

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

HUNTER VALLEY CHEF TROY RHOADES-BROWN CREATES FESTIVE DISHES FOR CHRISTMAS LUNCH WITH ALL THE FAMILY.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE RECIPES TROY RHOADES-BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY CATH MUSCAT STYLING LUCY TWEED



Troy (centre) celebrates with his mother Leslie (far left), wife Krysten, daughters Edie and Olive, father Terry, and Krysten's parents Sue and Vasco. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** Troy and son Hudson collect fresh mint from the kitchen garden; wreath made by Lucy Tweed; "Supporting small producers has been at the core of Muse since day one," says Troy; Krysten and Leslie chat in the vegie garden.



A VETERAN OF THE HUNTER VALLEY food scene, Troy Rhoades-Brown's career began in earnest 20 years ago, when he arrived in the famed winegrowing region in New South Wales at the age of 19. He had scored a job working under Robert Molines at his eponymous restaurant, Roberts (now Circa 1876) – an experience Troy describes as “transformative”, both professionally and personally.

“When I came here as a young chef to work for Robert and Sally Molines, I immediately fell in love with the vineyards, the produce and the pronounced seasons,” says Troy. “The kitchen was full of French provincial abundance. Quails were tea-smoked in the dining room, and game, suckling pigs, goats and rabbits were butchered in-house. That experience made me love food, cooking, and eating in a completely different way, and set me on the path to Muse.”

After four years at Roberts, Troy was eager to spread his wings and opened Muse Restaurant on the Hungerford Hill

wine estate in 2009: “I signed the lease with my then-wife, Megan, and we opened the doors on my 24th birthday. It was naive and bold, but one of the best decisions of my life.”

Inspired by the Hunter Valley region itself, Troy's vision was clear from day one. “I wanted to create something contemporary but distinctly regional, built on producers, with refined yet warm hospitality,” he says. “Nearly 17 years on, those values remain at the heart of Muse.”

An extension of the ethos behind Muse's success (the restaurant has retained its two-hat rating for 11 consecutive years), Troy personally grows an increasing amount of the produce he uses in the Muse kitchen. His garden includes 45 raised beds, a greenhouse, orchards and a worm farm. “We also forage fruit from local properties – pecans, cumquats, grapefruits, mulberries – which inspire dishes, drinks, and even the pecan shells are used for smoking meats,” he says.

Troy's commitment to seasonality and shared meals is reflected in the delicious recipes he's shared with us. He says the barbecued prawns are a guaranteed crowd-pleaser. “Don't holster this recipe for Christmas only!” he says. “Adapt it for a special pasta dish or use it for a show-stopping entree with roasted summer cherry tomatoes.”

Bringing together his intertwined worlds of cooking, gardening and family, Christmas is a time to relax and celebrate for Troy, his wife Krysten, and children Hudson, 12, Edie, nine, and two-year-old Olive. “Life can be chaotic with a family of five, a busy restaurant, countless plants and a few animals to care for, but I embrace it,” says Troy. “At Christmas, everything comes together: wine, laughter, flowers and produce from the garden, grandparents competing for cuddles with Olive, and our Great Dane, Dutch, inevitably stealing ham off the table.”

Visit musedining.com.au and [@muserestaurant_](https://www.instagram.com/muserestaurant_) >

“At Muse, what we're truly known for is hospitality,” Troy says. “Guests often talk about the warmth of our service and the way the food feels connected to place. My own kitchen garden is at the core of their work. We'll continue weaving more from my garden into the menu and telling that seasonal story in deeper ways,” he says.

“When I came here as a young chef, I immediately fell in love with the vineyards, the produce and the pronounced seasons.”



