

# Bécasse

JUSTIN NORTH

Inspirations and Flavours

*'The best in Australia just got better  
with Justin North' – Raymond Blanc*



*Where are the traditional craftsmen, the skilled and passionate individuals?*

*They are vanishing in a world of fast, overly simplified foods.*

*Good food takes time.*

*Technique is a means, and culinary artistry visually appetising,  
but flavour is the only true hand to guide you.*







*To Mum and Dad:*

*Thank you for everything. Your unconditional love and support are what I have thrived on for the past thirty years.*

*And to Raymond, a genius in the truest sense of the word. You changed my life – your energy and constant search for excellence will stay with me forever. You taught me to taste and think – two of the greatest attributes a chef can ever have.*

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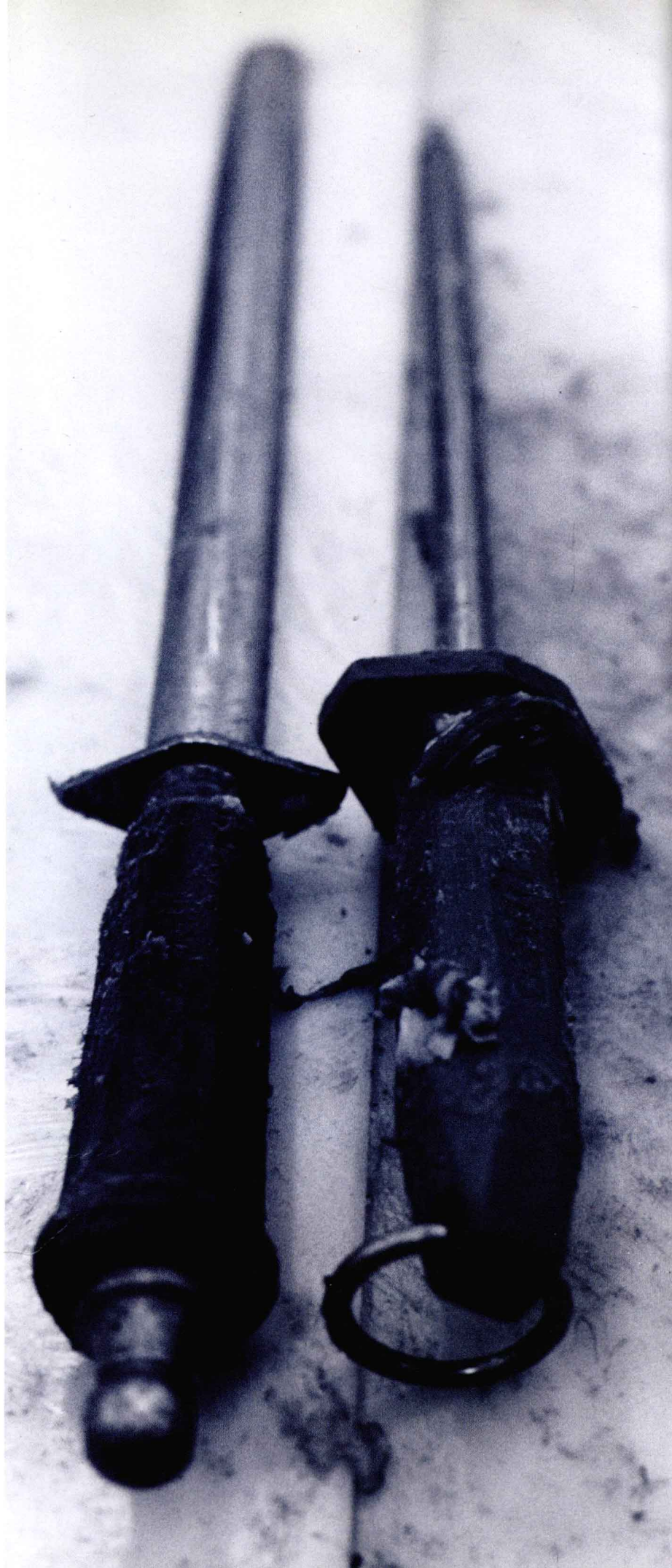
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# Foreword

