

Living foodie's dream



☰ Luke Nguyen

Age: 31

Profession: Chef/restaurateur, author, TV presenter

Experience: Chef/restaurateur for 15 years, author for three years and TV presenter for three years

First job: Glassy at age five (for his family's restaurant)

Interests: Cultures, cuisines, music and travel



CHEF Luke Nguyen decided at an early age he wanted to own a restaurant and he has managed to achieve that goal and many more

He juggles running his Surry Hills restaurant Red Lantern, writing cookbooks, working on his SBS travel and food series Luke Nguyen's Vietnam (the second series airs later this year) and working as a consultant to Star City's latest restaurant Fat Noodle.

What does your job involve?

My day used to be simple. Wake up, let the staff in, prep for lunch and dinner service at Red Lantern. Make sure our guests have a great dining experience and my staff leave happy so we can come back the next day and do it again. If I achieve this, I can pay the bills and the doors stay open.

Nowadays, I spend a few hours at Fat Noodle at Star City where I am consulting chef. I also try to fit in a few hours a day working on my next cookbook and organising my next show in Vietnam.

When did you decide you wanted to become a chef?

I knew I wanted to be a restaurateur when I was 12 but I thought to be a good restaurateur, I needed to become a good chef too.

What was your first job in your profession? How did you get it?

My first cooking gig was in my parent's Vietnamese restaurant in Cabramatta.

I got it through slave labour.

Describe the first job you ever had.

My first job away from the family business was in a cafe/restaurant that also had a nightclub upstairs. I worked on the floor as well as covering for chefs in the kitchen when they were too trashed to come in for work. On weekends I also worked the bar upstairs in the nightclub. I was 17 years old – yes under-aged, I told my boss I was 20.

What do you consider to be your big break?

I was sick of listening to my own voice saying, "I really want to open my own restaurant". So on my 23rd birthday, I risked everything and opened Red Lantern.

What have been your career highlights?

Releasing two top selling cookbooks – getting awesome ratings for my travel/cooking program [Luke Nguyen's Vietnam] on SBS and consulting on Star City's Fat Noodle.

What are the pros and cons of your job?

A pro is that I really, really enjoy what I do as it all involves food. A con is that it does not leave much time to relax.

What do you do when you are not working?

Enjoying live music or just travelling.

Work with passion

It's never too late to become a master chef, writes Kate Prestt

CELEBRITY chef and Skills Victoria ambassador Guy Grossi wants people with a passion for cooking to know it's never too late to enter the kitchen.

"It's never too late," he said. "But make sure you love it or you'll question why you've done it every day."

Grossi has more than 25 years' experience in the hospitality industry and is using this to help raise the profile of TAFE and training qualifications.

"Starting out in the kitchen you need to gain skill and experience to become good at what you do," he said.

"You'll make a lot of mistakes. You can't expect to walk into any career and get it right the first time."

As a schoolboy Grossi spent weekends and school holidays following his father Pietro around the



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commercial kitchens where he worked.

"Other kids were doing things they enjoyed; my father had me working in the kitchen. He thought it was enjoyable for me, but I'd end up sweeping floors, peeling potatoes and washing dishes," he said.

At 15 Grossi wanted independence and enough money to take out beautiful girls, so he left school to become a chef.

"I thought I'd feel comfortable in the kitchen, but then I started my professional career and it was very different to my years of helping

Dad. I had to learn responsibility," he said.

Enrolling in Commercial Cookery at Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Grossi completed his Certificate III (a three-year course with one year on-the-job training) in 1984.

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Now Grossi and his wife Melissa own three restaurants – Mirka at Tolarno hotel, Grossi Trattoria (Bangkok) and Melbourne's oldest

Italian restaurant Grossi Florentino. Grossi's fourth restaurant opens in Melbourne in October.

During his career Grossi has released two Italian cookbooks and he will release a third later this year.

He recently co-hosted the SBS series *Italian Food Safari* and has appeared on *MasterChef Australia*, but his involvement in the kitchen is still very much hands-on.

"I try to get into the kitchen as often as I can," he said.

"I feel, while I still enjoy it, I like to be there for our younger staff, to give them a first-hand feel for it."

But Grossi also believes he still has plenty to learn.

"I still haven't hit my straps. Something tells me I'm still learning and I'll continue to get better at what I do all the time."

