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**W**hen Hayman Island's executive chef Glenn Bacon says, "We do have a fair few chefs helping us out on the island", he's certainly the master of understatement. The array of restaurants at Hayman, a secluded far-north Queensland resort located at the northend of the Whitsunday islands, requires him to manage 48

chefs and 69 kitchen staff. Even more overwhelming, the concept of a quiet Monday simply doesn't exist. "There is no such thing as a busy Saturday night," he explains. "When the guests arrive, they want their Saturday night on a Monday or Tuesday night."

Bacon's skill at managing this mammoth business—as well as creating culinary masterpieces—was recognised last year when La Fontaine won Restaurant of the Year and Best European Restaurant at the 2010 Restaurant & Catering Queensland Awards for Excellence, as well as winning Best European Restaurant at the 2010 National Savour Australia Restaurant & Catering Awards for Excellence in October.

According to Bacon, it's the restaurant's consistency that won over the judges. "We don't really see what everyone else is doing so we just have the one standard that we set ourselves. My team is really focused on delivering a high-quality product. It's that consistency and our ability to exceed our guests' expectations that is our strength," says this executive chef who's been in the industry for 25 years.

A slew of other R&C Queensland awards for Hayman gave Bacon and management more to celebrate, winning Corporate Caterer of the Year, Best Tourism Restaurant, Best Asian Restaurant, Best Breakfast Restaurant and Best Wedding Caterer. The gongs continued at the national awards, also taking away Best Corporate Caterer, Best Wedding Caterer, Best Asian Restaurant and Best Tourism Restaurant.

Hayman Island has been one of Australia's iconic resorts since it was created by aviation pioneer Reg Ansett in 1950. However, it was another Australian, Sir Peter Abeles, who is responsible for the existing five-star resort. Abeles had a \$300-million vision that included building fine dining restaurants and creating a

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Glenn Bacon, La Fontaine, Haymen Island

# Island life

Queensland's Hayman Island was the stand-out at last year's Awards for Excellence. Executive chef Glenn Bacon explains why



Glenn Bacon, executive chef at Hayman Island: "There's no such thing as a busy Saturday night—guests want that service every night."

level of luxury that was unknown in Australia at that time.

La Fontaine, the island's culinary jewel, is adorned with Louis XVI-inspired furnishings, elegant chandeliers and the restaurant's centrepiece—a limestone fountain. Contemporary European cuisine is on the menu, with seasonally oriented fare. "I'm not a chef who wants to change the whole menu in one go," says Bacon. "If a dish evolves or if it's no longer relevant, then we'll change that particular dish. All the menus are printed in house which gives us the option to freely change things around."

For a theatrical effect, La Fontaine has a selection of dishes that are created live at the table, including a signature duck dish presented in two courses. "A lot of chefs usually stay in the back-of-house and leave the waiters to deal with the guests," says Bacon, "but with these particular dishes, it's an opportunity for the chefs to interact with the guests."

**F**ood and beverage manager Oliver Strickland has his office positioned right next to Bacon's for easy communication. When creating a new dish, for example, they have to organise the recipes, the costing and the photographic images, and then launch it and train the staff. "We work in harmony with each other," explains Bacon. "It's just one new dish but there's a lot of background work to make sure we have a lovely consistent product going out."

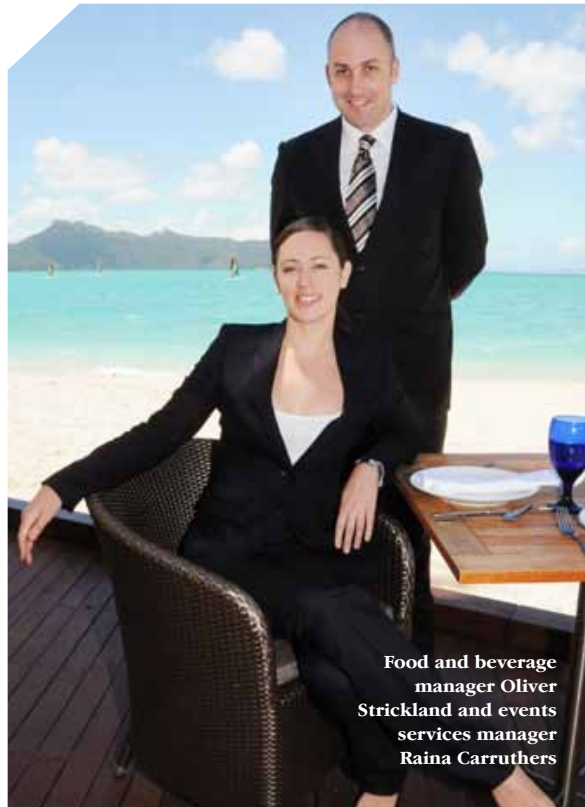
While Bacon manages the cooking staff, Strickland manages 69 front-of-house staff. He also looks after Hayman's In-Room Dining Department, a 24-hour-a-day service where staff members drive up to half a kilometre in buggies to deliver food to guests. "At the same time, there are 420 staff on the island, so we also coordinate nearly 1300 meals a day for them," he says.

