

# R&C

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# WHALE WATCH

**Why Jonah's Restaurant  
& Boutique Hotel  
deserves its  
iconic status**  
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★  
**INSIDE  
JONAH'S**

Jonah's Restaurant & Boutique Hotel has been a Sydney hospitality icon for decades. But getting to the top—and staying there—doesn't come easy. By **Shane Conroy**

The view from  
Jonah's over  
Whale Beach,  
north of Sydney.



## AFTER 90 YEARS

perched above stunning Whale Beach in Sydney's Northern Suburbs, Jonah's Restaurant & Boutique Hotel deserves its lofty status as a harbour city icon. From humble beginnings as a roadhouse for passing motorists in the late 1920s, Jonah's has evolved into a multiple-award-winning fine dining restaurant.

While it is famous for its drop-dead-gorgeous ocean views, it's the menu and wine list that keeps diners coming back. *The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide* has awarded Jonah's one chef's hat for the last 11 consecutive years, and the restaurant was named Savour Australia's 2018 Best Contemporary Restaurant – Formal at the most recent awards.

Under the direction of head sommelier Niels Sluiman, Jonah's has also won many awards for its renowned wine list, and now sits in the *Gourmet Traveller Wine Hall of Fame* after being awarded Best Wine List in NSW for the last three years running and Australia's Best



Above: Jonah's executive chef Matteo Zamboni.

Wine List in 2017. Now in the very capable hands of executive chef Matteo Zamboni and restaurant manager Mauro Ferrari, and following a recent refurbishment, Jonah's is primed for another decade at the top.

First, the food.

No restaurant can maintain one chef's hat every year for more than a decade if the food is not on point. For Zamboni—who learnt his trade at Michelin-star restaurants in Milan and Rome—that means putting quality ingredients at the centre of everything he serves.

“Our food philosophy at Jonah's is about utilising the finest local

**“Our food philosophy at Jonah's is about utilising the finest ingredients, and cooking them to showcase their quality and freshness.”**

Matteo Zamboni, executive chef, Jonah's Restaurant & Boutique Hotel

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JONAH'S

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Quality ingredients is at the centre of everything dished up at Jonah's.





Jonah's head sommelier, Niels Sluiman



## COVER STORY

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**“There is no success or longevity in the hospitality industry without consistency.”**

Matteo Zamboni, executive chef, Jonah's Restaurant & Boutique Hotel

and imported ingredients, and cooking them to showcase their quality and freshness,” he says. “I would describe the menu as contemporary Australian with an emphasis on seafood and an influence from my Italian background.”

“When we are developing a new dish it’s not just about the flavours,” adds Sardinian-born Ferrari who has also worked in restaurants in Italy and London. “It’s also about the presentation and the story behind the dish.”

There is no success or longevity

in the hospitality industry without consistency,” he says. “Whether it’s a fine-dining restaurant, a bistro, or any other establishment, your customers will expect to always have the same experience each time they visit your venue. So the main goal should always be to consistently deliver your product at the best that it can be.”

### On the floor

Your front-of-house game is just as vital to providing impeccable guest experiences as what you’re putting on the plate. That comes down to keeping service staff happy.

## COVER STORY

**“Matteo and I consistently go out for dinner to understand what others are doing and share our ideas, but it’s just as important to be a good listener to what your customers want.”**

Mauro Ferrari, restaurant manager, Jonah's Restaurant & Boutique Hotel

“Also keep them motivated and full of knowledge. Our staff must understand everything—from how to approach our guests to perfectly describing the dishes and knowing how to read a guest so they can make the right recommendation,” says Ferrari by way of explanation.

“We have an organised schedule of weekly training sessions, Matteo and I put together notes on every dish for the staff, and every time we launch a new menu we organise a staff tasting.”

As restaurant manager, Ferrari is always present on the floor during service. “The restaurant manager is the face of the business,” he says. “I greet the guests and visit as many as tables as possible to understand how the service is going.”

### Follow trends, but not too closely

While Zamboni and Ferrari agree that keeping in touch with food trends is



Staying in touch with food trends is important—but it's not everything.





  
Listening to  
customers is  
a priority, says  
Restaurant  
Manager  
Mauro Ferrari

important, they believe that listening to what your customers want and remaining true to your food philosophy should take precedence.

“Staying in touch with food trends helps to set new challenges, discover new producers, and provide new inspiration,” says Zamboni. “However, food trends should never dictate your philosophy. It is important to stay true to your own values, which should always consider your clientele’s needs.”

“Matteo and I consistently go

out for dinner to understand what others are doing and share our ideas, but it’s just as important to be a good listener to what your customers want,” adds Ferrari.

As Zamboni and Ferrari face the challenges of the future, they know they can’t afford to take a backwards step in the highly competitive hospitality market.

“I believe many people come to Jonah’s for the view. But we can’t just count on that,” concludes Ferrari. “We have to bring our best performance to every service.” **R&C**