



Tennis brings unUsual catering challenges

Corporate viewing and dining at New Zealand's International Tennis Opens is about as close to the play as you can get. In fact, corporate spectators are seated virtually on the court. Providing them with beverages and food during games, without distracting the players, was just one of the issues Austin's Food Design Events had to resolve in its catering plan. However, a combination of past experience over the previous three years and skilled staff meant the two tournaments ran smoothly – even when it rained - and thousands of strawberries later, Austin's is already thinking about the next year's Tennis Opens. CYNTHIA DALY speaks with Chris Blackman and Andrew Billingham (Bill) of Austin's Food Design Events.

How fit are you? If you were a runner for Austin's at the ASB Classic Tennis Open or the Heineken Men's Open in Auckland in January, you would be running up and down stairs and bobbing up and down between play for hours a day.

Chris Blackman, general manager of Austin's Food Design Events says: "One of the main problems for us at the tennis is the access restrictions around the courtside corporate boxes. There is no movement allowed in the corporate box area during play so the waiting staff and runners have to stop walking and bob down holding their tray of beverage or food while the play is on. When the rally finishes they can get up and walk but the moment the player starts to bounce the ball, ready to serve, they have to stop moving again. So they may bob down two or three times with a tray of drinks on the way to the corporate box."

To improve service and provide ready access to beverages, Austin's put mini bars into the corporate boxes containing a selection of wine, beer and low alcohol beer, water and juice.

"If you'd like another beer, you just open your mini bar and get one. It works really well."

Blackman says runners deliver orders to the boxes where waiters are permanently positioned ready to serve them.

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Serving Up Coffee Versatility

Austin's served up over 30,000 cups of coffee at the Tennis, keeping the heat on to deliver quality espresso coffee to spectators.

"We couldn't have done it without the support of our coffee supplier FreshFood Services" says Bill, "The level of service was quite demanding, making sure the espresso machines were running smoothly and we had enough beans at all times!"

Austin's worked with FreshFood Services to ensure equipment selected would be suitable for the task. For such a high volume event, Carimali F-Series automatic espresso machines were used to deliver speed and consistent quality.

"We have been working with FreshFood Services for over seven years as our coffee suppliers. Their versatility and expertise with coffee equipment is hugely appreciated, enabling us to operate to a high standard in the various different catering situations from events to conventions" says Bill.

The Auckland Convention Centre at The Edge sees Austin's catering for conferences, sit down dinners and cocktail parties for up to 2500 guests. In this situation, a lot of coffee needs to be delivered in a relatively short space of time. The Brewmatic 508 bulk brewer system achieves this quickly and safely, using airtight thermo pots to maintain optimum coffee temperature and freshness.

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is very appealing to customers ranging from caterers through to cafes and hotels. FreshFood Services offer a variety of solutions for espresso machines, high volume bulk brewing equipment, and filter coffee machines. We also supply Café Bar and vending systems. Call 0800 COFFEE (263 333) and talk to us today.



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Austin's at the tennis

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"To help keep them going, we have a runners' power food table, where there's fresh sliced orange, apple and Mars Bars all chopped up so they can graze on the run," says Bill.

First up for the serve is the ASB Classic Women's International Tennis Open followed by the Heineken Men's Tennis Open.

Both events attract top ranked players from around the world.

The challenge is to always provide a memorable and stylish dining experience for those attending.

This involves everything from creating cafés with the right atmosphere, to having an alternative dining area for 600 corporate guests should it rain.

While most people were relaxing over the Christmas break Austin's staff were busy turning parts of the ASB Tennis Centre into the Austin's Café and Vodafone Café. Once finished, these two indoor cafés serve around 3000 spectators a day offering everything from filled rolls and sushi to meals like skewers with rice, pasta dishes and salads. "Fresh

Food Services is our supplier of tea and coffee at The Auckland Convention Centre at The Edge, so we rely on their expertise to provide quality products from the beans to the equipment and the Twinings tea at the tennis. Fresh Food Services also provides excellent ongoing service," says Bill.

The ASB Bank Marquee hosts ASB invited guests to corporate entertaining where this year's theme was an English country garden. Austin's designed and built canapé trays each resembling a miniature garden setting. The 104 corporate boxes and two super boxes provide open air viewing unlike anywhere else in the world where you can be only 15 feet away from the players and

enjoy continuous catering all day.

The à la carte menu offers cold and hot choices such as skewers of marinated prawns, with baby spinach and rocket on a bed of lemon scented gourmet new potatoes with tomato and chilli salsa to roasted loin of pork with white bean cassoulet and thyme scented jus.

"All food is served covered by a cloche so they arrive steaming hot. They come out of the kitchen and there is a runner to take it away. Once it's



come out of the pan its usually no more than three or four minutes from the kitchen to the customer and that would be the furthestmost extremity of the grounds," says Bill.

And of course no day at the tennis would be complete without fresh strawberries and lightly whipped cream. This year spectators consumed 3700 punnets of strawberries while the cafés sold around 1000 strawberry and ice cream filled waffle cones.

To speed up service to corporate boxes Austin's use the WhizBang point of sale system. On a couple of occasions this year play was interrupted by drizzling rain. Austin's staff relocated corporate

box spectators to the Deutz lounge at the rear of the tennis stadium and continued service. Meanwhile other staff prepared to quickly dry off everything in the corporate boxes – polish the cutlery and seat spectators again as soon as the rain passed.