Muscata-glazed ham with grilled grapes. Tablecloth from Cultiver; **FACING PAGE:** **CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** Ginger & sweet soy glazed turkey skewers. "Turkey makes the Christmas Day menu here in a non-traditional but tasty way, with a sweet, salty glaze and dusting of dried chilli," says Troy. Glasses by Riedel; vibrant purple shamrock; Troy helps Hudson in the vegie garden; shapely globe artichoke; flourishing society garlic; BBQ prawns with venice, lemon, garlic & parsley butter; garden beds hold sugarloaf cabbage; ISA Brown chooks foraging.



"The liqueur muscat brings such a beautiful flavour to the pork, but be sure to leave enough in the bottle for a dram with dessert!"



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE The summer chopped salad features radish, cucumber, apple and manchego. "Chopped salads are underrated," says Troy. "Every mouthful delivers all the flavours and textures of this fresh, tasty salad."; Edie and Olive love the dainty flowers; crispy roasted potatoes with garlic, lemon & chives. "Beautiful rustic baked potatoes play a great supporting act for the ham," says Troy. "A squeeze of the roasted lemon helps lift the whole thing." Inlet serving dish from Ecology. Salt dish from Mud Australia and pepper mill from Myer; it's wine time for Sue and Krysten.



GINGER & SWEET SOY - GLAZED TURKEY SKEWERS

Serves 12

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 500g turkey mince | 30g white miso paste |
| 30g red onion, finely diced | 20g ginger, finely diced |
| 15g sesame oil | 2 cloves garlic, finely diced |

Place all ingredients in a bowl and mix well for 2 minutes until the mixture becomes pale and sticky. This ensures the meat binds properly and won't fall off the skewers.

With damp hands, shape 12 x 50g oval patties. Wrap and press each around a bamboo skewer.

Cook skewers in a large pan or barbecue over medium heat for 3 minutes each side. Brush skewers all over with the tsukune glaze and cook for 1 more minute to caramelize.

Serve with kewpie mayonnaise, sliced shallots, and a sprinkle of dried chilli or toasted sesame seeds.

TSUKUNE GLAZE

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 70g soy sauce | 40g brown sugar |
| 70g mirin | 20g rice wine vinegar |

Place all ingredients in a pot and reduce by half.

BBQ PRAWNS WITH VERJUICE, GARLIC & PARSLEY BUTTER

Serves 12

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 3kg whole large green prawns (choose premium Australian prawns - Skull Island Jumbo recommended) | 150g butter, cubed |
| | 4 cloves garlic, finely sliced |
| | 400g verjuice |
| | 20g parsley, chopped |

Peel prawns, leaving heads and tails on. Devein with a small knife.

In a pot, melt 20g butter and gently sweat garlic for 1 minute. Add verjuice and reduce by 80% until thickened. Whisk in the remaining butter cubes to emulsify. Keep mixture warm.

Season prawns and cook on a hot barbecue or frypan for 2 minutes each side.

Toss prawns in a large bowl with the verjuice butter and chopped parsley. Serve with napkins and a shell bowl.

MUSCAT-GLAZED HAM WITH GRILLED GRAPES

Serves 20

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 whole leg smoked ham (7-8kg, quality pasture-raised recommended. I have used Stockinpiggle) | MUSCAT GLAZE |
| 2 bunches red grapes | 200g Muscat (I used Hungerford Hill Liqueur Muscat) |
| | 300g brown sugar |
| | 100g sherry vinegar |
| | 60g Dijon mustard |
| | 6 cloves |
| | 4 star anise |

Preheat oven to 145°C (fan-forced).

Remove skin from ham, leaving some around the shank. Score fat in a diamond pattern. Let ham sit at room temperature for 1-2 hours.

For the glaze, simmer all ingredients in a pot on very low for 10-15 minutes. Strain.

Spoon 20% of the glaze over ham, roast for 2 hours, glazing every 20 minutes. Rest before carving.

Grill grape bunches in a hot pan or barbecue and place alongside the ham to serve.

