



“I’M A BEAR CUB?”

He’s the hairy/sexy/cuddly one from Master Chef! George Calombaris tells Matthew Myers about his passion for cooking, his gay mates and what really happened with fellow chef Manu in that Perth restaurant!

DNA: So, exactly what happened between you and Manu Feildel at the Malt Supper Club in Perth?

George Calombaris: [laughing very loudly] Well, basically two boys were being boys. I was standing at the bar, a bit intoxicated, and Manu was pretending to blow me. There must have been someone from a newspaper there and off it went! I had no idea that it had hit the papers until I was at the zoo with my fiancée and my son in the pram and I got a text message from Matt Preston saying, “What the hell were you doing in Perth!” But it was just two boys having fun. **You and Manu both started on Ready Steady Cook and now have rival television shows, but you’re obviously still good friends.**

We’re great mates. That’s what’s lovely about it. There’s no animosity or rivalry like people think there is. We respect each other. Manu is a great chef and does a wonderful job on *My Kitchen Rules*. The three of us on *Master Chef* are proud to see another cooking show doing so well. **In your career, you must have met a lot of famous people?**

The loveliest person to come through the restaurant was Sarah Jessica Parker from *Sex And The City*. When you meet someone in real life they either meet your expectations or let you down. But she didn’t let me down at all. She’s absolutely lovely! **She’d have to be cool considering she’s married to Ferris Bueller!**

That’s right! **You prepared the menu for Ellen’s Grand Hyatt cocktail party. That would’ve been some event!**

Yes, to be asked to do the menu for Ellen was a coup. Throughout a cheffing career there are little signposts along the way that remind you it’s an industry where you make people happy, and to be asked to do this menu was a lovely thing. I had lots of time to plan for it and to come up with something that suited that evening, the people and our special guest, Ellen. We all know she’s a vegan, so there were a lot of vegan-friendly dishes.

What did you think of Ellen?

She’s certainly a busy woman and I must say an absolute superstar! In fact, I don’t know how she does it. She’s so full of life and has an amazing aura. You just want to stand next to her and listen. What was nice is that she enjoyed the food so much that she wanted it sent to her room

as well. For me that was a great sign, which I’ll never forget.

We all know Ellen’s stance on same-sex marriage. Where do you stand?

Exactly the same as her. My theory is don’t take away the happiness of people. We all make choices in life and as long as you’re a good citizen and treat people with respect, well, who has the right to control that?

Do you have many gay mates?

Plenty, especially in the restaurant industry. A lot of my staff are gay and lesbian and I love them dearly. One of my restaurant managers from The Press Club was an absolute legend on the floor and now runs her own restaurant. She’s

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a wonderful person and I’m quite proud of her.

Did you know that in the gay world, you would be regarded as a bear.

[Laughing] A bear! Oh, wow! Matt Preston is sitting right next to me; what would he be?

Well, technically, he’d be the bear and you’d be a bear cub.

[Loud laughter from both] And what about Gary Mehigan?

An otter.

[Louder laughter] An otter! I love it! I love it!

If you were gay, who would you go for?

David Beckham. He’s an amazing footballer and a very good-looking man.

You have a restaurant in Mykonos called Belvedere. Mykonos, of course, is a popular gay destination.

It sure is and the restaurant is only a 45-seater but half of it covers the pool area so at lunchtime there’s a lot of scenery going on!

When I’m there with my fiancée she spends most of the day sitting poolside with all these gay boys. She has an absolute ball. Mykonos really is wonderful fun.

We’re talking about fashion in this issue of DNA, what do you think makes a great look for men?

Simplicity is always the best. The classics. I like the little touches, like an interesting belt or tie. That’s all you really need; just something that’s going to turn heads a little bit. That’s the key. **You’ve worked around the world, won awards, written five cookbooks, opened eight restaurants, have a great career in the media – all this from your humble studies at the Melbourne Box Hill Institute TAFE. What advice would you give someone starting out in the culinary arts?**

Be true to yourself, and if you don’t love it, don’t do it. If you don’t wake up in the morning feeling really excited about going to work, then it’s not worth it. It shouldn’t be a chore because it’s your life. You have to do something that you love.

Getting personal: does George Calombaris prefer jocks, boxers or freeballing?

Fitted boxes, one hundred percent. I like to know there’s some security down there! But Gary Mehigan loves the beaded G-string and Matt Preston loves freeballing [Laughing]!

What exciting things are there in store for the new season of Master Chef?

It’s our fifth season and with each year we learn more and more and hopefully make the show bigger and better. It’s one of those shows that’s in the psyche, a bit like the AFL premiership, where everyone waits for it and when it starts they all get excited and embrace it. It’s just the three of us now (with Matt Preston and Gary Mehigan), back to the way we were in series one, which is great.

What’s been a Master Chef highlight for you?

A couple of things, like knowing that we’ve been a little cog on a big wheel that’s influenced the way the country eats. I think we’ve influenced young kids, shown that cooking is a cool thing to do and that eating whole and real food is great. The joy that *Master Chef* has brought to Australian television screens is a wonderful thing, but it’s not just Australia; we forget that *Master Chef* is in over thirty countries, which is incredible.

Finally, do you have any idea what your porn name is? (Your first pet and the street you grew up on).

Yes! It’s Rocky Tudawali.

More: Master Chef Australia Season Five screens on Network Ten.