Bacon and Strickland share a certain synergy with their career paths. Both are from Sydney and both started their early training at the Sydney Opera House. Bacon completed his apprenticeship there, and then travelled to Europe and the UK where he worked in various London establishments including the highly acclaimed Chelsea House Hotel, The Berkeley and InterContinental Hotel in London.

Oliver Strickland began his career straight out of high school at a pub restaurant in Sydney, eventually working his way up to banquet supervisor at the Sydney Opera House. He too was bitten by the travel bug and after four years overseas, he returned to work at the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth during the upheaval of its refurbishment and rebranding. He began at Hayman in 2005.

With Bacon and Strickland managing La Fontaine, as well as its other main restaurants, bars, lounges and numerous other culinary projects, operational skills are paramount to keep everything running smoothly. "Hayman is a unique environment. It's not like we do normal hours; it's a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week operation," says Strickland.

Hospitality training is another priority that makes La Fontaine a restaurant leader. Hayman is a member of the Leading Hotels of the World organisation which requires a regimented training process. "They audit our resort to a certain standard and all our training for all our service staff is to their standard," says Bacon. "All of our waiters do two days of Hayman training and a day-and-a-half of food and beverage training before they even get to look at a guest."



**Food and beverage manager Oliver Strickland and events services manager Raina Carruthers**

### Planning for the unexpected

Beachside breakfasts one day, a mini-rock festivals the next...it's the unexpected that appeals to professional caterers working at an upmarket island resort. On Hayman, events services manager Raina Carruthers is capable of rising to any challenge.

Some of the most complex events she's taken on include 'Hayman on the Greens', where reams of picnic blankets and stalls providing sushi, soups and ice-creams were set up so guests could watch the likes of rock legends James Reyne and Vanessa Amorosi perform. Another memorable event was a circus big-top on the island. Fortunately, large events don't faze Carruthers—the biggest event this year had 440 guests. "My passion is the banqueting and conference side of things," she says.

The logistics are undoubtedly daunting, but the dedication of the catering staff is recognised by Hayman's management. "They are some of the hardest working people I have ever come across," says Oliver Strickland. "With some of the larger conferences, it's not uncommon for our staff to be doing 18- and 20-hour days, three or four days in a row."

Camaraderie is a key requirement due to the way of life on the island. "At the moment we have 420 staff," says Carruthers, "and we live within 500 metres of each other in our village. Your friendships are built within a week, yet you feel like you've been friends for two years. These people become your surrogate family." ○

Due to the unique island lifestyle, the turnover of hospitality staff, particularly juniors, can be fairly frequent. However, according to Bacon, upper- and mid-level management is currently stable. "It's not unusual for employees to stay for 10 years," says this executive chef. "During the past five years, it's really turned around and we are concentrating on making sure the team are well looked after and have everything they need."

Situated in the heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef, environmental awareness has been well addressed at La Fontaine and Hayman's other food establishments. All products and delivery crates are recycled, and they have encouraged suppliers to deliver everything in sustainable packaging.

"Everything is broken down in the kitchen," says Strickland. "A lot of our cardboard and green waste are put onto mulching piles, then every month we get a huge machine to spend two days turning it into mulch. The resort is almost like a little city: we make all our own electricity, provide our own fresh water and have our own sewer plant. We make sure nothing is wasted."

For many guests, a visit to Hayman is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. "We have such a mix of guests, whether it's a bus driver or a CEO of a multinational company," says Bacon. "One thing they all have in common is their expectations are the same, and that's what we try to exceed. We have a captive audience here, but the variety of restaurants we can offer makes a visit a distinctive island experience that is unavailable on the other islands." ○



**Glenn Bacon says that, due to the unique island lifestyle at Hayman, senior staff frequently stay for years.**