



**Winning streak**  
 The votes have been counted  
 and here are your favourites

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# At your service

Your votes in the Queensland Lifestyle Awards have been counted. Discover the hospitality businesses CM2 readers really rate. Well done to all our winners, writes **Fiona Donnelly**

### Best bar

**Caxton Hotel, Petrie Terrace**  
*"Too cool, great atmosphere."*

HOSPITALITY businesses ebb and flow on the buzzy Caxton Street strip but one hotel keeps packing them in. A Brisbane institution since 1884, The Caxton Hotel was a runner-up for the accolade of best bar in last year's inaugural Queensland Lifestyle Awards. Co-owner Steve Farquhar puts his business success down to old-fashioned warmth.

"It's called the hospitality industry but how often do you get hospitable service?" he asks.

Farquhar says customer care is paramount. "We want people to be able to get a drink immediately," he says. "If you haven't got service in a bar, then you haven't got anything."

Located just a few hundred metres from Suncorp Stadium, The Caxton Hotel could probably rest easy enjoying access to great passing trade. Instead, Farquhar says there are plenty of initiatives to ensure the customers keep on coming.

"We've got lots of deals. There's the mate's rates, two-for-one Tuesdays and Big Wednesdays."

Last year, the \$3 million Char Grill restaurant and Terrace Bar were added. This year, Farquhar says a revamp of the facade is on the cards.

### Best bar person

**Michelle Hall, Mecca Bah, Fortitude Valley**

*"She's good - makes the best cocktails."*

IT'S SAID that to be successful, a barperson should have an intimate knowledge of the human character. If this is true, Michelle Hall, of popular Middle Eastern eatery Mecca Bah, is certainly well-placed.

The 20-year-old is studying psychology at The University of Queensland, funding her studies with part-time restaurant work.

"I did waitressing first but then moved from the floor to the bar because I thought it would be a challenge," she says.

A gap year spent in the US after school sparked her interest in restaurant work and taught her the basics of customer service. She has worked part-time at Mecca Bah for 18 months.

"It's all about having pride in what you do," she says.

Although first and foremost a restaurant, Mecca Bah's bar is a bustling spot and Hall says she has bolstered her basic mixology knowledge with cocktail training sessions and forays to other bars around town.

"It's important to have fun, to learn new things and, of course, to try what you're making."

Her favourite cocktail is Turkish Apple Iced Tea, a mixture of apple schnapps, vodka, Bombay gin, Turkish apple tea and apple juice.

### Best Barista/Best Cafe

**Matt Burton, Two Cups, Spring Hill**

*"The best coffee I've ever had and such a warm and friendly guy."*

IT'S A CASE of history repeating for barista/cafe owner Matt Burton and his Spring Hill bolt-hole, Two Cups, which also triumphed



as best cafe and best barista last year. Why does he keep getting the popular vote?

"Number one has to be consistency of product and customer service, building a good relationship and rapport with the customer," says Burton who has become a master of the 14-second conversation since opening the business two years ago.

"It really makes a difference if you recognise your customers and are able to ask, 'Flat white with one, Tony?'"

The petite cafe has become so popular that a recent attempt to offer free deliveries to offices fell flat because customers said they preferred to call in and collect in person. "It must be bloody boring sitting at a desk all day," Burton says. "People would rather come down and enjoy the show."

A happy half-hour, where coffees are \$2 between 9.30am and 10am, has turned into a bit of an institution.

"We go flat-out," says Burton, who employs an extra staff member to help in the busy periods. "From week to week you might struggle with operating costs but you've got to look at what you're building up to see it's worth it."

Burton says last year he launched an extensive marketing campaign to persuade customers to vote for Two Cups. This year, success came more easily.

"I just put the story from the newspaper up beside the till and last year's feature on the wall," he laughs. "I think I got even better feedback this year because it's all about loyalty."

### Best Restaurant

**Restaurant Lurleen's, Sirromet Winery, Mt Cotton**

*"A pleasure to visit. It's absolutely first-class."*

ACCORDING to Trish Robertson, food and beverage manager at Restaurant Lurleen's, the venue's outstanding success is all about providing quality at the right price, consistently.

"We're not always perfect but we always endeavour to push forward and to keep our standards high," she says.

It's a philosophy that's working, with Restaurant Lurleen's being voted in as best restaurant for the second year in a row. Award-winning executive chef Andrew Miroch insists on sourcing the best produce, local where possible, and refuses to use imported seafood.

"I like to keep it simple and the quality high," he says. "Our market is not about small amounts of food on a large white plate. It's important in this market to give value for money."