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REAL FOOD REAL PEOPLE

"IT'S
MKR 7
MY KITCHEN RULES
SEASON!"

The competition in the kitchen is fierce when Pete Evans and Manu Feildel return for a seventh season of Australia's number one program, MY KITCHEN RULES.

Twelve new teams of talented home cooks and aspiring chefs get set to shine at Kitchen HQ as they battle it out for \$250,000 in prize money in Australia's most popular and hotly contested cooking competition.

Acclaimed chefs Colin Fassnidge, Karen Martini, Guy Grossi and Liz Egan return to Kitchen HQ to judge the new batch of hopefuls.

And when the famous MKR doorbell rings this year, there will be a new judge taking a place at the dinner table!

This year's contenders are:

GROUP 1

New South Wales - Monique & Sarah - Cops
Victoria - Mitch & Laura - Brother and Sister
Queensland - Cheryl & Matt - Cougar and Cub
South Australia - Rosie & Paige - Best Mates
Western Australia - Anna & Jordan - Mother and Son
Victoria - Gianni & Zana - Married Lawyers

GROUP 2

Queensland - Alex & Gareth - Miners
New South Wales - Luciano & Martino - Italianos
Victoria - Tasia & Gracia - Sisters
Queensland - JP & Nelly - Lovebirds
Western Australia - Nev & Kell - Tradie and Cleaner
Victoria - Jessica & Marcos - Fitness Friends

Each team will take turns to transform an ordinary home into an instant restaurant for one pressure cooker night. They'll plate up a three-course menu designed to impress the judges and their fellow contestants.

Last year, an average audience of 2.43 million viewers tuned in to see Pommie best mates Will and Steve take out the 2015 title.

Again this year, the top two teams will battle it out in the grand final where they will present their ultimate dining menu to a full restaurant.

My Kitchen Rules launches after the Australian Open tennis in 2016.

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GROUP 1 NSW

MONIQUE & SARAH



Workmates Sarah, 26, and mum-of-four Monique, 33, bonded over their love of food in their stressful office. As police officers, work is serious and coming home to cook is a good relaxer for these two.

How did you end up on MKR?

Monique: I said to Sarah, "You're a good cook aren't you?" And she said, "Yeah I'm a good cook." "Good, do you want to do MKR with me?" And so we filled out the application in our lunch break.

How long have you been work mates?

Monique: It's a very young relationship. We'd only been working together about three months when we applied for the show. We've known of each other for about four years. We bonded in a very male-dominated workplace - Sarah and I enjoyed each other's femininities and our beautiful smells, our perfumes and eating healthily surrounded by all the boy smells.

Who taught you how to cook?

Sarah: I remember growing up my mum Cheryl saying, "Sarah you need to come into the kitchen, you need to see this, you need to know this one day." Her big thing is you don't throw out anything. As a kid I was just like, "Whatever Mum." When I got a bit older, from maybe 16 onwards, I started to develop a bit of an interest in what she was doing and I wanted to watch and by the time I had almost moved out of home, I had a really big interest and started looking at the different aspects of food and the healthy side of food.

Monique: I'm half-Dutch and half-Maltese and I come from a very big family. Anytime we would go to a family function it was all about the food. If you rocked up to my nona's house and said you weren't hungry that's unheard of, of course you're hungry, you're always hungry. She's my main inspiration. I have a picture of her on the fridge - she looks over me cooking every day.

What style of food will you be cooking?

Monique: We're modern Australian but then Sarah has her family type of cooking (Italian Polish) and I have my family cooking.

What ingredients do you use a lot of?

Sarah: Butter, rosemary, a lot of garlic, onions, cream and a lot of vegetables as well.

Monique: I like my protein and spices.

Are you girly girls outside of the police force?

Sarah: We're girly girls at work! We're always like, "Is my hair ok, does my make-up look ok?"

Monique: We try to be as girly as we can. We can't wear jewellery, that's an OH&S thing, but we might put a nice little ribbon in our hair.

Have you found the job as fulfilling as you thought it would be?

Monique: I look at life very differently now, unfortunately, because of the things I've seen. It does change your view on life. It makes me appreciate what I've got, my husband, my children, my health and all the beautiful choices my parents made for me. Life's very tough and it's very easy for kids to go the wrong way very easily.

How do you cope under pressure?

Sarah: The pressure in the kitchen is a little bit different than the pressure out on the street at work. But we can grab some positivity from what we do at work and try and use it the same way to try and calm ourselves down. But when we first met Pete and Manu, we melted. That shocked me!

How competitive are you?

Monique: We're competitive within ourselves in that we want to do well and hopefully really knock them out of the water, at the same time we don't wish ill on someone else so that we can succeed.

How opinionated are you?

Monique: We're very honest because we're also representing the NSW Police; it's important within our work and what we do, to be honest people. We uphold the law, we are sworn to be truthful, so we're carrying that through to our experience with MKR. If we like something we say so and if we don't like something then unfortunately we don't like it.



GROUP 1 VICTORIA

MITCH & LAURA



Siblings Mitch, 21, and Laura, 19, may be the youngest cooks in the competition, but you won't find many teens dishing up offal quite like these pair. Avid fans of nose-to-tail cooking, they are inspired by the great produce surrounding their rural Mornington Peninsular home. Both students, they are yet to decide where their future lies but the lure of the kitchen is hard to resist at times.

How did you end up on MKR?

Mitch: It was mainly me. We all watch the show and I said, "Oh, Laura would love to do that. Laura and Mum would kill it on the show." But Mum didn't want to and then it ended up getting pushed back onto me.

Why did you put your sister forward?

Mitch: She has a massive culinary passion. And she's a really good cook. Given the caliber of what she cooks at home, she deserves to show off her skills.

Who is the head chef?

Laura: I'm definitely head chef. Or it's more like an army - I'm commander and he's my soldier. He's very good.

Mitch: I have good clinical skills, not the imaginative skills that Laura has where she can just create new things.

Laura: He's the general surgeon, I'm the plastic surgeon. I make the magic happen!

Where does your passion come from?

