



RYAN LOCKE, HEAD CHEF, QUALIA

GREAT BARRIER REEF, QUEENSLAND

Head Chef Ryan Locke feels privileged to have been handed the responsibility of running the kitchens at qualia. The ethos of using natural and organic food lies at the heart of his cooking – a philosophy that is centred on balancing classical and modern flavours with the tropical climate.

“My food is produce-driven, with flavour combinations that are both classical and modern,” he says. His cuisine has to compete with the beautiful and distracting views of the Great Barrier Reef and Whitsunday Islands, for which Hamilton Island is renowned. It measures up nicely. Ryan’s dishes and the experience of eating at sunset, on the edge of this tranquil island with the Coral Sea reflecting the colours of the day, are a feast for the senses... the very definition of qualia.

Formerly Sous Chef at qualia and Executive Sous Chef at luxury lodge Lizard Island – and having previously cooked at Huka Lodge in New Zealand – Ryan describes how his cooking has evolved.

“Each dish has gone through many stages of rethinking and redesign to help me tell the particular story of the ingredients.” Seasonality and sustainability inform everything he prepares.

“Here, the cuttlefish is our most local ingredient and is some of the best I’ve ever had; we poach it very gently in clarified butter at a low temperature.” Ryan takes daily inspiration from the landscape and environment of Hamilton Island.

“The rocks, the ocean, the qualia gardens and the forestry through Passage Peak are all places I consider when thinking about the dishes. We forage for ingredients on the island, and we have paperbark trees and various varieties of pine, which we use for smoking dishes tableside. It’s about continuing our guests’ sensory experience, brought about by the unsurpassed beauty of the island and its surrounds when they sit down to dine with us.”

The most important part of our menu is the story – sourcing food that has a connection to either Hamilton Island or qualia or is something that reminds me how amazing and diverse Australia’s cuisine can be. We want the food to be about a local experience, special to the Whitsundays and for our guests.

qualia
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