Great love and great achievements often involve great risk. A decade ago, Justin North left behind all he knew and came to work for me. He spent nearly three years by my side and was one of the finest chefs to ever work at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons. And since he took that risk, Justin has gone from one achievement to the next. He rose quickly from commis to sous chef at Le Manoir and was voted employee of the year. Now, his restaurant in Sydney is a huge success, fully booked every night and the recipient of several awards. In his quest for perfection, Justin refuses to stand still and I am proud to introduce his latest achievement: this wonderful book.

The book *Bécasse* celebrates those who take great risks in the pursuit of excellence; people who go to extraordinary lengths for results; people who are not satisfied by the good but look for the great and, hardest of all, look to produce it every day. Justin does this at Bécasse, and his suppliers do the same on their farms, lakes, and on the open sea. The relationship with one's producers is the most important relationship a chef can have. One can't survive without the other, and each inspires the other to reach new heights. The best way to show respect for your producers is to treat their food with love and care, as Justin does.

If you are interested in food you will love this book. You will

love it because good food is not about fashion but about research, quality and craft. Good food is starting with the perfect product, then having the skill and knowledge to get the best out of it, and the confidence to let it taste of itself or the talent to make it taste more of itself.

These recipes illustrate Justin's command of technique. Like so much good produce, skills are being lost in the kitchen through mass production and people who consider the 'in things' more important than the great things. It is vital that we support the tradition of using quality ingredients, to ensure the traditions of great cooking continue. Justin has put up his hand and said, 'I want to do this', and he does it with immense skill in his kitchen. With this book he can now reach further and inspire not only the people who work for him, but chefs and home cooks everywhere.

Justin came to me for inspiration from the old world, and is now blazing a trail in the new. Searching for the best from earth and sea is a battle I fight every day in Europe. It is a battle for committed craftsmen and women who love good food and great cooking. I'm happy to know that halfway around the world, my protégé and friend Justin North is doing the same. And I wish him well in his journey of discovery.



Raymond Blanc  
UK, May 2006









# *Introduction*

The seed of this book was planted five years ago. Having arrived in Australia after working in Europe – a continent with an abundance of extraordinary produce – I soon discovered the remarkable produce Australia has to offer. Incredible seafood, the freshest and most diverse selection of fruit and vegetables, and an increasingly high quality of meat, offal, poultry and game. I wanted to find a way to celebrate the produce and the producers, to give them the recognition and exposure they deserve.

I began talking to local suppliers to learn more about how they selected the products they sold me: the best fresh produce available in Australia. From those early conversations came meetings with farmers, businesspeople and cultivators. I started to travel on the days Bécasse was closed, and I loved what I saw and tasted.

From garden nurseries to the most technologically advanced processing plants, what these producers have in common is a steadfast commitment to excellence. Whether it's time spent researching their product abroad, or years of trial and error to perfect their recipe for livestock feed, in their own way

each producer embodies what I want to express via my food in the restaurant: timeless depth of flavours through solid technique.

Once the basic idea for the project was in place I set about gathering a team of equally passionate people to turn the dream into a book. Together we travelled around Australia talking to producers, capturing the mood of the land, and recording it in an attempt to bring to life this unwavering commitment to truly superior food.

As a chef, it was a delight to learn more about each product, and it is with great pride that I serve each of them, season permitting, at Bécasse. Every story I heard was inspiring. Whether sharing a cup of tea with an octogenarian yabby farmer or discussing the finer points of humane, efficient slaughter of lambs, each experience in its own way strengthened my resolve to preserve these people's unique stories.

Plenty of heart has gone into the making of this book and, of course, a good deal of cooking and eating and I am confident that you will be inspired by a breadth of produce that begs to be explored.