Laura: Well, mum has always been a pretty avid cook and dad dabbles. But mostly we live in an area where the produce is so amazing - we have wineries, olives, everything all around us. We're always at the beach fishing. And then I really got into food and cooking programs and I'd watch them religiously as a kid. I'd learn and I'd want to try things and it sort of spiraled from there. I'd watch different chefs, more advanced chefs and try more advanced things.

What do your friends think about your obsession with food?

Laura: I guess it gets a bit tiresome. Pretty much all I talk about is food and martial arts, that's my life.

What martial arts do you practice?

Laura: I do Zen Do Kai which is a karate-based one and Brazilian jiu-jitsu and Muay Thai. I fought once in the ring and that's where I want to go again. It's hard at the moment to balance everything as you need to train intensely.

Mitch: I love board sports: skating, surfing and cricket is my life.

You're a fan of nose-to-tail cooking...

Laura: We love a bit of everything. Our dad is completely against it. He's like, "Why eat the heart when you can eat the loin?" Because it tastes good!

Mitch: It's just more interesting too. It's more adventurous and interesting tasting the offal. Some of the crazy things you can make with it that are just more obscure than your standard cuts. It's more fun playing with them, it's an unknown realm.

Do you like throwing dinner parties?

Laura: We did a massive dinner for 19 people for my 18th birthday. I didn't want to have a raging party so instead I had a feast. We raised the animals and processed them and had a massive suckling pig, ducks and chickens. Mitch helped me out in my time of need. That was a good night; I was proud of that one.

How do you feel being the youngest team?

Mitch: Maturity beyond her years. It's interesting the way the judges and contestants look at us. They are kind of expecting us to be juvenile and quite basic with our knowledge I think. So being the youngest we're trying to break those expectations.

Laura: We both love seeking knowledge. I love knowing about cuisines and techniques; it's something I love to research and that's why I watch so many cooking shows because it's food for my brain. I would prefer a Heston show than Facebook.



GROUP 1 QUEENSLAND

CHERYL & MATT



Hailing from Brisbane, sales/marketing manager Cheryl and student Matt are used to people misinterpreting their relationship. Mum-of-one Cheryl, 50, has been happily dating 26 year-old Matt for the past 18 months and says he won her over with his chicken Caesar salad.

What do you think about being a 'cougar' Cheryl?

We want to say to everyone out there that age doesn't matter. Why should a number make a difference about who you're with, who you enjoy your time with and how you go through life. Society shouldn't dictate that.

Matt: Yeah it might seem weird but there's 50 year-old men going out with 18 year-old women and that's not frowned upon in society. What we're doing is something that is showing that females have a right to do whatever they want and if we enjoy each other's company, then it doesn't matter.

What's your vibe like in the kitchen?

Matt: When we're 100 percent in sync we're pretty good. I'm usually naked though!

Cheryl: We're usually having a few drinks and listening to some music. Matt is pretty good at grabbing whatever is in the fridge and putting it all together. Being a student (he is studying HR), and having to make ends meet, he's really good like that. He makes it taste so good and look so good. We laugh a lot.

Is there a head chef?

Cheryl: Usually Matt is the head chef with all the savoury stuff, unless I'm in control mode.

Matt: Then there's no point in telling her what to do because she'll do it her way anyway.

Most used ingredients?

Matt: Whatever is in season - there's no point buying things out of season as it's just not viable.

How do you cope under pressure?

Matt: Usually we cope well if we've planned things out properly. I like to have an idea of how things are going to unfold.

Cheryl: He's the calming influence on me. I don't stress but I panic a little bit; I get a bit anxious. He'll do something crazy like dance with me or say something stupid. Laughter always works for us; it gets us back on track.

Matt: If I see she's under pressure I always try to bring her out of it, then she forgets what happened.

What are your hobbies other than cooking?

Cheryl: I go to the gym and play tennis and do a bit of gardening. We have a great veggie patch. We mainly have herbs but also beautiful tomatoes, shallots, kale and spinach. Matt's dad has a veggie patch and he brings back sweet potato and turmeric when we cook.

Matt: I like looking at the financial market and being up to date with what's going on in the world.

What do you see as your biggest strength in the competition?

Cheryl: We can laugh at any situation and think about it as a 'glass half full' opportunity and the two of us together are stronger than singly.

What about your biggest weakness?

Matt: It might be our laughter as well because sometimes we don't seem to take things seriously. Because we have this front of being idiots, people look at us and think we're not serious.

Are you competitive people?

Cheryl: Both of us have swum competitively, but I was never at the level Matt was (he was the fastest breaststroker in Queensland as a teenager). But we are competitive people, even with each other.

Matt: Yeah even if we're driving separate cars we'll try to beat each other back to the house.



GROUP 1 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

PAIGE & ROSIE



Mum-of-two Rosie, 37, and best friend Paige, 34, love nothing more than a gossip in the kitchen. There they are happy to experiment with creating flavourful healthy food and with a wine in hand they can “solve the world’s problems”. The next step in their future is a wedding event company for Rosie, and a providore for Paige.

How did you meet?

Paige: I went to a friend’s house to do something and Rosie was there. You were on the couch. And I thought, “Who’s this interloper?” And she didn’t even introduce herself or anything. She just sat there like a mute.

Rosie: It is pretty intimidating with that group of friends at times, being the interloper. I was the newbie.

Who taught you to cook?

Paige: My mum Wendy and my grandma Marybelle. We’re a big family of cooks so I grew up in the kitchen. Every memory I have as a kid is being in the kitchen. I love food; I love eating food. It’s all there in the back of my head; I just have to remember it.

Rosie: My best friend at the time was an apprentice chef. I sort of learnt a lot of base skills from her and then built on that myself.

What does cooking mean to you?

Paige: Rosie gets very romantic when she talks about cooking. I enjoy cooking for me, it’s more entertaining friends and family and making a lovely meal for them rather than some crap out of the freezer. It’s nice to be able to do something and do it well. And sometimes it’s one of those things you can do on autopilot and it’s relaxing as well.

Rosie: I just love immersing myself in it. I like creating things and making something from nothing almost. Just from scratch, from base elements. It’s a bit of a creative outlet for me.

How do you be creative while cooking for a young family?

Paige: Her kids eat gourmet.

Rosie: They eat what we eat. Beth likes pate and a cheese platter. They are pretty good eaters.

Do your kids like cooking?