CRISPY ROASTED POTATOES WITH GARLIC, LEMON & CHIVES

Serves 12

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 3kg brushed potatoes | 2 bulbs garlic, halved |
| 6 sprigs rosemary | 1 lemon, halved |
| Flaky salt | Chives, chopped, to sprinkle |
| 300g extra virgin olive oil | |

Scrub potatoes clean. Place in a large pot of cold, salted water with rosemary. Simmer until just tender. Drain and discard rosemary.

Halve potatoes and squash gently with your palm onto an oiled tray. Season with flaky salt and drizzle with 150g olive oil. Roast at 220°C (fan-forced) for 25 minutes.

Flip potatoes, add garlic, lemon and remaining oil. Roast for a further 20 minutes until golden.

Squeeze roasted lemon and garlic over the potatoes and sprinkle with chopped chives.

SUMMER CHOPPED SALAD

Serves 12

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 400g mixed radishes (my favourites are breakfast, watermelon, daikon, purple daikon) | 10g dill leaves |
| 400g cucumber | 10g basil leaves |
| 400g green apple | DRESSING |
| 300g manchego (sheep's milk pecorino) | 70g extra virgin olive oil |
| Juice of ½ lemon | 30g sherry vinegar |
| 20g mint leaves | 15g honey |
| | 10g Dijon mustard |
| | Pinch of salt |

Dice the radish, cucumber, apple and manchego into 1.5cm cubes. Toss apple pieces in lemon juice to prevent browning.

Whisk all the dressing ingredients together in a bowl.

Just before serving, toss salad ingredients with the dressing and fresh herbs. >



BRANDY CUSTARD & PISTACHIO PUFF PASTRY CAKE WITH FIGS & BERRIES

Serves 12

VANILLA BRANDY CUSTARD

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 800g cream | 50g brandy |
| 30g vanilla paste | 12g powdered gelatine |
| 120g sugar | 65g water |

Make the custard the day before serving the dessert. Place the cream, vanilla paste, sugar and brandy in a saucepan. Warm over low heat, stirring regularly with a spatula and scraping the base and corners, until the mixture reaches 75°C on a digital thermometer. Do not boil – overheating can cause the custard to split.

Remove from the heat, add the gelatine mixture and whisk to dissolve, then blend briefly with a hand blender to emulsify. Pass through a fine sieve into a container and chill overnight to set.

On the day of assembly and serving, transfer the set custard to a bowl and whisk gently for 1 minute until smooth and pliable. Spoon into a piping bag.

PUFF PASTRY

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 3 egg yolks | 12 figs, sliced |
| 15g milk | 100g roasted pistachios, |
| Pinch of salt | chopped |
| 25cm x 20cm sheet all-butter puff pastry (Carême brand recommended) | 60g honey |
| | Large bowl summer berries |
| | Vanilla ice cream |

To prepare the puff pastry, whisk egg yolks, milk and salt in a bowl. Brush over puff pastry. Bake at 170°C for 20 minutes, then 130°C for 30 minutes until crisp.

*To finish, slice puff pastry in half. Pipe custard over the bottom layer, top with second layer. Garnish with figs, pistachios and honey. Serve with berries and ice cream. *CS**

*Troy and Krysten have fun with little Olive. Baubles from Myer. **FACING PAGE** The scrumptious brandy custard & pistachio puff pastry cake with figs & berries makes an ideal dessert for Christmas Day. Green bowl from H&M Home. Inlet footed bowl from Ecology.*



“This is a very fancy take on the Australian bakery vanilla slice. The honey, pistachio and figs really make it a celebration – and the kids always race to the fresh berries and vanilla ice cream.”





It's feast time for the family, with a stunning backdrop of soft, buttery sunlight and cute alpacas – Woolie, Shaggy and Maggie – in the yard. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** Troy and Krysten's parents enjoy wine and a chat; Olive taste-tests garden goods; Troy's vegetable garden offers plenty of seasonal inspiration for Muse; elegant table settings; lunch is served; cheeky Great Dane Dutch awaits his share of the leftovers.



"Life can be chaotic with a family of five, a busy restaurant, countless plants and a few animals to care for, but I embrace it."