaurant where everyone knows exactly what to expect,” he says. “I guess this is quite personal, where it’s not like you’re feeding the masses at one time.”

“We get to give a very personal, unique experience as we’re bringing the restaurant to them. And being where we are, we can have it outside if the weather is great, and be experiencing it on the farm where the food can be raised and grown and I think it just gives it an extra little special thing.”

It’s the connection to the land and produce that drives Rebbettes, and at Mona Farm there is no shortage of it. The estate has Highland cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens, beehives and bountiful vegetable gardens. This fertile pocket of NSW boasts fantastic growing conditions for truffles and mushrooms as well as peaches and other stonefruit.

“I think a lot of my inspiration comes from just what’s happening around me. Just being able to walk out to the gardens and pick my own veg, to pick an apple off the tree or quince or a pear and go see local suppliers,” says Rebbettes.

“It really makes me and my team just feel like we are out there, not just in a kitchen. We get to be outside, we get to walk around and cook over fire.”



#### EYES ON THE PRIZE

Through young yet experienced eyes, Rebbettes sees a lot of hope in the future of the hospitality industry.

“Things are moving to be much more sustainable,” he observes. “Things are opening up much more through social media. Suppliers seem to be getting more inspiring in these places like farms, and it all seems like they’re feeding off each other. The way we’re moving forward, I think, is going in the right way.”

Being recognised as a finalist in the Young Chef of the Year Award for 2022, he says, represented a nod to his commitment to a more sustainable approach to food.

“It kind of gave me a drive to keep trying harder and just keep going,” he says. “It made me feel like if I keep doing what I’m doing, then hopefully someday I’ll get to where I want to be.” And where is that, exactly?

“My goal is to kind of have a space that is not just a restaurant, but kind of like a learning centre,” he says. “Where people can learn how to make ceramics, and people come in, learn how to tend gardens which supply the restaurant itself, – same with livestock, and then also woodwork. I’d like to have this like a closed loop – everything’s ending up at the restaurant, but it’s a learning space as well.”

A bold vision, perhaps. But what else is youth for, if not for dreaming big, and making beautiful things? **S**



Radicchio, shaved fennel, kohlrabi and hazelnut salad with a Dijon mustard dressing

Tuscan kale and Italian sausage stuffed pork belly porchetta, with broccolini salsa verde, kohlrabi and black garlic



**Tuscan kale and Italian sausage stuffed pork belly porchetta, with broccolini salsa verde, kohlrabi and black garlic**

Serves 4–6  
Preparation 2 hours, ideally 2–3 days prior  
Cooking 2 hours 20 minutes  
Minimum 20 hours resting time

**Porchetta**  
2kg free range Australian pork belly  
2 Italian sausages, skins removed  
½ bunch Tuscan kale, stalks trimmed off  
3 sprigs sage (optional – any hard herb can be used, e.g. sage, thyme, rosemary)  
Black pepper

**Brine**  
1L water  
100g fine sea salt  
1 tsp mustard seeds  
1 tsp coriander seeds  
1 tsp fennel seeds  
1 star anise  
A few sprigs of thyme

**Pickled kohlrabi**  
1 large kohlrabi  
500ml white vinegar  
125g caster sugar  
1 clove garlic, crushed  
1 tsp mustard seeds  
1 tsp celery seeds  
1 tsp whole black peppercorns  
Generous pinch of salt

**Broccolini salsa verde**  
3 bunch broccolini  
1 clove garlic, chopped  
1 bunch basil  
1 bunch parsley  
1 lemon, juiced and zested  
Black pepper to taste  
Salt to taste  
Chardonnay vinegar (or white wine vinegar; add ½ tsp of sugar to replicate the sweetness of the chardonnay vinegar)

**1.** For the brine: place all ingredients into a saucepan. Bring to a simmer and remove from the heat. Allow the brine to infuse for 15 minutes.  
**2.** Strain the liquid into a suitable dish or container that will fit the pork belly laying flat. Chill the brine in the fridge for an hour or two until the liquid is cold.  
**3.** Add the pork belly and submerge in the brine. Leave for 7 hours.