Rosie: I want them to learn but it drives me crazy at the same time because they get the chair and drag it across the kitchen floor and then say, “Mummy can we help” and I’m like, “Of course you can.” It’s going to be 10 times more of a mess but I’m happy for them to do it. They need to learn to cook one day so she might as well start now.

Do you have a particular style of cooking?

Rosie: We do both love Middle Eastern food and a lot of Asian food.

Paige: Especially in winter we’re both guilty of doing a lot of comfort, rustic foods.

Is your strength in sweet or savoury?

Paige: We’re definitely a lot stronger at savoury. I never really ate sweets growing up.

Rosie: We might’ve had a square of dark chocolate and a cube of apple every now and then.

Paige: It’s almost like you were mistreated.

Rosie: It’s cool though because I love dark chocolate and it’s good for you.

What do you love most about each other.

Paige: How passionate she gets about the most random things. It makes me giggle and it’s very endearing. And the way that even though she’s thought about every single possible outcome to anything that’s ever happened, once push comes to shove she stills goes, “Sh*t, what will I do?” It’s quite funny.

Rosie: Her hilarity. How you can be just in any situation and make me laugh. And you are generally freakin’ hilarious.

Are you competitive?

Paige: I am. It’s from my sister and brother. We used to have this game where we would see who could eat the biggest whole piece of food at the table. We’d be swallowing half a boiled potato. It’s sibling rivalry that’s just grown.

Rosie: I’m not competitive. I hate sport. It’s just too much pressure being in a team and needing to win. Why can’t everyone just be happy playing?



GROUP 1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ANNA & JORDAN



Anna, 55, was destined to have one of her four sons grow up to be her sidekick in the kitchen and Jordan, 23, is happy to take up the role. Although her young apprentice has a few of his own ideas on making Anna's traditional Maltese and Italian dishes a tad healthier.

Who taught you to cook?

Anna: My mother Maria. It was actually my job when I came home from school to help Mum in kitchen. I was one of seven so there was always a lot to do.

So you're used to cooking for large crowds?

Anna: Since I was a child there was minimum of nine of us for dinner and then as siblings brought people into the family it just started getting bigger and bigger.

Jordan: Mum can cook for 15-20 people easily. Not a problem. When we found out we had to cook for 12 we were like, "Yeah that's standard." I think everyone else was a little shocked. And Anna was like, "That's a light dinner tonight."

What got you into cooking Jordan?

Jordan: I just love actual produce and eating. I worked on a farm when I was younger so my passion for cooking comes from actual fresh produce and nutrition of food and what it does for the body so that's why I love to cook. I'm a vegetable enthusiast. I think healthy cooking has so much flavour already and you want to let the vegetables shine. You don't want broccoli tasting like butter.

What has your mum taught you in the kitchen?

Jordan: Essentially everything I know about cooking I know from my mum because she's the cook in the household. My first dish was chocolate mousse. All European foods - Maltese is my mum's side and my dad's side is Italian, so mum has taught me those but the health foods I've kind of branched out and taught myself a lot.

Anna: He's taught me a lot about eating healthy.

What's an average dinner at your house?

Jordan: Well it's always a four-course meal.

Anna: There is family night on a Tuesday and everyone is expected to be home. It's the only time where we all sit together as a family now that they're adults. And I'll do a very big meal.

Jordan: My mum is a feeder. She gets satisfaction from people eating.

Anna: I love it.

How do you get on together in the kitchen?

Jordan: We yell at each other and bicker. We don't really agree.

Anna: I think it's our European blood, we just get hot-blooded and quite opinionated. But we don't hold grudges.

Is Anna head chef?

Jordan: Yes, but I'm willing to challenge her opinions. At the end of the day, Anna's word goes ... sometimes.

Anna: He does challenge me and it's not a bad thing. Sometimes it pushes me out of my comfort zone because I've been cooking for a long time. Like the other day he said, "Let's do a kale pesto." And I said, "I don't think so." And when he did it, it was really good. I think sometimes because I've been doing it a certain way for so long I become stagnant.

Sweet or savoury?

Jordan: Savoury, I do not do sweet well. But Mum does everything well. I love ice-cream, otherwise I'm seriously in love with vegetables.

Anna: I love pastry for dessert, gnocchi and pastas. I don't like hot dogs. I don't know how people can eat that red thing; it smells. I don't like over-processed foods.

Most used ingredients in your kitchen?

Jordan: Olive oil, garlic, onions, tomatoes. Our uncle cold presses the olive oil; my other uncle drops off the eggs.

Anna: I have friends who grow their own garlic. The region we live in used to be a market garden so we're used to having a lot of fresh produce on hand. A lot of my friends are still market gardeners. You really learn to appreciate what freshness is.

Other interests besides cooking?

Jordan: I love boxing, bike riding and meditation.

Anna: Yoga, travel, dancing and socialising. We're both social queens; we just love it. We're a very social family. There's always someone over or we're going somewhere. My husband Joe's favourite saying is: "How many for dinner tonight?" There's always someone there for dinner.



GROUP 1 VICTORIA

GIANNI & ZANA



Newlyweds Gianni, 27, and Zana, 24, don't do things by halves. About to open their own law firm in Melbourne, these high achievers have the MKR title in their sight. And they aim to win it while educating viewers on traditional Montenegrin food.

What do you love most about each other?

Zana: I think the biggest thing is how he is with kids, that's what made me fall in love with him quickly. The kids gravitate towards him.

Gianni: I love that Zana is so grounded, so honest. When people first meet her they might be a bit taken aback at first, but then they just fall in love with her too because what you see is what you get. I love that about her.

Describe your relationship.

Zana: Although we have similar cultural values and we respect each other, we're very different personalities. He's very quiet, relaxed and nothing stresses him out. I'm so the opposite; I'm a stress head, I just have very high expectations and I'm very vocal and honest and I say it how it is. Gianni calms me. He's actually changed my personality a lot.

Gianni: I like to think I'm pretty laid back. She pushes me. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't be doing this now even though I love to cook; I just wouldn't have taken that step.

How do your cultural backgrounds impact your cooking?

Zana: Most of our food is based around what we were taught from our grandparents, so it's a lot of heritage.

