

Didier Crevecoeur 53 // The Sweet Bistrot
part owner and executive chef

The Sweet Bistrot executive chef and part owner Didier Crevecoeur is well aware of the time and effort needed to ensure his food is perfect. The executive chef, who has worked all over the world with the Accor hotel group, is on site at the Abbott St café at 2am six days a week baking bread and traditional French pastries to prepare for the day ahead. During the day, he's back at the café, cooking up a storm creating a range of sweet and savoury traditional French crepes for his customers.

The café, also owned by former real estate agent Robyn Goodwin and Didier's wife Veronica, sells only fresh home-made food, according to the trio of owners.

"We make everything here. In the morning we have fresh-made French croissants and chocolate croissants," Didier's wife Veronica says. "We are also known for our eggs benedict and the trick is in the hollandaise sauce, it has to be perfect." Didier adds: "It's not in a bucket. It's fresh made."

The French chef seems modest when talking about his cooking history, only saying that he has worked "here and there" while Veronica chips in, explaining that Didier was an executive chef for Sofitel in Asia, Europe, the US and the South Pacific.

"His most challenging position was executive chef at Hanoi, the first five-star hotel there," she says. "He had a brigade of 100 people and started from scratch teaching them everything."

Didier says with little time to train his team, the first six months at the hotel were "challenging". "It was a 24-hour operation," he says. "You have to train the baker at 2am, then you have to be open for breakfast. For the first three months I would sleep for two hours in my office in between a shift until people had an idea of what was going on. The guests were all international business people, mostly French. We did everything ourselves there, you could not go to a bakery to buy bread because there were no bakeries in Hanoi. And all the beef, we imported from France."

Didier later admits he worked for French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1975, who "ate very expensive food like foie gras".

A move to the Gold Coast in 1991 and Didier and Veronica fell in love with Australia. After moving back to Paris, they finally arrived in Cairns nine months ago with plans to stay.

"We decided to come here to see



Photograph // Chris Soc

French flair

Traditional French crepes are now being served in Cairns

The Sweet Bistrot

what the opportunities were," Didier says.

"When we came here to Cairns, we didn't see crepes anywhere. The origin of crepes is from Brittany in France. There are many different recipes. It's like a pizza, you put on any topping that you want.

"It's (crepe) a very common dessert in France. Every corner on the street, there's a crepe stand."

With plans to add more crepes to the menu, Didier says his favourite is Mexican because it's "more refreshing", a chicken, avocado, cheese, tomato, onion and sour cream concoction.

He says popular choices are apple and cinnamon and fruit salad crepes although

Didier says his regulars have been working through the menu, trying out the different recipes. Other varieties include apple, toffee and ice cream; banana, chocolate, walnuts and ice cream; smoked salmon, capers, tomato and sour cream; and cheese, potatoes, French sausage, onion and sour cream.

With the new café just up and running, Didier says he once again expected to spend long hours in the kitchen.

"We are in the beginnings, we have to test the water so physically I'm doing everything on my own," he says.

When asked what Didier cooks at home, he replies with a simple: "We sleep".



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