

Cooking Up a Masterpiece

Australian artist Jeff Martin serves playful paintings of the world's top restaurant kitchens.

BY TAMERA LENZ MUENTE

VISIT THE BUSTLING kitchen of one of the world's top restaurants on a given night, and you might just catch someone positioned in the corner, capturing the action with a sketchbook. Self-taught Australian artist Jeff Martin worked in some of Melbourne's most critically

acclaimed restaurants for more than 19 years. He's transformed himself into an astute observer of elite kitchens, sketching and painting the unique spaces and the people who work in them.

Martin presents these fast-paced environments on canvas in his Back of House (the restaurant industry term for behind-the-scenes) series. So far he's completed more than 30 paintings of Melbourne's and Sydney's top restaurants and is currently on a journey to paint the kitchens of Europe's premier dining establishments. As of this writing, he has visited, sketched and photographed restaurant kitchens in Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Italy. Many of them are at the top of the Michelin star charts.

Martin typically spends one night in each kitchen. "By the end of



Photo by Dave Blunge

ABOVE: Jeff Martin, pictured here drawing in the kitchen at Bras Relais and Châteaux in Laguiole, France, creates paintings from 15 to 20 sketches drawn from life. "I was very excited to see green in a kitchen, a first for me," said the artist of his experience in this exclusive French restaurant.

RIGHT: Martin's painting of the kitchen at Sean's Panorama—*Sean's Panaroma* (oil, 59x71)—located in Sydney on the north side of the famous Bondi Beach, was part of his Back of House-Sydney series.



an evening, I usually have 15 to 20 sketches and around 500 photographs," says the artist. He uses the photographs for color reference, while his exuberant drawings convey the energy of each scene.

"Working from the sketches is key to the immediacy of my work," he says. He makes at least one drawing to determine the painting's composition, and several studies of the chefs at work. "As I look at my sketches and review the photographs back in my studio, I'm easily transported back to my experience in that particular kitchen—its smells, tastes, everything."

The paintings dish out cool palettes and repetition of shapes—circles of pots and pans, rectangles of stainless steel countertops, white ovals of chef hats—while offering a unique compositional flavor. Why does Martin continually return to these spaces of culinary creativity? "My passion for the industry is the key that keeps me coming back for more," he says. "I love what these people do day in and day out. They are creative and dedicated, which is easy to admire."

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ABOVE: Martin made this sketch at Copenhagen's Noma, currently ranked number one on the prestigious S. Pellegrino list of the world's best restaurants. The drawing captures the close proximity in which the chefs work, and its spontaneity mirrors the figures' movements.

BELOW: Christian Awe works on the murals for Wynwood Kitchen and Bar, the newest restaurant in this evolving area.



Public Art in Miami

Wynwood Walls in Miami, Florida, is proud to be the home of a permanent exhibition of cutting-edge, large-scale street art. An open-air park, this creative space has become the focal point of Wynwood's artistic center and is a popular destination during Art Basel Miami and throughout the year. In addition to the new and existing international mural installations, visitors can check out dozens of galleries and arts organizations in the neighborhood. —C.H.