Gianni: And they are the things that drew us together too; we both have a big respect for our grandparents and our heritage. Our cultures, even though they are different parts of Europe (Zana: Montenegro; Gianni: Italy), they are very similar.

Zana: The closest person to me was always my grandmother and as soon as I met Gianni's nona she became my best friend as well so that's how we fell in love, based on our love for our grandparents.

Do your families bond a lot over food?

Zana: Yes, especially in the Montenegrin culture because they are very poor so they don't buy gifts. It's the biggest sign of respect to cook for someone in our culture.

What does cooking mean to you?

Gianni: For me, cooking is relaxing. Not many men in my family or my culture would cook. For me, it is relaxing but I'm very methodical. I need recipes, but she'll just whip things together.

Zana: I feel with my wooden spoon and hands, they determine what I need so we balance each other very well.

Are you head chef Zana?

Zana: We work very well in the kitchen together. It's bizarre because when we're in real life, I'm definitely the stronger personality. I'm the boss clearly. But in the kitchen, it's a little bit different. You've got to be smart and know when to be the boss.

What ingredients do you use regularly?

Zana: We cook with a lot of offal. We cook peasant food. It's technical but simple ingredients. And it's very cheap, you can literally cook for under \$10 for a family.

Favourite kitchen gadget?

Zana: We're very basic. We use my grandmother's long rolling stick pin for most of our stuff and a wooden spoon. That's all we need. I don't like using gadgets for cooking.

You're both lawyers. Have you always been high achievers?

Zana: We are very high achievers. Ever since primary school I wanted to be captain of everything. I always worked so hard. I was naturally not intelligent. I struggled when I went to high school; I was very behind in school and worked my butt off.

My careers counsellor told my mum I wouldn't be capable of achieving the scores to become a lawyer and that's when I put my head down and didn't stop studying. I'm the type of person that if I say I'm going to do something, I'll do it no matter what.

Gianni: I was the opposite. My parents are always like, "If you tried you could actually go places." I was happy with what I was achieving.

What are your other interests?

Gianni: I play Futsal (indoor soccer).

Zana: Fitness, shopping, fashion, cars. We love cars.

Gianni: I've got a 911 Porsche.

Zana: I've got the new Range Rover Evoke. It's a real mum car though so I need to start popping out munchkins!



GROUP 2 QUEENSLAND

ALEX & GARETH



Best mates Alex and Gareth are almost each other's shadows. From Mackay, they live together on the Sunshine Coast and both work in fly in/fly out mining jobs. And these 25-year-olds have both been saving in the hope of chasing a food dream in the near future. Will MKR be the ticket they need to get them out of the mining industry and into their own restaurant?

Who taught you how to cook?

Gareth: We did. I suppose we built our essential skills from our folks but I only really got super interested in it while both of us were living out of home at a young age. I really got keen on it when I found out about girls, and wanted to impress them.

Alex: It wasn't until I started living by myself about 23 that I started getting really into it. And now that Gareth and I are living together again, that's when we started cooking together.

What sort of foods do you like to cook?

Gareth: We are big meat eaters. We try to experiment with different cuisines; I notice I cook a lot of Asian. I don't really think to myself I might cook some Asian, it just kinda happens. And I like roasting meats.

Alex: I like trying to make healthy food taste good. We have a lot of friends in gyms and that sort of thing and counting calories and they just eat the most boring stuff. I think I definitely like Asian food more because of all the spices.

What do you love about cooking?

Gareth: Eating, hands down. I think my favourite thing is cooking for other people and seeing the satisfaction on their face when they're eating something nice.

Alex: I think it's a bit of an artwork. It's really satisfying when you serve a good meal.

What are each other's most annoying habits?

Gareth: I think I get like a foot square on the bench to work with and there's just stuff everywhere.

Alex: Yeah I'm always leaving a trail behind with whatever I'm doing. I leave a bit of a mess. I think Gareth's is trying to get him to places on time.

What do you love most about each other?

Alex: I think Gareth is really cool, calm and collected and I'm the stress head out of us. I think it's good to have him around

at times when I'm stressed and Gareth's just like, "It'll be fine, don't even worry about it." He brings me back to earth at times.

Gareth: I'm kind of the opposite; if I'm under stress he gets me going, gets me to move on a bit quicker. We can count on each other.

Why do you think you have what it takes to win?

Alex: I think being young and pretty ambitious and I guess the drive to not return to the mining industry is enough for us to get through this.

Do you like using recipes?

Alex: I hate 'em. I like to look at them to get a rough idea but as for following stuff step by step it's not really me. Both of us are pretty big on just finding stuff in our cupboards and I must admit I've never seen anyone at our age with pantries stocked like ours. It's always good for us to open our fridge and pantry and make something awesome from it; I think you get more ideas that way as well. I think with a recipe you never really go outside the box.

Gareth: I think the only time we ever really follow a recipe is if we are trying to learn something super traditional like pasta dough. I like to think we are similar to Jamie Oliver in the kitchen - I like the way he cooks, it's always a splash of this and a dash of this.

How do you go with the sweet side of things?

Alex: It's definitely a weak point for us.

Gareth: We've already learnt a lot so far. We've been watching a bit of Heston and we are planning on doing a bit of dry ice ice-cream soon.

What's your food dream?

Alex: We have been saving money from our jobs in the mines so that we can open something of our own and we're kinda hoping MKR will help fast track it. Like a bar and grill type of atmosphere, where you meet your mates and serve food that we like cooking.



GROUP 2 NSW

LUCIANO & MARTINO



Luciano, 49, was one of the first people Martino, 48, met when he moved to Australia 11 years ago. After dancing the night away at Mardi Gras, they became instant friends and began throwing Italian dinner parties showcasing authentic dishes for their lucky friends. Now as they approach 50, they are ready for a big change and cooking just might be the answer.

How do you know each other?

Luciano: We met 11 years ago through a mutual girlfriend of ours.

Martino: She introduced us and it was during the Mardi Gras and we spent the whole weekend together dancing and partying and we became good friends. And since then we've shared the love for, the passion for cooking Italian food.

What is your day job?

Martino: In Italy, I was a high school teacher teaching philosophy and history. Now I'm working for a jewellery company. It means travelling, travelling, travelling. And then MKR arrived, so for me this is a holiday.

