

# The great Gary and George cook-off

Helen Greenwood finds out what MasterChef judges Gary Mehigan and George Calombaris really think of each other.

A four-hour plane flight to Perth is how long it took Gary Mehigan and George Calombaris to come up with the recipes for their cookbook, *Your Place or Mine?*

When they landed, they had all the dishes down. The long-term friends and MasterChef presenters took 43 ingredients – they were meant to do 40 but a few more crept in – and came up with their own take on each one.

The book ties their stories and lives together through food. "We have the same appreciation for food and the same ethics when it comes to food," Calombaris says. "We understand each other's flavour palate."

The two chefs know each other well. They worked together for seven years in Melbourne, Calombaris famously as Mehigan's apprentice until he left to open his own restaurants.

They teamed up again on the judging panel of the hit television show. "We've been working together for 18 months," Mehigan says. "We see more of each other than we do our respective partners."

We put their knowledge of each other to the test.

## GEORGE CALOMBARIS

*If Gary were an ingredient, what would he be? And why?*

Duck fat. He's soft and gooey on the inside.

*If Gary were a kitchen implement, what would he be?*



Pair of jokers ... MasterChef's Gary Mehigan and George Calombaris.

He'd have to be a spoon because he's always tasting and eating. It's the most important utensil in any kitchen.

*When is Gary at his happiest in the kitchen?*

When he is cooking and plating food. He's always happy at the start of service till you upset him and he slowly deducts points.

*When is Gary at his most annoying in the kitchen?*

He's not. However, when he gets tired or gets a bee in his bonnet, he gets so sarcastic it's hilarious. He says it's because he's English and they are the most sarcastic people on Earth.

*Which is the dish of Gary's that you most like in Your Place or Mine?*

His Sussex Pond: crisp suet pastry, a gooey, lemony, sweet centre and custard. It says a lot about his culture, who he is as a cook.

*What was the funniest moment with Gary on MasterChef?*

We're all on a health kick at

the moment and I catch him sneaking dessert into his mouth and he says it's fine.

*What do you enjoy most about working with Gary?*

His happy nature, his teaching nature and that he listens. A lot of people don't like to listen these days. A lot of people are tellers, not listeners.

*What is Gary's most endearing personality trait?*

When you cook something and give it to him and he loves it, he makes you feel wonderful. He shows so much affection.

*What is Gary's strongest attribute as a judge on MasterChef?*

His food knowledge is exceptional. If I know half of what he knows, I'm a very good man.

*How would you describe Gary's cooking style?*

Classic, clean, tasty. If it's steak with peppercorn sauce, it's the best grilled steak and the best peppercorn sauce.

*What is the difference between*

*the way you cook and the way Gary cooks?*

I probably cook on a tightrope. I like to go out on a limb, to be a little bit out there. He is the safe option, down on the ground and he always hits it home.

*What do you most admire about Gary?*

His dedication, his determination. He never drops his standards. He believes in what he believes and won't take short cuts.

## GARY MEHIGAN

*If George were an ingredient, what would he be? And why?*

Feta. We call him the little feta because he's always going on about it and the fact that it's not made from cow's milk and everyone thinks it is. He also goes on about the Greeks not eating lamb – they eat pork and goat.

*If George were a kitchen implement, what would he be?*

A Thermomix because he uses the blooming thing all the time.

*When is George at his happiest in the kitchen?*

When he has a bunch of ingredients and he's figuring out how he is going to pop them on the plate and he can be spontaneous. He often doesn't put what you think he will put on the plate and then his chest puffs out and he's proud of it.

*When is George at his most annoying in the kitchen?*

When he's bored. He's like the cheeky little boy, he disappears and creates havoc. He needs to be busy.

*Which is the dish of George's that you most like in Your Place or Mine?*

I love his egg and chips. When I think of every imaginative and interesting thing he's done, where on Earth did this classically British dish come from?

*What are the funniest moments with George on*

*MasterChef?*

He always gets his verbs and nouns and adjectives mixed up. He did really badly at school – which goes to show you don't have to do well at school to do well in life – and he'll come up with this serious speech and Matt [Preston] and me will be on the floor. He doesn't realise he's doing it. He will say you "basilled" me instead of baffled me or "this is the hardest challenge you've ever faced". We call them Georgisms.

*What do you enjoy most about working with George?*

It's a bit of like minds. I've known him for a long time.

*What is George's most endearing personality trait?*

He's very honest and very up-front. He's a very giving person and very generous with his time.

*What is George's strongest attribute as a judge on MasterChef?*

He brings real high-end experience from the front line. He's creative and can back it up with quality. His list of successes legitimise his youthful perspective and he's changed the face of modern Greek cooking [in Australia].

*How would you describe George's cooking style?*

He has leveraged brilliantly his heritage, his family food. He has taken the best of modern food and done it to suit his soul food.

*What is the difference between the way you cook and the way George cooks?*

My food is all about comfort, tradition and technique. George's food, in comparison, is free, with no constraints – peasant cuisine turned up a notch.

*What do you most admire about George?*

His family values. He's very grounded and sensible. He's an old man in a young body.

Article from the SMH

## Meet the Junior MasterChef top 12



**NICK, 10 (NSW)** - Nick started cooking at the age of seven. He enjoys hosting dinner parties for his friends and his specialties are desserts and lamb. He is writing a cookbook titled *How do you like your lamb?*

**ISABELLA, 12 (QLD)** - Cooking since the age of five, Isabella dreams of opening her own restaurant with her twin sister Sophia. She learned to cook Italian cuisine from her mum and traditional Sicilian dishes from her grandmother and aunt.

**SOFIA, 12 (QLD)** - Like her twin sister Isabella, Sophia began cooking at a very young age, and favours Italian dishes. Her favourite person to cook for is her father and she has learnt her techniques from celebrity chefs like Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson.

**JACK, 12 (TAS)** - Jack began cooking at the age of nine. He's a big fan of Julia Child, using her cookbooks and the 2009 movie of the famous US cook as inspiration for his own creative talents.

**SIENA, 9 (VIC)** - The youngest competitor of the final 12, Siena has her own cooking club at home in Victoria where she teaches her friends to cook different recipes. She loves desserts and the first dish she cooked was muffins at the age of four.

**EMILY, 11 (SA)** - A country girl who lives on a farm in South Australia, Emily began cooking at the age of three and her specialty dish is rabbit and venison pie. Her grandmother is a chef and her uncle cooked for the Navy. Emily's dream is to become a food stylist.