

Chef Chat

Ray, my illustrious business partner was a judge at the Royal Melbourne Show Chefs' Studio last week. Apprentices battled in teams to win a string of prizes and cooking kudos.

Where I started, the chefs were culinary gods, in some cases positively terrifying and earning what I thought was a stash of cash. The kitchen I worked in was hierarchical, aggressive and steeped in tradition. But it toughened me, it taught me commitment, perseverance, concentration and shaped my approach.

The trouble is kids are smarter these days.

I recently offered a promotion to a young chef with good skills and an eye for detail.

"No thanks. The salary doesn't cut it on an hourly rate," he said. "That may well be, but it's the first rung on the way to the top," I replied.

"I don't want to be like you," he said. "Sixty-hour weeks, all that stress, the pressure of an ever dwindling skills base and remaining profitable in an acutely competitive market."

Sheesh. I was stumped and he wasn't wrong.

Still, I'm proud of my bleary eyes, varicose veins and high blood pressure. It's the dignity of hard labour, don't you know.

GARY MEHIGAN

chef, proprietor

Fenix, The Boathouse

What's In

The recently opened Little Cupcakes is a cool bakery dedicated to perfecting the cupcake. Decorated in a French provincial style, the store is scattered with fresh flowers, rustic tables and stools. Cupcake flavours include strawberry, chocolate, coconut and mint. They come in a mini bite size (\$2.50 each) and the more indulgent "standard" size (\$3.70). See for yourself at 7 Degraives St. Ph: 9077 0413.