Luciano: I'm a flight attendant on long haul. I've been in the hospitality industry all my life. I basically do the same thing as a restaurant only 33,000 feet in the air.

Do you only cook Italian?

Luciano: We cook it well because we know it, but we do other cuisines as well. But we are so familiar and so confident with Italian. I could cook you a dish a day for a year and still I wouldn't double up on a dish, it's so varied.

Martino: People think there is only one kind of lasagna which there is not, there is about 20 types.

How did you learn to cook?

Luciano: Watching nonna and my mum. And from working in restaurants - just because you are out the front doesn't mean you don't know what's going on in the kitchen.

Martino: And I've been close to my mum and my grandmother since I was young. Cooking is not only about food, it's all about chemistry: you have to put ingredients together and for me it's really a way to de-stress.

Luciano: And I love entertaining at home too. There's nothing more satisfying when you know you've made something nice and your friends are enjoying it. That just gives me such pleasure. It's the way we were brought up, especially Italians, around the kitchen, around the food, you go to nonna's house and before hello it's: "Are you hungry?" Food has always been in our life.

Who is the head chef in your kitchen?

Martino: When we have to do a dinner together, we do planning and we say because he is very good at kneading the dough or making the fresh pasta, normally he does this sort of thing. I'm more into sauces.

Luciano: He's very good at his sweets. In the kitchen, he's the chef and I'm the sous chef. There can't be two head chefs in the kitchen and we each bring our own individuality to the table.

Martino: When he does something wrong he starts singing.

Luciano: Music is a remedy to lots of things. I could not live without my music.

What's your favorite Italian dish?

Luciano: I don't think I could live without pasta. If you said you can't have pasta for the rest of your life, just kill me.

Martino: I was a big pasta eater but now I don't eat pasta too much because you know you have to look after yourself but when I do eat pasta it has to be perfect.

How would you describe your teammate?

Luciano: Easy-going, generous, hard-headed sometimes, reliable, caring, competent and proud.

Martino: He's a very giving person, he's so generous - this is the biggest quality of Luciano. I trust him, he's reliable, he's trustworthy, he's amazing.

What's your biggest weakness in the competition?

Luciano: Being Capricorns, we're hard-headed sometimes!

Martino: Because you're messy.

Luciano: As long as the end product is there, who cares! He's probably more organised than me, but I'm getting there.



GROUP 2 VICTORIA

TASIA & GRACIA



Siblings Tasia, 26, and Gracia, 24, can fight like the best of sisters, but they say it only fuels their passion in the kitchen. After growing up in Indonesia, India and Australia, these homely cooks have very big international influences on their cooking style. Just don't tell anyone they fear they can't cook rice without a rice cooker!

You both recently finished studying...

Tasia: I finished my post grad (in 2014) and then last year (2015) I've just sort of worked two different part-time jobs hoping I might get into MKR. I did my Bachelor in Psychology and then went on to study counselling. I work part-time at a hotel and part-time at an after school.

Gracia: I finished my Masters in March (2015) in Bio Medical and Health Sciences so I studied research and I also work part-time at a restaurant.

How do you get along in the kitchen?

Tasia: We argue a lot, but I think because we hang out most of the time, we kind of work around it. We fight all the time but I think that's how we communicate, it works with us. I think some people might think just because we argue we might not actually work well in the kitchen but that's how we communicate.

Do you have lots of family recipes?

Tasia: I always ask my grandma for recipes but she doesn't go by recipes, it's all in her head. She will just tell you what's in it, not quantities so you have to go back and work that out yourself. As long as we know the main ingredient and we've had it before we can work it out.

Gracia: That's for savoury, but for desserts I tend to need a recipe or I'll memorise it. We do Asian desserts and I make a lot of ice-cream.

What do you love about cooking?

Tasia: Cooking is therapeutic for me, even though it's pressure sometimes I just like the end result of creating something. Cooking is something we are both good at so we feel confident doing it. When we invite our friends over we know we can create something nice for them.

What would be a normal dinner for you at home?

Gracia: We always have rice on the table every night. There's always two dishes, not ever just one, always a minimum of two on the table. In our family we do tend to cook too much!

Tasia: When we have our friends over, we tend to cook more. And our dad notices that when we go out, Gracia, my mum and I we tend to over order.

What are your weaknesses in the competition?

Gracia: My stress levels get to me a lot. I think because I'm so used to being organised and I love to be organised, I plan everything to the detailed minute. I have lots of timers in my kitchen and they all go off at different times. And I overthink things before they happen.

Tasia: Outside the kitchen, people think I get panicked really easily and I get really stressed.

What are your most used ingredients?

Gracia: Chilli, we use chilli in everything, garlic, onion and shallots.

Tasia: The rice cooker is on 24 hours in the kitchen.

Gracia: We just have to show we know how to cook it without a rice cooker!

What are your other interests other than cooking?

Tasia: We love travelling. Gracia and I travel together every year, either with our family or we go somewhere with friends. We do a lot of shopping together. Gracia is into make-up, she has tonnes; and I love shoes.

Are you competitive?

Tasia: We're more competitive with each other than to other people. She's my constant rival.

What's your food dream?

Gracia: We've wanted to take the food journey for a long time but at the same time we've got, psychology for her, and science for me as a back up. I want to have a dessert bar.

Tasia: Of course we will have a savoury in the dessert bar, we have to!



GROUP 2 QUEENSLAND

JP & NELLY



For Nelly, 25, it was love at first sight when she met her new boss JP, 30. Luckily, after leaving the job love blossomed along with a healthy appreciation of nutritional food. Now “tea obsessed” Nelly wants to wow the MKR dining table with her tea-infused menu along with some help from her beau, who just happens to be the son of a French chef.

What sort of cooking do you specialise in?

JP: I specialise in winging it. I don't follow recipes, I sort of just open an empty fridge and I cook a meal. I love to cook Mexican and street food - anything you can eat with your hands.

Nelly: I love to do desserts - my thing is tea-infused desserts. Tea-infused everything. I drink a load of tea. I'm a tea enthusiast. I'm a crazy tea lady; I just need a cat.

Who taught you to cook?

Nelly: Both our families are European so we've been brought up with home cooking; no frozen meals, nothing from cans, everything fresh food so I think that's how we got our love for cooking.