**4.** After 7 hours pull the pork belly out of the brine and pat the meat dry.  
**5.** For the porchetta: place the pork, skin-side down, on a chopping board with the long side facing you.  
**6.** Layer the kale along the middle of the pork, followed by the sage and the sausage mince. Using a pepper grinder, add a generous crack of pepper all over the meat.  
**7.** Roll the pork into a cylinder and using butcher’s twine secure the pork belly into a traditional porchetta – make sure it is nice and tight to keep the filling in.  
**8.** Once all tied up, place the porchetta onto a tray that will fit into your fridge. Do not cover, as you want to let the skin dry; this helps to get a nice crackling. Leave overnight or at best for at least 24 hours.  
**9.** Pull the porchetta out of the fridge 1 hour before cooking and let come to room temperature.  
**10.** Pre-heat fan-forced oven to 240°C. Place the pork into a roasting dish, ideally on a trivet or wire rack. Pour some water to cover the bottom of the tray, about half a centimetre.  
**11.** Cook pork in oven for 20 minutes. After the first 20 minutes you should see the skin turning to crackling. Turn the heat down to 150°C and continue to cook for 1–2 hours. If you have a temperature probe you can test the internal temperature – once it reaches 70°C it is ready to remove from the oven. Alternatively, if you poke the centre with a knife and if juices run clear it is cooked.  
**12.** Leave the pork to rest for 10 minutes.  
**13.** For the broccolini salsa verde: bring a suitable pot of water to the boil. It will need to fit the whole broccolini in.  
**14.** When the water is boiling, add the broccolini into the water and blanch for 2 minutes. Remove and plunge into some ice water to stop it from cooking any further.  
**15.** Once cooled, remove from the ice water and pat dry. Place onto a chopping board and roughly chop. Place into a bowl and put to the side.  
**16.** Using a blender, place the herb stalks and all into the jug of the blender. Add the chopped garlic, lemon juice and zest, generous crack of pepper and a good pinch of salt and the olive oil. Blend to a pesto-like consistency.  
**17.** Pour the blended mix over the chopped broccolini. At this stage, add a tablespoon of vinegar. This can be done to taste to your desired acidity. Adjust the seasoning again to your desired level.

**18.** For the pickled kohlrabi: place all ingredients into a saucepan, bring to a simmer, and continue to simmer for 5 minutes.  
**19.** Meanwhile, peel the skin off the kohlrabi – using the peeler, peel nice long ribbons of kohlrabi into a container. Carefully pour the pickle liquid through a sieve into the container over the kohlrabi. Leave to cool, and then place into the fridge overnight.  
**20.** Cut off the twine and slice the porchetta into rounds, placing onto plates or on a serving dish. Spoon over the broccolini salsa verde, peel and slice the black garlic (if using) and scatter over the top, and add the ribbon of pickled kohlrabi.

**+ Wine**  
Try our featured Barbera from Pepper Tree – perfectly plush with mouth-watering acidity.

**Radicchio, shaved fennel, kohlrabi and hazelnut salad with a Dijon mustard dressing**  
Serves 4  
Preparation 30 minutes

**1 radicchio**  
**1 fennel**  
**1 kohlrabi**  
**Roasted hazelnuts**  
**Hazelnut oil (optional)**  
  
**Dijon mustard dressing**  
**1 tsp white sugar**  
**2 tsp white wine vinegar**  
**1 ½ tbsp Dijon mustard**  
**Extra virgin olive oil**  
**Black pepper**

**1.** Place the sugar, vinegar and mustard in a bowl and using a whisk, emulsify together.  
**2.** Continue to whisk and slowly add a steady stream of olive oil until you reach a nice dressing consistency, followed by a good crack of black pepper.  
**2.** Prepare the salad by slicing the radicchio, peeling and grating the kohlrabi and finely slicing the fennel – if you have a kitchen mandoline this will make quick work of it all.  
**3.** In a salad bowl, mix the radicchio, kohlrabi, fennel and hazelnuts. Add the desired amount of dressing and place into a serving dish. Drizzle with a little hazelnut oil and scatter a couple of hazelnuts over the top. Serve.