*Justin North*

May 2006







# Notes from the chef

The recipes in this book are all from Bécasse, past and present. In creating them I wanted to bring out each product's unique qualities as well as demonstrate its versatility. Many of the recipes use secondary cuts of meat, and offal. I have taken this approach to show how great these often-overlooked cuts can be with the right technique/recipe. While offal might not be to everyone's taste, the point I want to make is that a whole animal can be used in cooking and can, when handled correctly, display an extraordinary breadth of flavour and texture.

Before you start on any dish, I ask you to read the recipe through several times. By doing this you will gain a sense of its scope and complexity, and hopefully see that elegant food should be prepared with patience and a respect for the ingredients.

Some dishes will take only a few minutes and others might take you a day or even longer. Where applicable I have offered a faster alternative, but creating good food takes time, and I know you will savour the experience.

There is a glossary of ingredients, and French culinary terms that I use throughout, on pages 285–6. I also keep a copy of *Larousse Gastronomique* within reach at all times. It's an amazingly comprehensive cookery encyclopedia, and a worthwhile investment for cooks of all abilities.

Although these recipes are the real thing, made the way we prepare them at the restaurant, they are only guidelines. Please use them as a base from which to experiment with other flavours and ingredients. Good cooking takes time and practice. So relax, enjoy and have fun!

## Alcohol

I often add a splash of raw alcohol to freshen a finished sauce or soup; a good example is a drop of Madeira to finish a mushroom consommé. Red and white wine I tend to reduce, depending on

the level of acidity required for a recipe – the more it reduces the more acidic it will become. A good quality wine can be used to freshen a sauce, but should only be boiled for a few seconds. This will kill the straight alcohol taste but retain its unique flavour. Cognac, Armagnac, dry sherry and the like should never be reduced as they will lose all flavour. If a fresh drop is too strong, boil for a second.

## Braising

The comfort of a warming braise simply cannot be beaten. Once a cook has mastered the art of braising, a whole new world of cookery will open up – one that includes the amazing array of secondary cuts of meat that are so often overlooked. The slow cooking process breaks down the collagen and sinew in these tougher cuts, leaving you with a highly flavoured, meltingly tender dish.

There are three parts to a braise: marinating, browning and then slow-cooking the meat in an oven, covered with an aromatic, flavour-rich stock that becomes a sauce. A braise has such integrated flavours it becomes hard to tell where the meat ends and the sauce begins. A braise should never boil: just a gentle 'blip' on the surface will suffice.

## Butter

Using unsalted butter gives you greater control over the salt level in your cooking.

**Foaming with butter:** This method is invaluable to the cuisinier's repertoire. Foaming is the caramelisation of meat, fish or vegetables by adding butter to the pan during the cooking process and heating the butter to a light, frothy 'beurre noisette', over a constant heat with regular basting.



## Caramelising

I love to roast a piece of fish and then caramelize its skin until crisp and aromatic. Fish skin has a similar nature to that of chicken skin. Making small incisions in the skin with a sharp knife, slowly caramelize the fish and roast it, basting with foaming butter, lemon and all the pan juices. These are absorbed through the incisions.

## Frothing sauces

There is the misconception that this technique is a trend simply for visual effect. When executed correctly, frothing aerates a sauce, emphasising its lightness while still getting intense flavour from a good, fragrant and tasty base.

## Herbs

All herbs used in the recipes are fresh unless otherwise stated. If you use dried herbs I suggest drying them yourself – the flavour will be far superior.

## Garlic

Always use fresh, new-season garlic – as garlic ages and dries it loses its flavour.

## Meat

I recommend cooking meat from room temperature. This produces a more evenly cooked end result, as the heat is able to penetrate the meat almost instantly. As a general rule, and in most cases in this book, I rest meat for half the amount of time it has been cooked. This allows the meat to relax and the juices to be absorbed back into the meat, keeping it moist and tasty.

## Oils

I refer to non-scented cooking oils throughout. Canola or grape-seed oil fit the bill perfectly. Grape-seed oil is almost totally neutral in flavour – ideal to take on robust flavours. I use extra-virgin olive oil for finishing foods and if any heat is required I use a second-pressed olive oil. Always buy your olive oil locally and as fresh as possible as this will have the purest taste.