JP: My dad was a chef so as a kid I'd always be in the kitchen helping him, even in his restaurants I'd pop in and do things with him. So I think that got me into it a bit.

Nelly: His dad is French so he taught me things to say to Manu.

JP: I got her to say cheeky things.

Nelly: My dad is Italian and my mum is Polish.

JP: And my mum is Polish too. That's what's good about us because we don't just cook one style of food; we can do everything.

How has your cooking evolved over time?

JP: Nelly has improved heaps actually. Not long ago I would've said she couldn't cook.

Nelly: Excuse me! I've cooked the best pastas you've ever tried in your life.

JP: She can cook a good pasta sauce. But now she's amazing.

What's an average dinner at home?

Nelly: We never do a boring dish. We try to make things that are fatty into healthy which is really cool. We do healthy Mexican. We get an idea and we just roll with it and it usually works.

So you're healthy cooks?

JP: Not in the show so much because it's a cooking competition, but in our normal life yes.

Nelly: But we don't let that get in the way of flavour first. Butter is our key ingredient.

Any big cooking disasters?

Nelly: We made a Polish cheesecake and it was horrible.

JP: It was like an omelette on the outside and raw in the middle.

Any favourite kitchen gadgets?

Nelly: The mixer, I love that.

JP: The cleaver. I have a really big heavy cleaver at home and I love it. It was my dad's.

What's each other's most annoying habits?

JP: This will go for a while, I'm annoying. She's too beautiful. But she annoys me when I drive.

Nelly: He is the worst driver ever. And he licks my face a lot and I hate it. He is like a teenage boy.

Why do you have what it takes to win?

Nelly: We're always adapting, always keen to learn and I think that we can do so many different things. We're not just stuck in one style of cooking.

JP: I think the main thing is we work really well together. Regardless if it's cooking or other things, we work really well together.

Nelly: Yeah, we bounce really well off each other. Where I'm lacking he can pick it up and vice versa.



GROUP 2 VICTORIA

JESSICA & MARCOS



Facebook is to thank for Jessica and Marcos following their food dream and applying for MKR. Childhood friends, they lost touch after Jessica, 30, moved. But these old Sydney school friends reconnected online and discovered their shared love of healthy eating after Marcos, 29, also migrated to Melbourne. Now they're ready to rattle the competition with their raw and nutritious menus.

So how did you find reconnecting after so many years?

Marcos: The friendship picked up where we left off and we realised we were into some of the same things: good eating, exercise, keeping healthy, cars.

Tell us about your shared interest of food and eating out.

Jessica: We realised we both were into the same kinds of food and healthy eating. If you've got options of brown rice or white rice, we're always on the brown rice if any rice at all. Then we started cooking together and we were a pretty good team in the kitchen; we have the same kind of food philosophy.

Marcos: It started with Jessica who would cook for me. Jessica's very particular with how she works and what she does and she's very good at it. It probably takes a little bit for her to let anybody in her kitchen and eventually I said, "I'm ok in the kitchen, I have some knife skills and I know a little bit about food, can we cook together?" It took her a little while and she let me in and then we just started cooking together.

Jessica: Over the years we now have a little group of friends and we have dinner parties together. We feed everyone and it's good fun.

Who taught you to cook?

Jessica: I taught myself. As a teenager I didn't want to eat meat and eggs. My dad always wanted meat and vegetables - there was always potato on the table; if you don't feed a Polish person potato and cabbage, watch out. So I started cooking for myself from about the age of 13.

Marcos: The internet taught me how to cook, I am a YouTube enthusiast! I will watch five videos on how to cook pork belly and then I'll throw my own little twist into the different methods I've watched and I'll make up my own one from there.

What kind of food will you be dishing up?

Marcos: We basically try to balance everything out and cook something that pleases everyone but that is also pretty damn good for you.

Do you have a signature dish?

Marcos: We're very diverse - we go from Asian to Italian, but my favourite is a seared tuna with black sesame on top and a nice Asian salad and pickled ginger.

Jessica: We like really fresh, clean food in their natural state. We make some vegan cheese cakes and raw tarts: the food is raw and all of the nutrients are there, nothing has been cooked away.

Marcos: We just steer away from the nasties: butter, fat, meat fats, sugar. We don't completely cancel it out, we just steer away from it most of the time.

How does cooking make you feel?

Marcos: I love cooking my own food because I know what's gone into it and I'm guilt free when I eat it.

Jessica: Cooking is my life. When I'm finished cooking I'm thinking about what I'm going to cook next, what's in the fridge, what do I have pickled. I've been falling asleep on the couch after a really long day at work and I have ingredients in the fridge and I couldn't sleep, I had to get up and cook something I had in my head. I lose sleep over food.

Sounds like Jessica is definitely your head chef...

Marcos: Jessica is definitely a lot more experienced than I am. I'm really comfortable being sous chef and I like a bit of direction especially when it's someone I look up to. She can be bossy at times; she's really direct and knows what she wants.

Jessica: I think if it was someone I didn't care about as much I'd probably just be barking orders, but because I care about Marcos I'll try and soften it a little bit but I'm very direct, I'm very honest and I'm very forward. You'll always know where you stand with me. I don't understand why people don't value honesty. Honesty makes a lot of people uncomfortable.

Do you want a career change after this?

Jessica: I would like to study patisserie. I think we can all think that we are great and we know everything but unless you've learnt the industry way from the beginning ... I think to get a job you need certificates and certain qualifications.



GROUP 2 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

NEV & KELL



After meeting each other two years ago, Nev and Kell found they shared a passion for food. Nev, 48, a control room attendant, thinks it's the "duck's nuts" to be on MKR. No need for prize money, he would've done it just for the apron says cleaner Kell, 44.

Tell us about your cooking?

Nev: We do all our cooking together. An average weekday meal would probably be a roast dinner; everyone loves a roast dinner.

Kell: We have romantic nights sometimes; we do jazz it up. We might have scallops. We like good quality food.

How does cooking make you feel?

Nev: Happy. We just get up some Sundays and say, "Let's cook today." And all we do is cook all day and then give the food away. The neighbours love us, especially the kids. They love the desserts.

Kell: I lean towards desserts. Nev's very good at cooking meats and things like that. We make it fun; we put the music on and dance around the kitchen.

