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Fifty Of New Zealand's Best Announced As Finalists- Cuisine NZ Restaurant of the Year Awards 2010

The standard of New Zealand restaurants is going from strength to strength, as shown by the number of finalists in this year's Cuisine NZ Restaurant of the Year Awards climbing from 40 to 50. And 26 of the restaurants are first-time finalists, including Barolo at the Langham Auckland, Hawke's Bay's Elephant Hill and Black Barn Bistro, Wellington's Ortega Fish Shack & Bar and Dunedin's Two Chefs Bistro.

Now in its sixth year, the Cuisine NZ Restaurant of the Year Awards, proudly supported by Mercedes-Benz, is the only national restaurant competition in New Zealand.

Two new categories spice up the 2010 awards: Best Specialist Restaurant recognises excellence in seafood, ethnic or vegetarian; Restaurant Personality of the Year will celebrate spectacular service by an individual.

Cuisine is delighted to announce Kerry Tyack as new head judge. Tyack, also head judge for the Monteith's Beer & Wild Food Challenge, the New Zealand Sausage Competition and the 2009 Kapiti Chef Collection, has a wealth of experience in food and wine, and is regarded as one of the most experienced food and restaurant judges in the country.

"These are undoubtedly the most important restaurant awards in New Zealand," Tyack says, "assessed by leading local food and wine experts and a highly respected international judge.

"We have an impressive line-up of finalists. And it's not just about big-city dining – this year we see a greater number of provincial finalists, with Paihia and Mt Maunganui making the list for the first time in the history of the awards."

Editor of Cuisine, Sarah Nicholson, says the new award for a restaurant personality is an exciting addition. "Great service, which is unobtrusive, intelligent and efficient, can make or break a dining experience, no matter how good the food is, so we want to acknowledge that."

Judges will visit each of the final 50 restaurants anonymously in pairs to select eight category winners: Best Smart Dining (metropolitan and regional), Best Casual Dining (metropolitan and regional), Best Neighbourhood Restaurant, Best Specialist Restaurant, Best Winery Restaurant and the Cuisine Restaurant Personality of the Year, plus an overall Supreme Winner.

Returning this year is the month-long "Dining with the Stars" opportunity. During July, 43 finalists will offer specially created, fixed-price menus matched with wines from New Zealand's most-awarded winery, Villa Maria Estate, silver sponsor for the second year.

Cuisine also welcomes San Pellegrino as the bronze sponsor of the awards.

A full list of finalists is available in the July issue of Cuisine, on sale Monday 28 June.

The winners of the Cuisine NZ Restaurant of the Year 2010 Awards will be announced on 16 August at an exclusive event for the restaurant industry in Auckland. The awards will be profiled in the September issue of Cuisine, on sale from 19 August.

Last year's Supreme Winner and winner Best Smart Dining – Metropolitan, Wellington's Logan Brown, was ineligible this year as co-owner Al Brown is now Cuisine's senior food writer.

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