## Salt

When used correctly, salt is a trigger to release the full flavour of foods. Food should be seasoned with salt immediately before and after cooking. Too far in advance and the salt will penetrate the meat too much. Without salt just prior to cooking, the moisture in food is drawn to the surface which causes stewing in the pan. In cooking I use fine sea salt that doesn't contain any chemicals. To season raw food or to finish foods that do not require any further cooking I use fleur de sel (see page 8) as this salt has a clean, fresh taste.

## Pepper

Peppercorns are berries from a climbing vine that ripens from green to red and then brown. They are harvested at various stages of maturity. I always cook with freshly ground white pepper straight from the mill – these are ripe peppercorns with the husks removed, which makes the pepper less spicy and, in my opinion, more suited to cooking. Black pepper is simply red peppercorns that are dried, which makes them a lot more pungent and spicy.

## Vegetables

Vegetables should be cooked until the crunch has just gone but the resistance remains. No more and no less.





The background of the page is a solid dark blue. Overlaid on this are several thin, elegant, white or light blue swirls and loops that flow across the page, primarily concentrated on the left side. A semi-transparent, lighter blue rectangular box is positioned behind the word 'Salt' and the text 'MURRAY RIVER GOURMET SALT'.

*Salt*

MURRAY RIVER GOURMET SALT





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## KINGS AND *conquerers*

Over the centuries, salt has been a valuable commodity. Traded thousands of years ago around the Mediterranean, wars were fought for salt, land ceded over it, and humans and animals alike have always depended upon it for survival. Salt has had a variety of uses.

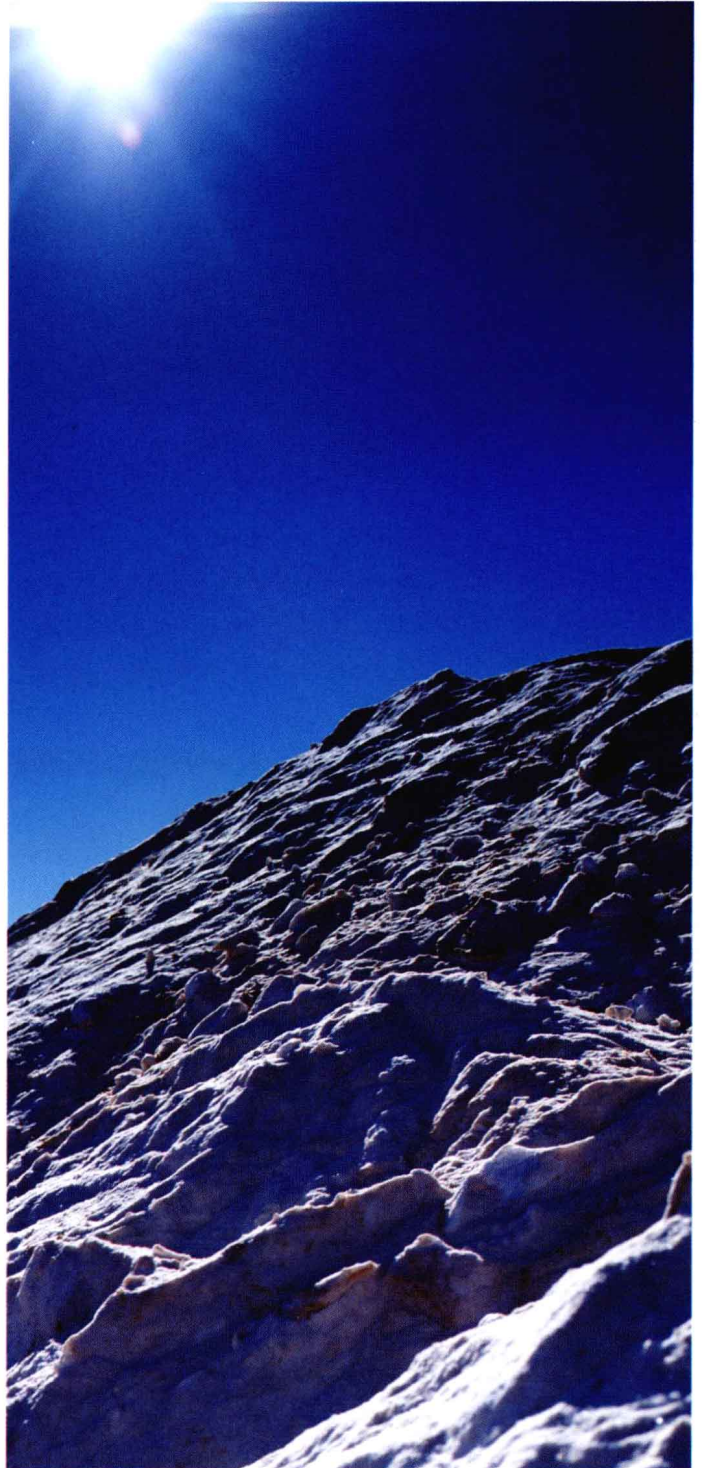
Egyptians marinated olives in brine to make them edible; they also used salt for mummification. The naturally occurring salt in the soil along the Silk Road of China during Marco Polo's time served to preserve bodies that were buried there.

