



chris radecki

by Catherine Taylor

Chris has balance down to a fine art at work and at home.

The Gold Coast International's culinary magician – Yamagen chef Chris Radecki – went blade to blade with this region's best Japanese chefs and won the recent Teppanyaki Challenge for the second time. Chris says the annual event is just one of the highlights of his job. "I studied Western cooking and Japanese cuisine during my apprenticeship but I prefer teppanyaki to everything else. The Japanese have very strict standards of cooking, everything depends on the quality of the ingredients and the presentation but this doesn't take away from the fun," he says.

"Cooking teppanyaki at Yamagen is great fun, everyone is in a good mood, people love all the tricks and showmanship but the food must be perfect. We can't get by on tricks alone. During the competition I didn't do a lot of tricks: I did throw and blow some fire, the diners found that entertaining. I twirled fire from salt and pepper shakers and blew a stream of fire from my mouth," he says.

Most people are quite surprised

to find a 6' 4" Aussie chef cooking traditional Japanese food in a Gold Coast restaurant. They are even more amazed when they find magic tricks and fire blowing are part of his repertoire. Chris learnt fire blowing from a group of stage performers. "It was a bit of a coincidence really, they came into the restaurant and I asked them how they did the fire blowing act. They showed me and I practiced at home with water until I got it right," he says.

It doesn't seem to occur to Chris that few people are quite this enthusiastic about their jobs – but that's Chris; he's enthusiastic about everything especially his wife Cassy and his 16-month old daughter Jessica.

"I met Cassy when I was an apprentice and she was a receptionist at Donte Sapporo. We worked at other restaurants together, Cassy joined GCI before I did and was assistant manager here before Jessica was born. We decided parenting was more important than work so now Cassy

works two days a week here and I work five nights. We have the prefect work to play balance, I don't start work until 2pm so I can go the park and the beach with Cassy and Jessica, it's a sensational lifestyle," he says.

"The GCI has been fantastic to me, without Mike Jones and the team I could not have achieved what I have. We have a great team spirit here, we are strict on standards but we are all keen to see people enjoy their dining experience. It's all in the attention to detail. Japanese customers are often a bit thrown when they see me cooking teppanyaki; I couldn't look less Japanese if I tried. I tell them I was an XTreme Make Over experiment, they made me look Australian," he says.

Chris needs no makeover; this good looking 34-year-old has the right recipe for success and not just in the restaurant, keeping fit and having a family is as important as his career. "I have a certificate in personal training; I keep fit, eat well and don't drink. Life is for living, I am so lucky to have a family to live it with. Before Jessica was born we used to worry about all the same things other couples worry about but once you have a child everything changes. When that little girl looks up at me with her big blue eyes, tugs on my sleeve and says Daddy – the rest of the world just melts away," he says.

A genuine interest in other people and a desire to see them have a good time adds that extra buzz to the way Chris works. He is a favourite with

Yamagen diners, Japanese guests are impressed with his cooking skills and Western diners enjoy what is for many their first teppanyaki experience with a liberal helping of showmanship.

Chris says Yamagen appeals to western diners. "Lots of people now bring children to the restaurant, it's great, the chefs keep the kids amused while the parents enjoy their meal. I have perfected a great trick using a dollar coin and an ice-cream in duck pan. I explain to the kids about the tooth fairy and how fairies can hear the sound of them rubbing a dollar coin. The kids put the coin in the pan and an ice-cream appears. Their faces light up, it changes their whole concept, the kids go home believing in fairies and magic," he says. Anyone who doubts the importance of a balanced life should meet Chris at Yamagen; they will soon change their minds.

10 Things Chris Radecki can't live without.

1. His wife Cassy.
2. His daughter Jessica.
3. Great food.
4. Laughter.
5. Friendship.
6. An excellent working environment.
7. A 50-50 work play environment.
8. Family support.
9. Fresh air and sunshine.
10. A fitness regime.

giveaway...

The Gold Coast International Hotel is giving you the chance to win an exclusive Sunset Teppanyaki dinner for you and three friends with Chef Chris Radecki at the Hotel's award winning Yamagen Japanese Restaurant. The winner will enjoy an exclusive Sunset Teppanyaki Special for four, including a 6 course Teppanyaki Menu and free undercover parking, all served up by Chris as your personal chef. For your chance to win call the *Life Weekly* competition line: 1900 999 253 and leave your details and the code word TEPPANYAKI. (Call costs 55c, higher from mobiles). Or email competition@lifegc.com.au with your details and the code word. Entries close Wednesday 19 October.

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