



# Dining disasters

## TV TIMES



GORDON BROWN

**C**OOKING programmes seem to be all the rage on the telly these days. Most are a form of the dreaded reality series, of course, which means that it's not enough to watch an enjoyable soufflé being created. It's also got to have the added ingredient of foul-mouthed, bad-tempered abusive chefs.

The worst personality to emerge was Gordon Ramsay. He could swear for England that guy, and effectively does. He may be a fine chef, but many of the series he appears in are created solely with the intention of contriving scenarios in which he can be appallingly rude to people who are ill-equipped to fight back.

Mrs Brown has just read that bit and reckons I'm describing our marriage. I tell her not to be so hard on herself.

Anyway, I suppose it was inevitable that New Zealand television had to come up with its own version. The Kitchen Job made its debut on Tuesday night, on TV3 at 7.30pm, a suicide spot really, because it is up against the finest fare on

offer, in televisual terms, that veritable feast called Coronation St. However, that's why the Japanese invented video machines.

So at 8.30, we sat down to watch New Zealand's version of kitchen nightmares. There was a twitch or two at the start when we realised the kitchen job was going to be fronted by an American chef called John Palino. We need not have worried though, he was no potty mouth. He had cooked in New York, but had been in our country long enough to have lost the Godamns and was polite — to a point.

John had years of experience and knew how to fix an ailing food business, which he found in Helensville.

The River View Bar and Café did indeed have a view of the river but not much else going for it. The narrator told us at the start that Helensville was nothing special. He was wrong. We thought it might have been named after Helen Clark and nowadays it's John Key's seat. So look for a name change — Johnsville maybe.

But I digress. The narrator started off by telling us that "the restaurant business was no place for dreamers or the inexperienced." You only had to think of poor Leanne and her Italian restaurant in Coro St to know how right he was.

"Every year hundreds of restaurants and cafes open in New Zealand and over half of them fail in the first year".

There was a pleasant enough chap called Andrew who owned the River View. He told John he was losing \$3000 a week and was soon going to be one of the casualties. He'd been a chef in Aussie and saw the business advertised, so he came over checked it out and bought it. His Australian wife was a front-of-house expert, but there was a small snag when

she decided she didn't want to shift here. So Andrew became the maitre'd, with terrible results.

A good feature of the series is that John goes into the place incognito a few weeks before and has a hidden camera with him. He called it "a dining disaster". And it was. The waitress didn't know anything about the food ("I don't eat here"); he had to wait 45 minutes for his food, despite there being only one other table of



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diners; the steak was dry and Andrew was shy. Anyway, John got everything renovated; lots of free stuff donated (to make up for the humiliation) and rebranded it as a steak house. The sponsors who give the free stuff get thanked profusely and a mention whenever possible.

The restaurant was transformed overnight and, suddenly, Andrew was back in business. And the closest John came to swearing was in response to Andrew's rather limp comment, "without customers you've got no vibe".

"Screw the vibes. You're losing three grand a week!"

It was good fun and I'll be back to tape it next week. □

**The worst-mouthed celebrity chef, Gordon Ramsay. A Kiwi version of kitchen nightmares is on TV 3.**  
Photo: FAIRFAX

