



INDUSTRY FEATURE

From the world to the classroom

PETE (THIRD FROM LEFT) WITH STUDENTS FROM HIS COOKERY CLASS

Working in hospitality is often described as a job that can take you anywhere in the world – and Pete Handy is living proof. With more than three decades in the industry, Pete has travelled the globe and worked in countries from Spain to Switzerland to Italy. Now his passion lies in passing on his knowledge to the next generation and showcasing the opportunities that are available to them.

It's a story that speaks to the very heart of workforce development, not just filling roles, but shaping careers. Pete's journey through the industry is one built on curiosity, creativity and a willingness to take opportunities as they come, wherever they may be in the world. It is also a reminder that hospitality, at its best, is far more than a job. It is a career that evolves, adapts and, for many, becomes a lifelong pursuit.

For Pete, that journey began in some of the most structured and demanding environments the industry has to offer. Large-scale hotel kitchens, with their multiple departments and disciplines, provided the foundation. From there, the world opened up. What followed was not just a career

progression, but a lifestyle, one that blended travel, creativity and the ability to earn a living anywhere. "I started at the Regent Hotel in Sydney, under Serge Dansereau in a large hotel, which is probably kind of the best place to start, because they've got a whole lot of different departments," Pete says. "I learned my craft there, was there for three years, then moved to another place in Palm Beach in Sydney for my final year, and then went overseas and just travelled for 15 years."

That ability to move seamlessly between countries and roles is something Pete is particularly passionate about highlighting to young people. In an era where career pathways can often feel rigid or narrowly defined, hospitality offers something different: flexibility, mobility and a genuine sense of possibility.

It is also, in Pete's view, one of the few industries where creativity is not just encouraged, but essential. For those who may not see themselves in a traditional academic setting, it can provide both direction and purpose.

"This industry is amazing for travel, which is what I wanted to do, and a profession where you can get



paid a reasonable amount of money, and you don't have to re-qualify when you go overseas. You can get a job anywhere," Pete says. "I've got off a plane in Majorca and got a job on the super yachts, just because I could cook. And that's what I wanted, that's the lifestyle I wanted. I love to ski, so I went working ski fields in Switzerland and Italy. The other thing about hospitality is it's a creative outlet. I needed that outlet because I wasn't really good at school.

"I needed that outlet because I was very creative, and I always loved cooking. So I thought, well, why not combine travelling, cooking and being creative? I got to travel around the world and get paid for it. This is a great industry for young people to get into that side of things."

After decades in kitchens and training environments, Pete made a conscious decision to shift his focus. Rather than continuing to work with apprentices already in the system, he wanted to reach students earlier – before they had made up their minds about what their future might look like.

That decision ultimately led him to Elizabeth College 12 months ago, where he now teaches commercial

cookery. It is a role that combines everything he has learnt across his career, but with a different objective: inspiration.

"I've taught adults most of my life, because not only have I been a chef, but I've also been a hospitality and commercial cookery trainer, a trainer of apprentices in the workplace for private training organisations, RTOS, around Melbourne



SOME OF THE TREATS PREPARED AND SERVED BY ELIZABETH COLLEGE COOKERY STUDENTS



and Tasmania.

"I wanted to see what I could do with younger adults, so 15, 16, 17-year-olds, and getting them inspired to get into the industry, rather than training people that were already in the industry. So when I got an opportunity to go into Elizabeth College, I took it up."

At Elizabeth College, the approach is deliberately practical and grounded in real-world expectations. The course mirrors the structure of a registered training organisation, delivering nationally recognised qualifications while immersing students in a working kitchen environment. From commercial-grade equipment to real customer interactions, students are exposed to the full scope of hospitality operations.

It is not simply about learning recipes, it is about understanding standards, systems and the discipline required to succeed in industry.

"We try to make it as real world as possible. We've got a combi oven, we've got six burner gas stoves, we've got commercial deep fryers, we've got a commercial walk in cool room. Everything is as commercial as possible.

"We've got paying customers that come in every week, so the teachers, we sell food to them. That provides students that interaction with customers, interaction with EFTPOS machines and learning how to use cash and non-cash transactions. It has to be broad, because I wanted them to understand it's not just about cooking the food and going, 'Oh, we're done now', and just push that to the side.

"The younger kids... they don't realise what hospitality is and what it has to offer. There's so many opportunities available"

- Pete Handy

"There's also the cleaning side of things, making sure that everything is spick and span to industry standards. Ultimately, I want these kids to be able to walk into a workplace and the workplace go, 'Ah, you got trained properly.'"

Beyond the technical skills, Pete is equally focused on changing perceptions. Too often, he believes, hospitality is viewed as a fallback option rather than a career of choice. In his classroom, that

narrative is challenged early.

His 24 students – the most the course has had enrolled for years – are encouraged to see the industry for what it truly is, diverse, dynamic and full of opportunity, both locally and globally.

"I think the younger kids nowadays, they don't realise what hospitality is and what it has to offer. Front of house or back of house, it doesn't matter. They don't understand the opportunities that are available. They think it's just restaurants, cafes and bars," he says.

"They don't understand that it's cruise ships, it's airlines, it's private islands. It's being a private chef or a front of house manager for a private company. There are ski fields, there's so many opportunities that are available, and it's not just about chefs, waiters and waitresses.



"There's so many other jobs that are available in the industry, and I just want to make sure that they are aware that's what's available, and trying to inspire them with my enthusiasm and passion, because I still have it, even at my age, I still have it for this industry, because it is such a great industry to be

in."

Importantly, success in Pete's classroom is not defined solely by how many students go on to join a kitchen environment. For many, the biggest takeaway is confidence, the ability to step into the world with a practical life skill and a better understanding of how food, service and hospitality fit into everyday life.

That might mean entering the industry, or it might simply mean being able to cook a proper meal, host friends or approach food with a bit more care and curiosity.

"The way I started the year out was, and this might be controversial, but I didn't care if they didn't want to go to university, I didn't care if they didn't really want to do this course. But I said to them, 'how about while you're here for a year, let's have a bit of fun. You learn how to cook for yourself, so when you get out into the big, wide world, instead of having two-minute noodles, you can actually cook something nice. Or if you've got a girlfriend or boyfriend you want to impress, or a family member you want to impress, you know how to cook properly'.

"I can pass that knowledge on, and that enthusiasm for food. And that's the other thing, enthusiasm for food. It's not just a fuel you kind of shovel in your mouth and go, 'right I'm ready to go'. It's got to taste good, it's got to look good, it's got to be appetising. And so I want to pass that knowledge on to them."

Ultimately, Pete Handy's career has come full circle. From a young chef searching for a creative outlet, to a seasoned professional travelling the world, and now an educator shaping future pathways, his story reflects the full breadth of what hospitality can offer.

And if a handful of students leave his classroom with both a job opportunity and the ability to cook something far better than instant noodles, then he would likely argue the next generation is already on the right track.

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