

THE GOLD COAST'S MOST ICONIC ROOFTOP RESTAURANT, **NINETEEN AT THE STAR**, IS STARTING CONVERSATIONS WITH THE HELP OF ITS INTERNATIONAL STAR, EXECUTIVE CHEF **UDAY HUJA**.

On the top floor of the curvy, elegant The Darling, high above Broadbeach Island on the Gold Coast, executive chef Uday Huja does his thing. His restaurant is Nineteen at The Star, the sophisticated, sumptuous, destination eatery that opened in 2018 to the top end of town. It's a beautiful venue, cast straight towards the coastline and finished with plush velvet and gold tones. And, with less than three years of operation behind it, it has become a Gold Coast icon.

Huja arrived in the Nineteen kitchen in August 2019, an old friend of The Star Entertainment Group. He had spent a number of years in Sydney handling the 23 food and beverage outlets in The Star Sydney alone. "It was an easy decision to come up here to Nineteen at The Star," he says. "It was an opportunity to lead the Gold Coast's top restaurant, and to evolve it and develop it, and I had a lot of support to do just that."

Huja is polite and articulate. He comes from Virginia, from the town of Charlottesville that produced three American presidents, but he is Indian by heritage. His childhood was filled with the delightful recipes of Indian cuisine while, outside the home walls, it was all about fried chicken, cornbread and black-eyed beans. A career in professional kitchens didn't push those roots aside. Huja has been exposed to some of the highest-flying restaurants in the world, but he still loves the spices and flavours of Indian cooking, and he loves to fry chicken.

Nineteen at The Star suits him well. "My style of cooking is not 40 ingredients on a plate," he says. "Mother Nature has done all the hard work and given us these beautiful products, and my job is to just cook them properly and present them. At Nineteen, our mantra is very clear... great ingredients, simply prepared with finesse. The dish should have one voice, that main ingredient, and everything else is in support of that."

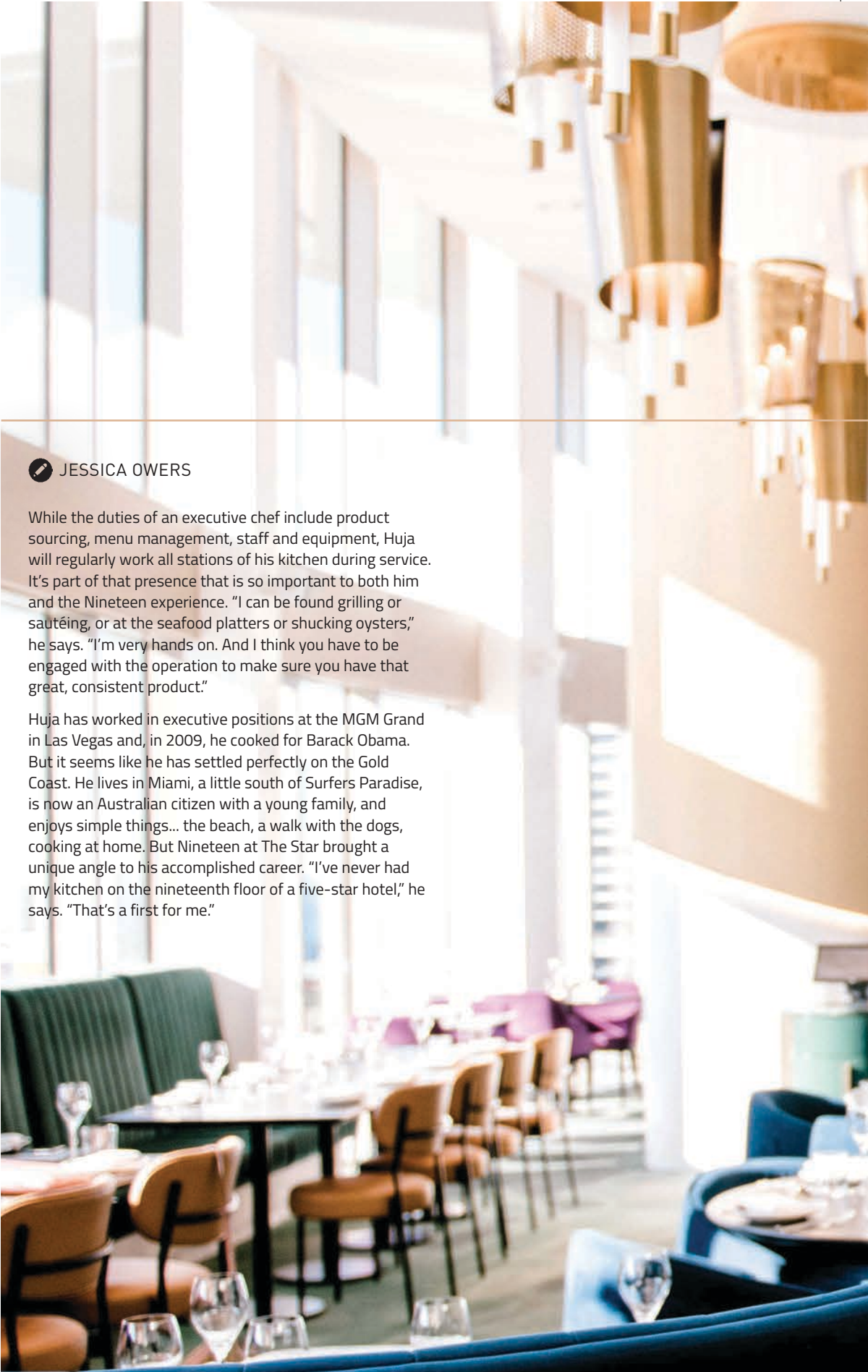
The Nineteen at The Star menu is surprisingly simple but excellent. High-end Angus and Wagyu, ocean trout and roast Bendele duck. Dishes are tastefully garnished, with plenty of white plate around pickled finishes, spinach cream or lemon butter. It's a menu that screams quality. But it's not everything.

Huja believes firmly in the dining experience at Nineteen at The Star. To him, it's not just about the food. He tries to meet each guest that dines in his restaurant, and he is genuine about feedback. Since his arrival, he has introduced culinary tours to the dining room. "Our guests can come up and talk with us in the kitchen," he says. "They can ask about the grill and the wood we use. We really wanted to break down that wall between the kitchen and the guest, and create opportunities for conversation. I'm someone that will walk out and deliver food to the table, and I talk with the guests about what they're eating. I try to talk to every table every night I'm there."

JESSICA OWERS

While the duties of an executive chef include product sourcing, menu management, staff and equipment, Huja will regularly work all stations of his kitchen during service. It's part of that presence that is so important to both him and the Nineteen experience. "I can be found grilling or sautéing, or at the seafood platters or shucking oysters," he says. "I'm very hands on. And I think you have to be engaged with the operation to make sure you have that great, consistent product."

Huja has worked in executive positions at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas and, in 2009, he cooked for Barack Obama. But it seems like he has settled perfectly on the Gold Coast. He lives in Miami, a little south of Surfers Paradise, is now an Australian citizen with a young family, and enjoys simple things... the beach, a walk with the dogs, cooking at home. But Nineteen at The Star brought a unique angle to his accomplished career. "I've never had my kitchen on the nineteenth floor of a five-star hotel," he says. "That's a first for me."



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The Star of the Star



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