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**SIMON
THOMSEN**

"This simple piece of hospitality happens all too rarely in Sydney"

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**RIPE HERE,
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*Matt Preston tucks into
the trends for 2010*

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SPANISH MAINS

Miguel Maestre loves food, loves to talk, and loves to entertain. And he is certainly doing his share of all three at his happening new Manly venture, El Toro Loco.

The host of Miguel's Tropical Kitchen on Lifestyle Food, and one of the four chefs of the popular *Boys Weekend*, on Channel Ten, Maestre is paring his cuisine back to its roots by offering true home-style Spanish fare in his grand 300-seat restaurant with sweeping views of Manly beach.

"It is probably one of the best sites in Australia," he says of the North Steyne restaurant. "I would say with 160sq m of beachfront, it's the one place in the North Shore, other than Bathers' Pavilion, that has an amazing location so close to the water. It's such a big perspective."

While Maestre has done his fair share of fancy food – he was last at masterchef Tony Bilson's Number One wine bar at Circular Quay and has spent time at the home of modern gastronomy, Ferran Adria's El Bulli, in his native Spain – he says El Toro Loco is a back-to-basics venue.

Foams, gels, vacuum packs and essences "was amazing" he says. "It opened my mind, that was the best thing that happened in my life. I think (Adria) is amazingly talented, he is like the Albert Einstein of cooking.

"(But) the older I am

getting, I am thinking more and more basics – basics is what I do best. Simplicity is the biggest skill."

Featuring on his menu are gems such as pigs trotters with seared scallops, bread dumplings, his signature paella with abalone and other fresh seafood. There are also some clever desserts, including sweet battered lemon leaves.

Maestre says the Manly venue completes him as a fully-fledged Aussie. The 30-year-old recently married Australian Sascha Newport, with whom he has finished building a house at Elanora Heights – not that he sees much of it.

His first weeks have been frantic. After his opening night service, he managed only 30 minutes sleep before preparing the next day's service.

"We are working as a team, as a unit, it really starts in the kitchen," he says crediting his staff, including long-time workmates, sous chef Ian Gibbs and second sous Joshua Gadsden. And what does he think he can offer the Monday-Friday locals and the weekend tourists?

"I am selling an experience, I am not selling a plate of croquetas with a beer. I am trying to give you a piece of Spain in the middle of Manly."

El Toro Loco, 49-53 North Steyne Rd, Manly, 9977 0999