Barbequed blue mackerel with purplette onions, roasted red bell peppers, oyster mushroom and sweet and sour currant sauce



### Barbequed blue mackerel with purplette onions, roasted red bell peppers, oyster mushroom and sweet and sour currant sauce

Serves 2

Preparation 90 minutes

Cooking 15 minutes

**1 large or 2 small blue mackerel** (ask your fish monger to fillet or butterfly – alternately you can substitute the mackerel for another oily fish)

**4 bulbs purplette onions** (alternatively use 1 red onion)

**2 red bell peppers**

**1 punnet oyster mushrooms**

**1 white witlof**

**Sweet and sour currant sauce**

**2 tbsp olive oil**

**1 shallot diced**

**1 tbsp caster sugar**

**30g dried currants**

**6 tbsp white wine vinegar**

**3 tbsp white wine**

**1.** In a saucepan over a medium heat, add the olive oil and diced shallots. Sweat the shallots off for a couple of minutes until translucent. Add the remaining ingredients and bring to a simmer. Continue to simmer and reduce by two thirds.

**2.** Meanwhile, place another saucepan on the stove full of water and add a generous pinch of salt. Bring to the boil. Peel the onions keeping whole if using purplette onions (or cut into 8 wedges if red onion) then place into the boiling water for 5 minutes. Remove and place into ice water to stop cooking. Once cooled, remove from the water and drain. Set aside for cooking later.

**3.** Remove the mackerel from the fridge to come to room temperature.

**4.** For the witlof, cut the base off and remove the individual petals. Keep to one side ready for the barbeque.

**5.** On a hot charcoal barbeque, completely char the red bell peppers so that the outside

is black all around. Place the charred red bell peppers into a container for 10 minutes to allow them to sweat in their own steam. Remove and peel off the skins and cut open to remove the seeds. Cut the pepper into large strips and keep aside in a warm spot.

**6.** Place the oyster mushrooms and onions onto the barbeque and cook, charring a little if so desired. Add the witlof to the barbeque just to wilt and slightly breakdown, but to also have a little bite.

**7.** Warm the currant sweet and sour sauce up to a simmer, and in a bowl add the barbeque oyster mushrooms, red bell pepper, witlof and onions. Dress with sauce and toss.

**8.** Very lightly oil the skin of the mackerel, season with sea salt and place skin-side down onto the barbeque. If you have a fish cage place the fish into the cage to put over the barbeque skin-side down. Cook until the flesh starts to turn opaque. Manage the heat so you do not burn the skin whilst it is cooking skin-side down. Turn the fish over just to seal the flesh meat. Remove from heat and serve.

**9.** To serve, place garnished barbequed veggies on the base of a dish. Dress with remaining sauce, and place mackerel over the top.

## + Wine

We've paired the Trimboli Family Fiano with the mackerel for its plush core of fruit and beautifully balanced acidity.

### Apple tarte tatin

Serves 4

Preparation 15 minutes

Cooking 40 minutes

**6 apples, whatever is in season**

**150g white sugar**

**55g unsalted butter, plus extra for greasing**

**Pinch of salt**

**½ vanilla pod, seeded**

**Vanilla ice cream**

**1 sheet of puff pastry**

**1.** Pre-heat a fan-forced oven to 200°C.

**2.** To make the tarte, peel the apples and cut

into 2 cheeks, removing the core. Keep to one side.

**3.** In a saucepan that will fit all the apples comfortably, make a caramel by adding the sugar and 50ml of water. On a low heat, let the sugar dissolve into the water. Once dissolved, turn the heat up to medium to take the sugar to an amber-to-dark caramel.

**4.** When it reaches this stage turn the heat back to low and very carefully add the butter and salt to the caramel. Carefully whisk everything well together.

**5.** Add the apple cheeks and the seeds from the vanilla pod and cook the apples in the caramel, stirring gently every now and then. You're looking to cook the apples until tender – about 10 minutes – but this can change depending on the apples used.

**6.** Grease a round, ovenproof pan (24cm diameter) with butter – you can use a round cast iron dish, metal frying pan, or a solid-based cake tin.

