

A TOUCH OF FRANCE

FROM THE FAMILY-FRIENDLY VENUE TO A FRENCH-INSPIRED FOCUS ON QUALITY FOOD AND QUALITY SERVICE, THIS BARWON HEADS BISTRO STANDS OUT FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS, WRITES MICHAELA MEADE



THE moment you step into Tommy Gunns, the family feeling is evident.

Even two hours out from service starting on a chilly Thursday afternoon, owner Ruaraidh Gunn – known as “Rozza” to customers and friends – has upbeat music playing at the venue, as he busily prepares for the first customers to arrive, every move made with care.

Clearly welcomed fully since opening the establishment in December, 2022, Rozza only pauses from setting cutlery on tables to have brief chats with locals who pass by on the bustling Hitchcock Ave.

He greets everyone with a warm smile, with the hospitality he extends to guests seeming second nature.

Rozza and his family – wife Davina and three kids aged 17, 14 and nine – relocated to Barwon Heads from Melbourne following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rozza had run a restaurant in Armadale pre-Covid, but says he and Davina always liked the building that is now Tommy Gunns.

He says during the pandemic the family spent a lot of time in the region, and it opened their eyes to the amazing life they could have.

From there, it was as though the stars aligned. They purchased the restaurant – that had been on the market for a year and a half, almost as if waiting for them – and spent six weeks renovating the space.

They brought on James Bond-Kennedy as the head chef, who has led previous kitchens to industry acclaim, as well as sous chef Dan Hooper and beverage manager Meg Conway.

As the three chefs busily prepare for opening, Rozza explains how the transition to life in Barwon Heads has gone so far.

“We had a hectic summer,” he says. “It gets so busy down here in the hot months but winter’s always tough.

“A lot of locals stay away in the busy season, so now is the time they’re here.

“It’s about building a client base, and giving great food and good service and hopefully next winter, you’ve grown and got that critical mass you need.”

Rozza says the community has welcomed the business with open arms, with visitors coming from Barwon Heads, of course, but also central Geelong, Point Lonsdale, and Ocean Grove.

He says the vision for the 65-seater

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restaurant was to offer tapas-style sharing plates, and good wine to go with it.

James says the menu was partly inspired by the space itself, and by meeting with Rozza and Davina, as well as his own international travels and “good, simple cooking” using the restaurant’s redgum wood-fired oven.

“It all lent itself, I thought, to something I’ve always wanted to do, which is a place vaguely inspired by the second wave modern bistros of

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France," James says.

"It's still rooted in classic French menu style and technique, but a lot of it is driven by these younger chefs ... feeding off a lot of other influences into their food.

"We all thought Barwon Heads is a great little community town that has great places already but could always do with another nice, family friendly venue.

"It's been really good trying to find our place."

As for what inspired the restaurant's name - it was Rozza's grandfather Tommy Gunn, who fought in both world wars and received several medals for his service.

Rozza says Tommy loved a drink and good food, so having him as the namesake for the restaurant "just felt right".

For Rozza and his team, the legacy of Tommy has also inspired how they look after guests.

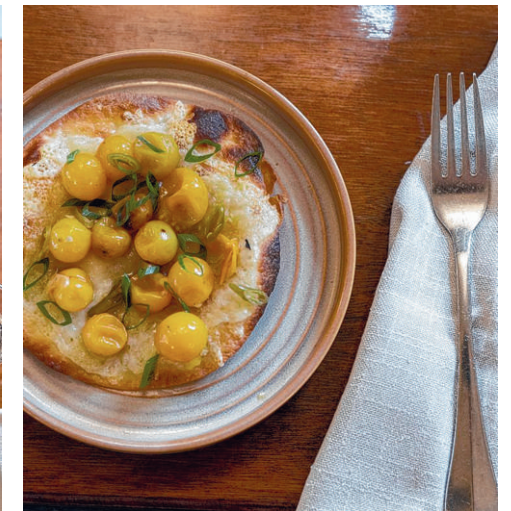
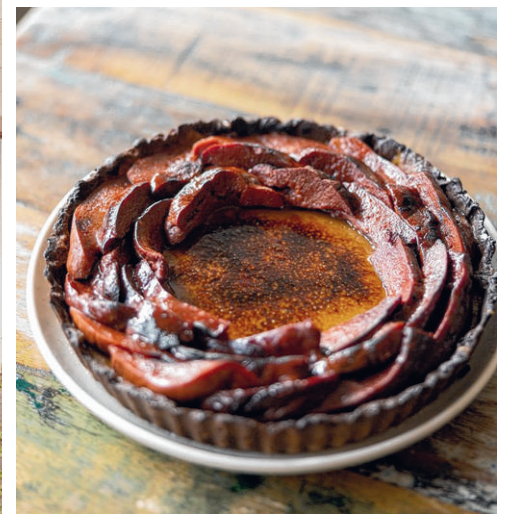
Rozza says treating everyone to a good time is "what it's all about".

"You want people to feel like they're being looked after, and everything's thought of," he says. "That, to me, is the core."

Tommy Gunns will have specialty offerings over the winter period, including a guest chef.

Tommy Gunns at 60 Hitchcock Ave, Barwon Heads, is open from 5pm Wednesday-Thursday, and from 12pm Friday-Sunday. Follow @tommygunnsbarwonheads on Instagram

Dan Hooper, owner Ruaraidh 'Rozza' Gunn, beverage manager Meg Conway and chef James Bond-Kennedy will make you feel right at home at Tommy Gunns. Photo: Ginger + Mint



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