

Sepia wins AFR's top restaurant award



Martin Benn of Sepia restaurant accepts the award for top chef at the AFR Australia's Top Restaurants awards, at Melbourne's Crown Casino. Paul Jeffers

by **Lucille Keen**

Chefs and restaurateurs packed Crown Melbourne for The Australian Financial Review [Australia's Top Restaurants](#), presented by Qantas Airways and Vittoria Coffee, where Sepia took first prize.

"We came in here with no expectations, but it really reinforces that what you are doing is good," said Sepia owner Martin Benn, who was also voted Australia's top chef.

"The reward is making people happy and surprising people, giving them something they haven't had before.

"All we really want to do is push Australia forward. When you get awarded you feel a responsibility and that's a good thing," said Vicki Wild, Mr Benn's wife and restaurant co-owner.

"Having the awards and giving you the recognition gives you the confidence. Australia's restaurants are amazing – why aren't we recognised on the world stage? We need to be, so let's go for it."

In an Australian first, chefs and restaurateurs from 500 venues across the nation voted for their favourite dining experiences. The results, announced on Monday night, have formed a list of the country's top 100 restaurants.

In the national awards, Ben Shewry's Attica was ranked second, followed by Peter Gilmore's Quay, Dan Hunter's Brae and Andrew McConnell's Cutler & Co.

Mr Shewry, whose restaurant also won best restaurant in Victoria, said it was amazing to be honoured by his peers.

"I feel so close to all of the people in our industry," he said.

Andrew McConnell, who had three restaurants in the top 100 – two of which were named in the top 10 – said he was "thrilled" with the results.

"Cumulus Inc is an offshoot of a restaurant I want to hang out in, drink in, relax in, and I suppose it makes sense a lot of chefs want to do the same thing," he said.