Austin's head chef Arnault Vallee designs all meals, using the best meat, fish and produce New Zealand has to offer.

Attention to the players' and the tennis opens president's needs also have to be planned. Players have their own secure lounge where food is provided to an international standard and served in hot and cold buffet form so that they can design their own meals. This food is prepared in a separate kitchen to ensure nothing is included that doesn't meet the international standard such as caffeine.

During the Tennis Open Austin's also host a number of additional events including eight cocktail parties of approximately 200 guests each. Not to mention 260 lunch boxes prepared for Heinekens special guests on finals day.

Then there are all the volunteers to feed – that's a total 1080 extra dinners which need to be served between sessions.

"The Heineken Open is the hardest week. You've just come out of the ASB Classic and you go into four double sessions; the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the Heineken are all double sessions where you start at 8am and finish at 1am, so its quite a hard push," says Bill.

After the two tennis events, Austin's staff cater for the New Zealand Beach Volleyball Championships before changing the format again to produce a courtside formal three course dinner for guests at the celebrity tennis match between Martina Navratilova and Monica Seles.



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Nourished joins

Austin's Food Design Events has a reputation for high end catering. It is the exclusive caterer to the Auckland Convention Centre at The Edge and will begin catering at the Telstra Clear Pacific Events Centre in Manukau. People and service are all important to Austin's. With this philosophy Austin's has taken a step in a new direction by opening a café in Queen Street, Auckland. CYNTHIA DALY met with Austin's Food Design Events general manager Chris Blackman and Austin's Design and Logistics manager Andrew Billingham (Bill) at Nourished.

menu



Nourished is neatly positioned in the HSBC building at the base of Queen Street, opposite Britomart and across the road from the ferry terminal. Foot traffic is virtually constant. There are large in-house client opportunities with 1200 people in the building, and plenty of office and retail outlets near by, all providing potential business for Nourished.

"You can't stand still here without getting knocked down," says Chris Blackman.

"About two years ago we started looking for a location because we wanted a shop front for our service – somewhere we could take our clients and they could taste our food, all be it in a different style than the formal dinner or canapé party. But it's all about the service and the quality of presentation which flows right through," says Blackman.

A search for the perfect location to meet their standards proved fruitless.

Then out of the blue in August last year the opportunity to develop a café in the HSBC building arose.

"This opportunity came up at completely the wrong time in the sense that we were so busy and flat out doing everything else. But we felt that if we put it in the 'round to it basket' we'd probably miss the opportunity and we'd be searching again. So we bit the bullet and decided to get on with it."

Blackman says the building owners wanted to upgrade their facilities to offer their tenants an on-site café restaurant and were very supportive of Austin's as they were familiar with its high standards. It is the golden location for Austin's.

Bill says, operating a café always has its challenges, but if you provide good service at a reasonable cost, create a great atmosphere and are in the right spot to start with, it is a safer bet.

"Choosing the right staff is also all - important. Cafés are all about people interaction, so if you are remembered when you walk in the door, and better still they remember your order from the day before, you're halfway there."

Designing a café to fit the space while providing atmosphere involved a lot of consideration. An example is the café opens onto the HSBC lobby entrance, an area that could feel like a train station

at busy times. However the café actually subtly blends with quiet corners, plants and table layouts to mask the lobby feel.

Austin's handled all of the design in-house including the kitchen, the choice of furniture and colour schemes. The openness of the kitchen, which was designed to allow people to see the chefs at work, adds an interactive element to the atmosphere.

The interior has a natural understated appeal with earthy tones and pale timber. Modern comfortable furniture made by Titan, menu styling and the easy atmosphere encourages clients to linger awhile.

"Once we started looking at the space and started working on the design, one of the main points for us was that we had a good entrance from the café to the lobby of the building," says Blackman.

To achieve this a wall was removed between the lobby and café creating a five metre opening that provides access from within the building.

"This gave us the flow and open feeling and created a convenient meeting place, where the tenants could feel comfortable and it works really well."

Blackman says: "The most important thing about the design was that it was workable from our perspective. The reason why we did it in-house was that we understand what we need better than any architect in town. We understand the reason why it's important to have certain items next to each other, not just because they fit well, but because they need to be there in order to produce what you are producing quickly and efficiently."

All cafés have a very limited space for the server to maximise the seating capacity, says Bill. "You need that small triangular flow so that everything is at arms' reach but not too crowded so it has to be space efficient."

Nourished is at the centre of two main client markets - those passing through, who nip in for a coffee and something out of the display cabinet. And the market that comes to Nourished as a destination to bring others to for a nice meal and glass of wine while they do some business.

To cater for both, Nourished offers a deli counter with sandwiches and ready to go items and an à la carte menu which is suited to lunch meetings. Nourished opens at 7.30am to meet the early morning coffee demand and has attracted a specialised barista to join the Nourished team because of his passion and flare in making great coffee.

At present Nourished is open until around 4pm and remains open for happy hour on Fridays for after work drinks and tapas.

Blackman says there are also intentions to duplicate the design and style but for the time being Nourished is unique.



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