The ancient Roman government subsidised salt prices during its reign to ensure that plebeians could afford to buy it. They did this to shore up popular support when they needed it, according to author Mark Kurlansky whose book *Salt* charts the course of this essential mineral. Indeed, most Italian cities were established in close proximity to saltworks, starting with Rome and the saltworks at the mouth of the Tiber River.

Nowadays salt is often used when cooking green vegetables to retain their colour and flavour. Romans salted their raw green vegetables to counter the bitter taste they yielded, and this is the origin of the word 'salad', which means 'salted'. Salt also symbolised the binding of agreements in ancient Rome, so the absence of salt on a meal table would have been seen as unfriendly, even hostile.

The word 'soldier' is also a derivative of the word 'salt'. In centuries past soldiers were paid in salt (which, incidentally, is also the origin of the word 'salary'), which they would trade on the open market for other goods.

This seemingly innocuous substance has inspired passion and superstition for centuries and is an essential component of the human body. The identification of a salty taste triggers production of saliva and the gastric juices essential for digestion. This is perhaps salt's most important function, although it is rapidly eliminated by the body and must be replaced frequently.



OPPOSITE: The Mourquong Basin evaporation pan



## THE UNDERGROUND *Sea*

Conventional belief that salt comes from the ocean seems to make sense, but in reality the ocean is not saline enough to produce salt in the quantities we use. Cheap table salt is mass-produced using a process far removed from the romantic idea of giant salt pans drying slowly under a desert sun. Salt water is heated to 290°C, which removes eighty-two of the eighty-four naturally occurring minerals found in sea water. Then chemical additives (aluminium compounds) are mixed in with the salt to prevent caking. It is far from a natural process, and perhaps adds to the reputation that salt has attracted in recent years as a robber of health.

The drying of salt water under the hot sun does happen, however, and sometimes in the most unlikely places. Its Mediterranean climate and fertile soil have made Mildura on the New South Wales and Victorian border (and about an hour's drive from the border of South Australia), a popular

place to settle, and the agricultural centre has a permanent population of 65,000.

In Mildura, an ancient underground aquifer is used to bring us Murray River salt, a salt distinguished by its unique colour: the minerals from the inland sea give the salt flakes a pink tinge.

The underground source of saline water in Mildura is naturally occurring and has existed for thousands of years. Mining this water for commercial purposes is helping to solve Australia's considerable salinity problem. It is estimated that an area of earth the size of a football field is lost to creeping salinity in Australia every hour, making the earth impossible to farm, and eventually leading to creeping desert spaces across the continent.

BELOW: Alan Hutcheon of Murray River Gourmet Salt