Nev: I think that's why we do it because cooking is fun. Sometimes we argue a lot because there can only be one head chef.

Describe your teammate.

Kell: He's a good teammate. We're honest with each other - if he's doing something and I don't think it's up to the best, I'll tell him what it needs, he listens and cops it on the chin. He's got such a good heart and he cooks with love and passion.

Nev: We bounce off each other, that's why I love cooking with her and truthfully I couldn't do this competition with anyone else. She's the shoelace that holds us together.

What are each other's most annoying habits?

Nev: She takes up all the bench space in the kitchen.

Kell: The only thing I find annoying in the kitchen is how hard he is on himself, he never gives himself credit. Other than that, he's a bit messy.

What do you love most about each other?

Nev: How she washes up.

Kell: How we muck around. We take everything seriously but we also make it fun because if you don't have fun I think it shows on the plate, shows in the food.

What will be your secret weapon in the competition?

Nev: Probably our passion for cooking. I want every dish to be perfect.

Kell: I think our best weapon is each other - when one's down, we pick the other one up and we keep pushing ourselves. You get us on a plate: a whole lot of fun, hearty food and a lot of laughs.

Who were your kitchen mentors?

Nev: I remember my great grandfather used to make an apple sauce. Well we always thought it was apple sauce, but what he used to do is add chokos to it, because chokos take on any flavour that you cook with it. We didn't know the difference. But mum actually upset me a little while ago when we made her an apple pie. She asked, "How do you make your pastry?" And I said, "How do you make yours?" and she goes, "I always used one from the shops." All these years I thought she made her own pastry. I was devastated.

How do you cope under pressure?

Kell: I cope with pressure really well. Nev, on the other hand, sometimes he needs to take a step back and take a breath. He loses it and I bring him back to where he needs to be.

Nev: I want it to be perfect so I'm a bit hard on myself. Like doing anything, if you're going to mow the lawn, you're not going to half mow it.

What other hobbies and interests do you have besides cooking?

Nev: We go to the gym together just about every day.

Kell: And we like to go to the movies, we love to eat out and we like to travel too.





PETE EVANS

JUDGE

His personal mantra is “cook with love and laughter” and that’s exactly what co-host and judge Pete Evans wants to see from the new crop of MKR contestants.

“Love is the key ingredient for any successful dish,” says Pete.

Pete cites his mum’s spaghetti bolognese as his favourite go-to dish. While he’s made a few tweaks to fit into his paleo philosophy, including upping the vegetable content and ditching the pasta, he says it is dishes that you’ve cooked many times which are more likely to contain that vital love ingredient.

A fan of nose-to-tail cooking, Pete was pleasantly surprised to be served numerous offal dishes at this year’s instant restaurants.

“The standard of cooking among our contestants has definitely lifted. Our home cooks have evolved – they are more multicultural, inspirational and a lot more seasonal.”

Pete is a man of many talents. In addition to co-hosting My Kitchen Rules since 2009, he is a respected chef, health coach, entrepreneur, author and father.

Born in Melbourne and raised on the Gold Coast, Pete’s passion for cooking was discovered early on.

“My cooking life really kicked off when I ditched going to university and became an apprentice chef so I could surf all day and then cooked all night. Not that that really ever eventuated . . .”

Pete has opened and consulted on eight award-winning restaurants over the last 25 years as a chef and loves catering large events where the pressure is definitely on.

The keen fisherman and seafood devotee has a raft of cooking shows under his belt both locally and internationally.

An accomplished author, Pete released his 11th cookbook recently titled “Fast Food for Busy Families”. He is a regular contributor to magazine titles Gourmet Traveller, Wellbeing as well as writing for Good Food and The West Australian Newspapers.

In recent years, Pete’s love of fresh, healthy and organic food along with his passion for nutrition and wellbeing has influenced his recipes and cooking style and he is now a health coach qualified through New York’s Institute of Integrative Nutrition.

Pete’s latest project, The Paleo Way, is a healthy eating and wellness program. It consists of an online health program, a television program and a series of national speaking tours.

Pete is also an ambassador for the Australian Organic Schools Garden project.





MANU FEILDEL **JUDGE**

Judge and co-host Manu Feildel has finally had his dream come true in the seventh season of My Kitchen Rules – an enormous serving of sauce!

“I never thought I would say it on My Kitchen Rules, but there was too much sauce,” laments the cheeky French chef.

But one slip aside, he says the calibre of contestants this year is unbelievable.

“What I enjoy is how creative and ‘chefy’ some of the contestants are. And that they are bringing different cuisines of the world to the table.”

His recipe for MKR success is simple: deliver outstanding, home-cooked meals prepared with love. He wants teams to serve up their favourite dishes, the ones that invoke nostalgia and good memories, the ones they know inside out – just like the dishes he learnt from his mother and cooks for his own children, such as creamy cauliflower soup, tarragon roasted chicken and tarte tatin.

And he wouldn't mind seeing some “cheaper cuts of meat and unusual seafood that other cuisines might use that we don't necessarily know and use in Australia”.

Manu is no stranger to innovative cooking himself. After completing a chef apprenticeship at his father's bistro, he was bitten by the travel bug and packed his apron and headed to London.

Although he spoke no English, he began work at The Café Royal before rising through the ranks at restaurants such as Les Associes, Café des Amis du Vin and Livebait.

In 1999, Manu flew to Melbourne where he worked at Toofey's for a short while before heading to Sydney.

After six months working alongside fellow My Kitchen Rules judge Pete Evans at his Hugos restaurant, Manu opened the kitchen at Hugos Lounge in Kings Cross.

Manu ran the kitchen for 18 months before he moved to Restaurant VII. During his reign, the restaurant's exciting fusion of French and Japanese cuisine earned a coveted

Two Chef's Hats from The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide.

In 2004, acclaimed Australian chef Tony Bilson approached Manu to open his new venture Bilson's at the Radisson Hotel. In its second year, the restaurant was awarded Two Chef Hats and Three Chef Hats the following year.

More success followed with the opening in March 2009 of his own restaurant - L'étoile in Paddington, Sydney. Specialising in classic French bistro food, it too was recognised with a Chef Hat.