**7.** To assemble, arrange the apple cheeks very tightly in a circle around the edge of the dish first, rounded-side down, then fill in the middle in a similar fashion. Gently press down to ensure no gaps. Spoon over the caramel to fill the base of the pan.

**8.** Cover the top with puff pastry, tucking the edges down the side. With a knife, prick a small hole in the centre to allow steam to escape. Place into the oven for about 15–20 minutes, or until puff pastry is crisp and flaky.

**9.** Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 15–30 minutes before running a knife around the edge of the dish and inverting it onto a large serving plate deep enough to hold the caramel and juices that run off.

**10.** Serve with a good scoop of quality vanilla ice cream.

Apple tarte tatin



## Wood roasted peach and vanilla panna cotta with lemon verbena and raspberry syrup

Serves 6

Preparation 30 minutes plus 3+ hours setting time

Cooking 10 minutes

**6 ripe white or yellow peaches**

**Vanilla panna cotta**

**400g cream**

**160g full milk**

**160g white sugar**

**½ vanilla pod, seeded**

**1 ½ leafs gold leaf gelatine**

**Lemon verbena and raspberry syrup**

**100g white sugar**

**100g water**

**100g raspberry**

**½ vanilla pod, seeded**

**2 sprigs lemon verbena**

**1.** For the panna cotta: place the gelatine into cold water to bloom and soften. Meanwhile, warm the cream, milk, sugar and vanilla pod seeds to a simmer, and dissolve the gelatine in the liquid.

**2.** Pour 90g of the panna cotta into 4 small ramekins – you can also use aluminium dariole moulds which can be found at kitchen shops. Leave these in the fridge overnight or for a few hours to set.

**3.** For the lemon verbena and raspberry syrup: bring all the ingredients to a simmer in a saucepan. On a low heat keep warm for 5 minutes to infuse the syrup and breakdown the raspberries.

**4.** Pour the syrup into a container through a sieve to strain the liquid out.

**5.** Reserve for later.

**6.** Cut your peaches and place into the syrup to coat. Over a wood fire caramelize the outside of the peaches and keep warm.

**7.** Meanwhile using a bowl of hot water, warm the outside of the moulds for a few seconds and turn upside down into a bowl to release the panna cotta. To finish, add the wood roasted peaches with the syrup.

Wood roasted peach and vanilla panna cotta with lemon verbena and raspberry syrup

## Chilled fig leaf rice pudding with fresh figs, pistachios and honey

Serves 4

Preparation 15 minutes plus 4+ hours dehydrating time for optional dried fig leaf powder

Cooking 30+ minutes

**140g washed fig leaves**

**2 ripe figs**

**Handful pistachios**

**Honey, to drizzle**

**100g white sugar**

**600g full milk**

**50g cream**

**½ vanilla pod, seeded**

**100g medium grain rice**

**200g cream**

**1.** For the fig leaf powder: take 70g of the leaves and dry out in the oven at the lowest temperature setting. Once dried, blend fine in a jug blender to make a powder and keep in an airtight container until needed (optional).

**2.** For the rice pudding: roll 70g of fig leaves and slice. Add to a saucepan with the sugar, milk, cream and vanilla seeds with the pod. Bring to a simmer. Remove from heat and cover the pan. Leave for 15 minutes to infuse. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve into a new saucepan.

**3.** Rinse the rice under water to remove some of the starch then add to the pan. Bring back

to a gentle simmer and cook until the rice is tender. Remove from the heat and pour into a container to cool, covering the top with a bit of baking paper to stop it from creating a skin layer. Place into the fridge until cold.

**4.** Whisk the cream to soft peaks, and fold through the rice pudding base mix. In 4 serving bowls, tear apart the fresh ripe figs and place a half in each bowl. Scatter some pistachio nuts and drizzle with a generous amount honey, adding a little pinch of salt at this stage if desired.

**5.** Spoon over the rice pudding and finish with a dusting of the fig leaf powder.

Chilled fig leaf rice pudding with fresh figs, pistachios and honey