

# Local Food Innovators: The Lucky Bee



With culinary experience spanning all the way from **New York City to the Central Coast**, it's no coincidence that Matty Bennett and Rupert Noffs', **The Lucky Bee**, has landed itself a spot in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* 2023 'Good Food Guide'!

We caught up with **Rupert** to hear how they're dishing up **fresh fusion flavours** and "fun dining" at their brand new Ettalong Beach venue.



**Originating in "the Big Apple", what would you say makes The Lucky Bee stand out from other venues here on the Central Coast?**

The Lucky Bee is the only real modern Asian fusion restaurant on the Coast that mixes Thai, Vietnamese and Cantonese cuisines. We are a non-traditional Asian restaurant – a no Pad Thai zone if you will. We also offer a full dim sum menu.

We focus on fresh, healthy and spicy dishes, and most of our menu is gluten and dairy free as we only use tapioca flour and coconut milk.

We also serve unique tiki and signature cocktails we created in New York City. We're not big fans of the common sweet and over-the-top cocktails, and believe that they should be simple, fresh and yummy. Plus, you can't find our wine list at any other restaurant or bottle shop on the Coast. All of our wines are from small boutique, family run vineyards.

**The Lucky Bee was named in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* 2023 'Good Food Guide'. What would your customers say earned you this title?**

Our guests love our relaxed and friendly vibe, including our old school funk, disco and yacht rock playlists. We're fun dining, not fine dining! Our staff are very tongue in cheek and we don't take ourselves seriously – but we do take our food and drinks very seriously.

The thing about the Coast is that most venues are either fine dining with white table cloths and sommeliers, or burger joints. We try to create something in the middle where you know you'll always have a good time. It's an experience... a journey.



**We're all for fun dining experiences! In what ways are you shaking up the local hospitality scene?**

Working with local suppliers and purveyors and bringing a unique dining experience to the Coast.

With our experience, we enjoy mentoring and training young staff to help foster the future of the industry.

We also work with local artists for our art mural wall, particularly young queer people. We want a safe space for all, and like to say that we're inclusive, not exclusive. Our art wall was painted by Ollie Vincent Reyes ([@olliexvincent](https://www.instagram.com/olliexvincent)) and is getting a lot of attention!

**Speaking of supporting local, which Central Coast suppliers or producers do you work with to put your dishes on the table?**

All of our suppliers are local, except for our seafood, which we get fresh directly from Sydney Fish Market.

**With a brand new space at Ettalong Beach, you've certainly been busy bees lately. What has been the biggest challenge to your business over the past two years?**

There were a number of challenges in our previous location, which we were trying to navigate alongside the pandemic and constant lockdowns. Our venue at Hardys Bay was the subject of a Development Application and we found ourselves ultimately searching for a new location to open shop.

During this process, we also had to open a café and implement takeaway to stay operational during the peak of Covid-19 restrictions and keep our staff employed and paid. This meant that our shop was open from 7am-11pm most days. It was really tough and both we and our staff became burnt out very quickly.

We are very grateful for the support of Adam Crouch MP and some wonderful locals while we were trying to secure a new space.

**We're glad to see you bounced back bigger and better than ever before. How did you apply innovation to overcome these challenges?**

My brilliant mum, Mandy – who studied part-time for eight years alongside a full-time job to support us – used to tell me to "do what you can do, and can't what you can't". Because of this mantra, we turned our focus toward other options and used our energy elsewhere.

Luckily, we found our new space in Ettalong Beach with a long lease and wonderful landlords, who told us they had wanted us at the Galleria since we arrived back from New York City. It was perfect timing, and now we're surrounded by so many like-minded business operators.

Moving to Ettalong Beach was the best decision we've ever made. We've been welcomed with open arms, and you can actually get a taxi there!

**We agree mums always have the best words of wisdom. What support would help you further grow your business over the next few years?**

Funding is always needed, as well as more support for restaurants. We'd love to see training and workshops provided and paid for by the government or local councils, more local food and music events, and major sponsorships.



**Some great suggestions. And finally, where do you hope to see the Central Coast hospitality scene in the next five years?**

I'm sick of people saying our restaurant is "Sydney quality". Some of the best restaurants are actually regional, so that just doesn't make sense. We're not striving to be a Sydney-style restaurant, we're just trying to be good.

It would be great to see the area become a local culinary destination in Australia and I feel like that's starting to happen!



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