In 2011, Manu released his first cookbook, Manu's French Kitchen. He won Dancing with the Stars on Channel Seven and was crowned Chef of the Year at GQ's annual Men of the Year Awards.

He released his second book, Manu's French Bistro in 2012 followed by his third book, French for Everyone in 2014. He is currently writing his fourth book, due for release late in 2016.





COLIN FASSNIDGE

JUDGE

Colin Fassnidge didn't think My Kitchen Rules could surprise him anymore in 2016.

After all, last season he stepped up his judging role and took a secret third group around the country and landed himself a new apprentice for his Sydney restaurant Four in Hand.

But producers have even surprised him with what's on offer for the 2016 series. "Even I was surprised with what they came up with. Every year they freshen it up and this year it's especially fresh," he says.

Always on the lookout for new emerging talent, he says there is a lot of talent among this year's MKR contestants.

"I'm always on the lookout for new apprentices, but if they [contestants] talk to Drasko, I think they'll change their mind pretty quick," says the cheeky Irish chef known for his no-nonsense judging.

Colin may have a hard time narrowing down who he would like to cast in his own kitchen and he thanks MKR for the increase in talented home cooks.

"MKR has definitely changed home cooking in Australia. I think everyone knows good food from bad food now and they expect a lot more."

Known for his nose-to-tail cooking philosophy, the cheeky and outspoken Irishman says he was drawn to cooking as a career at the age of 12 after seeing esteemed French chef Raymond Blanc on a television program.

The eldest of three siblings, Colin recalls a Sunday roast being the first meal he ever cooked and says his passion for food was supported by his mother Colette and father Tony, who, he says, are "both good cooks".

The 41-year-old father of two began his career at Oxford's Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in 1994 where he completed his apprenticeship under his idol, Raymond Blanc.

Colin stayed in London for five years before heading to Australia after deciding to combine his love of travel with work.

Arriving in Australia in 1999, Colin worked at some of Sydney's most acclaimed restaurants including Banc and est. While working at est, Colin met his wife Jane, who hails from Northern Ireland.

Colin has been Executive Chef of The Four in Hand Dining Room since October of 2005. Since starting at The Four in Hand, his unique style has seen it transform from a small dining room in a pub to a 'foodie' destination.

In May 2011, Colin opened 4Fourteen. The Surry Hills hot spot was awarded the coveted Chef Hat just four months after its doors opened.

Crowned GQ Magazine's Chef of the Year in 2013, Colin released his first cookbook Four Kitchens in 2014.



GUEST JUDGES



GUY GROSSI

There's no place leading Australian chef, presenter and media personality Guy Grossi would rather be this Summer than sampling the homely and innovative dishes being prepared on the 2016 season of My Kitchen Rules.

As a long-standing judge on the hit series, he continues to be impressed with the calibre of home cooks across the country and it's their passionate enthusiasm that has him eager to return and taste more.

Guy is the owner and head chef of Grossi Restaurants, including esteemed Australian restaurants Grossi Fiorentino, Mirka, Merchant Osteria Veneta, Ombra Salumi bar and Bangkok's Grossi Trattoria.

A champion of presenting Italian cooking in Australia, Guy was awarded the prestigious L'insegna Del Ristorante Italiano by the president of Italy in 1996.

As well as being a guest judge on Channel Seven's My Kitchen Rules, he appeared alongside Neil Perry and Guillaume Brahimi on Iron Chef and with Maeve O'Mara as co-host of SBS' Italian Food Safari.

Guy is also a dedicated philanthropist and has fostered strong relationships with numerous charities such as HEAT (Hospitality, Education and Training), which he is patron; Starlight Children's Foundation and Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation.

He is the author of three cookbooks. He lives in Melbourne with his wife Melissa and their two children, Carlo and Loredana.



KAREN MARTINI

As an award-winning chef, restaurateur, author and television presenter, Karen Martini knows that complete diligence in the kitchen is the answer to success.

And she knows the teams who take that on board, and all critiques served up to them, will be the ones to realise their food dreams through MKR.

Karen's food message is drawn from her professional cooking career, her Tunisian-Italian heritage, and from the challenges of feeding nutritious and stimulating food to her young family.

Karen was the founding chef at the critically acclaimed Melbourne Wine Room and Sydney's Icebergs Dining Room and Bar. As executive chef of both restaurants she held Two Chef Hats in Sydney and Melbourne, and won, with Icebergs, the 2004 Best New Restaurant Award from the Sydney Morning

Herald. After 15 years at The Melbourne Wine Room, Karen and her partner, Michael Sapountsis, sold in 2011 to pursue new projects. Karen and Michael still own and run St Kilda's much-loved pizzeria, Mr Wolf, which they launched in 2004.

Karen was the food editor for The Age's Sunday Life Magazine for six years. She has contributed several articles to The Australian, and is the current food editor for The Age's Epicure lift out. Karen is also the author of four cookbooks and shares recipes and tips through her App as well as regularly publishing recipes, opinions, videos and news at karenmartini.com

For the last nine years, Karen has been the resident chef on Australia's longest-running lifestyle television series, Better Homes and Gardens.



LIZ EGAN

With more than 20 years' experience in the food industry, Liz believes it's very important to picture the dish you are planning to cook, imagine its taste, and then balance textures and flavours. This balance is really the best way to sum up what she looks for in her home meals, her Becco menu, and is what she'll be looking for from the MKR teams.

Liz grew up on Wantirna Estate vineyard in the Yarra Valley, surrounded by wine and food. Her mother is Italian and a wonderful cook, and Liz quickly learnt that the best way to ensure she got to taste everything her mother cooked at family dinner parties was to help in the kitchen.

After working in commercial kitchens almost by accident, Liz then moved on to form a catering company which ended up as Onions, a highly-regarded

restaurant in Melbourne's east. Onions was successfully developed into a Two Chef Hat venue and that recognition still counts as her proudest career moment.

Liz appears regularly in culinary publications such as Vogue Entertaining, Gourmet Traveller, Delicious magazine, Taste in the Herald Sun and Epicure in The Age. She was executive chef and co-owner of Becco in Melbourne until 2011.

Last year she launched her own website lizegan.com.au with projects with her two daughters, Bella and Lily, who are both studying nutrition.



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