



HIGH TEA REINVENTED

► MEET SIR STAMFORD'S PASTRY CHEF PATRICK HARRISON WHO HAS A PASSION FOR CREATING DELECTABLE SWEET TREATS, AS [CARLA GROSSETTI](#) FINDS OUT

PASTRY CHEF PATRICK HARRISON IS WOVING DIE-HARD HIGH TEA TAKERS at The Bar at Sir Stamford Circular Quay with his contemporary spin on a centuries-old tradition. He says today's high tea is aimed at switched-on crowds who aren't fanatics of the whole "pinkie-finger-curl-over-the-tea-handle" phenomenon.

"We don't practise or teach pomposity. It's about guests enjoying themselves. It's about coming along (for the experience), trying something new, and not trying to act according to some antiquated and stuffy idea of etiquette," says Harrison, who has been head pastry chef at the hotel for the last two years.

High tea is a ritual that is, quite literally, steeped in tradition. The taking of high tea is said to have originated as far back as the mid-1600s, when the queen consort to King Charles II in England, Catherine of Braganza, developed a taste for tea and introduced it to the aristocracy.

Taxes on tea were very expensive until the end of the 18th century when tea consumption increased dramatically. It was around that time that Anna, the Duchess of Bedford, requested sandwiches be brought to her in the late-afternoon to stave off "that sinking feeling" of hunger while waiting for dinner.

Harrison says: "There's a lot of discourse on the definitions of high tea, and while we respect the traditions, we'll leave the debate to the historians. High tea to me has evolved over time, and my version is that it has a modern twist on the tradition."

STAMFORD STYLE

The refined custom of high tea has been faithfully retained at The Bar.



THIS PAGE FROM TOP:
THE BAR AT SIR STAMFORD
CIRCULAR QUAY OFFERS A
SMORGASBORD OF HIGH
TEA DELECTABLES.
FACING PAGE FROM TOP LEFT:
CHEF PATRICK HARRISON
IMPRESSES HOTEL GUESTS
WITH HIS CREATIVE HIGH
TEA CONCOCTIONS.



Harrison says he tries to honour the strong sense of occasion surrounding the ceremony, but he adds his own liberal interpretations. His high tea menu, which changes with the seasons, has been created to complement a selection of quality teas. While The Bar still serves classic delectable such as freshly baked scones with homemade jam, he points out that he is constantly experimenting with new ideas while tinkering with tradition.

Harrison's philosophy is to keep his concoctions simple – he wants his high tea goodies to shed its elitist reputation. "I prefer my desserts to be light and laden with fruits. And the most important thing for me is not to complicate the taste with too many flavours," he says. Included on Harrison's high tea menu are noteworthy savouries such as smoked salmon on baguette crostini with horseradish creme fraiche. For desserts, Harrison recommends the refreshingly light cream of calamansi (golden lime) with raspberry or the different flavoured macarons. "I like to use seasonal ingredients and toy with classic ideas, and combine them with new flavours. It's about redefining classics and doing something more interesting," he says.

With its 18th century Georgian antiques, The Bar oozes glamour and old-world decadence, making it a popular sanctuary for events and private parties. While Harrison concedes the ritual of high tea offers a slice of old-fashioned grandeur, he believes his morsels – which look more like edible art – are absolutely up-to-date. "It's about combining new flavours with tradition while embellishing simple flavours," says Harrison. [SL](#)