

**GARY'S FAVOURITE
MASTERCHEF MOMENT**

'The burgers at the Shake Shack Madison Square Park and The Burger joint at Le Parker Meridien were a revelation – simple 100% beef patty, sweet mustard and pickles... oh and the crinkle cut fries. OMG!'



Gary and Mandy Mehigan, who have been together since they were teenagers, show off Molly, the newest addition to their family.

MasterChef's Gary Mehigan MY MYSTERY INGREDIENT ...MY WIFE

The star chef has found the perfect recipe for a happy family life, writes **LUCY CHESTERTON**

From his days as an ambitious young cook slaving over hot stoves in London restaurants to his celebrity status as a judge on Australia's top reality show, chef Gary Mehigan has come a long way. And he owes it all to his wife of 20 years, Mandy.

Not the type to revel in the spotlight, ever-smiling Mandy is the love of the *MasterChef* judge's life, his touchstone and his always reliable reality check.

"I couldn't do it without her," says Gary of his hectic life, which includes running two restaurants and being dad to Jenna, 10. "She keeps everything going. But when I'm home, I cook and I love that."

Gary and Mandy, both 44, met as "penniless" students in southern England, where Gary studied cuisine and Mandy was preparing for a career in administration.

"I fell in love with her straight away," Gary recalls. "It was those big blue eyes of hers."

For young Mandy, the instant attraction was Gary's sincerity.

"What appealed to me was he was just a genuinely nice person," reveals Mandy in a rare interview. "I mean, he was a boy when I met him, but he was very genuine and loving – that's never changed."

With Gary moving to London to break into the restaurant world, the couple barely saw each other.

"He worked incredible hours," says Mandy. "We had one day a week together, Sunday – and sometimes Monday night. But we were meant to be."

When Gary did propose – after a romantic meal at the Michelin-starred restaurant in which he worked – it was still a big surprise.

"When we got home, I was really tired and wanted to go to bed," Mandy recalls. "But Gary said, 'No, no, wait!' I gave him a cuddle and felt a box in his pocket. I said, 'Oh my God, what's that?', and he got down on one knee and proposed."

"Some couples grow apart when they get together so young, but we've grown together, and it works for us," she adds. "I think the key is talking. I never lie to him."

It was sheer luck the couple ended up in Australia, after deciding to try their luck overseas. They first visited New Zealand House, but there was no-one there. Then they tried Canada House, but their finances didn't allow for the £200 application fee. Australia House welcomed them with open arms.

"Chefs were on their priority occupation list and they said to apply... and to get married before



we left," Mandy says. "So we had to go home and tell our parents that not only were we leaving for Australia, we were getting married sooner than we thought."

The newlyweds waved goodbye to the UK three months later.

"We moved out here intending to stay a year and to do a bit of travelling," Gary says. "Now we're well and truly Australian."

Close as they are, Gary doesn't share everything with his wife. "He won't tell us who's still in the show," Mandy says. "He refuses!"

And if success ever threatens to go to Gary's head, daughter Jenna soon puts him back in his place.

"Jenna has to put up with all the, 'Is your dad the guy on *MasterChef*?' questions," he says with a grin. "Sometimes she just says, 'No, he's not. You've mistaken him for someone else.'"

The MasterChef final airs Sunday, Aug 7, starting at 6.30pm, on Ten.

COOKING UP A STORM: Gary opens up about the final four

It's spatulas at 10 paces as the final four face off for *MasterChef*'s coveted 2011 crown. Judge Gary Mehigan gives us the lowdown...



DANI VENN, VIC
Age: 25
Occupation: Publicist

"A heart-on-her-sleeve, bubbly and bright kind of person, which

is her strength and her weakness. Her mood determines how she'll cook. If she's bright, happy and smiling, it's going to be a good day, but if she's a little more serious, it's going to be a different kind of cooking day for her."



ALANA LOWES, QLD
Age: 30
Occupation: Journalist

"One of the best cooks we've ever had. She's meticulous and

has a real drive. You sense that whatever happens, food is going to be where she goes in her life. Maybe that's a weakness as well – when you're so focused and take something very seriously, often it doesn't go as planned."



KATE BRACKS, NSW
Age: 36
Occupation: Mum

"The surprise for me. A mum of three doing something for

herself to prove to her kids you can do anything you want. It's a lovely story for the girl from Orange. She has just been an absolute spunk! She's gone from baking retro coffee cake to jaw-dropping dishes. Her weakness may be her emotions."



MICHAEL WELDON, SA
Age: 25
Occupation: Film Projectionist

"A big surprise as well. He's been a very

consistent improver, though. He's a reader, a researcher. He goes home and studies things and will then come in and show us things the next day. He's also become very 'chffy', and George and I like that."

Read more

MasterChef's Dani opens up about her passion for food and the love of her life. Read our chat with her at...
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