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Poh wins MasterChef Australia

By Erin McWhirter, TV Editor | The Daily Telegraph | July 19, 2009 8:57PM

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AUSTRALIA'S culinary experts backed her and Poh Ling Yeow delivered, becoming the first contestant to win MasterChef Australia last night.

It was a case of third time lucky for the Adelaide artist who initially didn't make it past the first audition, was asked back, eliminated from the top 20 and returned one last time to claim victory over mother-of-three Julie Goodwin in the reality TV cooking contest.



Winning recipe... Poh Ling Yeow n on MasterChef Australia
 Source: The Daily Telegraph

Using her cultural connection of her upbringing in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur and the traditional influences her parents Christina and Steven have taught her over the years, Ling Yeow was stunned with the verdict but happy to embrace it.

"This is really a surreal feeling," the 35-year-old, who hails from Norwood in South Australia told *The Daily Telegraph*.

"New ground is forged when you take risks and I've taken a few during this competition which have paid off.

"Trying new things and throwing yourself in the deep end is what it's all been about. I feel like a deer in headlights.

"I have a cultural background to draw on, a whole spectrum of ingredients that most people in the competition aren't familiar with. It's been an intense bit amazing journey."

In one of Australia's most-anticipated and spectacular TV cooking showdowns the finalists showcased their culinary skills in a three-round challenge in front of their former top 20 *MasterChef Australia* opponents and judges Gary Mehigan, Matt Preston and George Calombaris.

Celebrity chef Curtis Stone also attended the final which included the finalists identifying ingredients in a beef bourguignon dish, cooking an entire chicken and perfecting Matt Moran's signature dish, a chocolate tart with chocolate half pipe and macarons accompanied by a chocolate sorbet.

Celebrating the triumph with her parents, her eldest brother Casper and his four children, as well friends and relatives in SA, Ling Yeow said learning to adjust to a new culture when her family migrated to Australia when she was nine gave her the ammunition she's need to succeed in many parts of her life.

"When we first migrated here there really weren't that many immigrants around, not many Asians, so we did stick out a bit," she says.

"I guess that's what my food and art is about. It's about me constantly trying to reconcile these two cultures I am a part of and finding a sense of belonging in both. I really reflect that in my food and art."

Raised in a strict Christian home, Ling Yeow says her parents converting to Mormonism when she was a teenager has made her determined to stick to her guns and do what she wants, not others.

"I grew up in a strict home and mum and dad wouldn't let me go out as a teenager, so I was a bit of a square peg," Ling Yeow says.

"Then when I was 16 we converted to the Church Of Jesus Christ For Later Day Saints, known as the Mormons and so we went from a culturally traditional home to this quite strict Christian religion so I had a sheltered upbringing.

"I basically went overseas when I was about 19 and that's when the world opened up to me. I had to leave mum for a little bit and just explore it myself. It was the best thing I ever did."

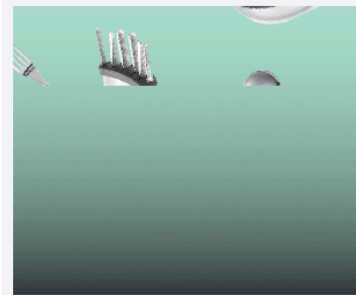
After pocking the \$100,000 cash prize and a cookbook deal Ling Yeow says she's excited about launching her book *Food From Mars*.

With a heavy Asian influence, the *MasterChef* winner believes Australians have been waiting for a cookbook which explores her roots.

"I think Australia is at a stage in our food history where we are willing to be adventurous now," Ling Yeow said.

"That's why I put fairly exotic ingredients into the competition because I think the public is ready to try exotic food.

"It's part of my story of who I am as a migrant and food has played a very important part in terms of me identifying with my culture because I've lost touch with lots of other aspects of it like



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language and values. That's happened because I grew up here."

However, for Ling Yeow her immediate focus is on returning to her painting after neglecting it for four months.

The established artist is yet to finish all her pieces for an exhibition of her works at the Hill Smith Gallery in Adelaide in November.

The reality TV contestant says it's been tough juggling the demands of *MasterChef Australia* with her love of art.

"I've been getting some really amazing offers due to MasterChef, which I can't talk about, but it's been really hard to balance it all," Ling Yeow said.

"So I am trying to process the recognition from the show, but I still really need to paint and it's something I miss and couldn't do in the house.

"I've been trying to multi-task but it's been difficult. When I am at home I can just put it down, but I've been really restricted in that sense while being on the show so I've got this build up of ideas in my head that I have to get out."

Disappointed but humble, Goodwin praised her feisty opponent for her success.

"Poh's a very deserving winner," she said. "I'm proud of her, she's a good friend and I wish her every success in the world."

MasterChef Australia is expected to record a national average audience of more than 2.58 million, the figure of the highest-rating TV program this year in the debut of *Underbelly: A Tale Of Two Cities*.

Auditions for the second series of *MasterChef Australia* will commence in November following the premiere of *Celebrity MasterChef*.

Applications are set to double with more than 15,000 expected to audition for the hit program.

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