



# RICKY SAWARD

## FUSS-FREE VEGAN HAUTE CUISINE

Ricky Saward has had an astonishing career, one that has taken him from the kitchens of a retirement home and eateries in his hometown to grand hotel kitchens in Vienna and Sydney, and eventually to Michelin-starred restaurants in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Starting out in the world of conventional fine-dining cuisine, Ricky was soon ready to spread his wings in search of a new challenge.

In 2018, Ricky was hired by Michelin-starred vegetarian restaurant Seven Swans, where he took over as head chef just a few months later. A jump into the deep end that was a risky move for both him and the restaurant. “I wouldn’t do anything like that again today,” he says. But we’d be forgiven for not quite believing him.

Then, towards the end of 2019, he decided to take an even riskier step and overhaul the restaurant’s menu to offer exclusively regional and seasonal vegan dishes. What is more and more of an established concept today still sounded far out a few years ago: “People thought we were crazy,” the chef recalls. But his courage paid off, and to great success: Seven Swans is currently booked up over a year in advance!

Ricky isn’t afraid to radically rethink modern haute cuisine. Of course, his ideas aren’t always popular with everyone. Some don’t understand the concept and dismiss it as nothing but a short-lived trend, while others praise him as being revolutionary, a pioneer, even a missionary of vegan cuisine. He doesn’t like such labels: “Anyone can do what I do. I’m no different from anyone else. But what I can do is make people think, and that’s something that’s important to me.”

Does every original idea have to be revolutionary or missionary? Of course, sustainability is important to him, but not in a pushy, showy way. “I’ve never been a

fan of people who go overboard about things, who do nothing but get on their soapbox. I’m a fan of getting on with the job and delivering. We take a fuss-free approach here. We cook – exclusively with vegetables – and cook very well. That’s what makes us stand out.”

Labels and frills and fancies are generally not his thing. They distract from what’s important. This is evident in Seven Swans’ minimalist, stylish interior, as well as in its menu: There isn’t one. Diners at Seven Swans are offered only its “secret” tasting menu – with or without wine – and have the little works of culinary art served to them straight from the kitchen by the chef and his team. Because there are no waiting staff here either. “There’s no need for them. We’re the ones preparing the dishes in the kitchen, and so we’re also best placed to tell the diners about them.”

The starting point for the restaurant’s dishes is always simple: What’s in season and available right now? What can we make with it? What marries well with what? This requires a certain level of skill

and expertise, and it is vital you know your products and produce inside out. The restaurant’s fresh ingredients come from its very own permaculture garden; with 350 different types of vegetable grown there all year round. These are dried, matured, grilled, smoked, fermented or powdered and offer plenty of scope for keeping the menu interesting. This impresses non-vegans most of all as they usually only realise towards the end of the evening that they haven’t missed their usual meat or fish at all.

### SEVEN SWANS

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# CABBAGE ROLLS

 Serves 10     60 minutes     90 minutes + 12 hours

- › 1 white cabbage
- › 2 pointed cabbages
- › 400 g Brussels sprouts
- › 200 g sauerkraut
- › 200 ml vegetable stock
- › 20 g horseradish
- › 30 wood sorrel leaves
- › Rapeseed oil
- › Salt

- The white cabbage chips**
- 1 Remove the leaves from the white cabbage. Cut the stalk out of the leaves. Drizzle the leaves with oil and salt.
  - 2 Spread them out between two layers of baking paper and weigh them down with a baking tray.
  - 3 Leave at room temperature for about six hours, then dry the leaves in the oven at 55°C overnight.
- The sauerkraut stock**
- 1 Squeeze the sauerkraut and collect the juice. Boil down the juice until it thickens. Season to taste if necessary.
- The Brussels sprout cream**
- 1 Remove the outer leaves and the stalk from the Brussels sprouts. Blanch the Brussels sprouts in boiling water until soft and rinse in ice water. Drain well and sauté
- in oil without letting them brown. Add the stock and bring to the boil.
- The pointed cabbage rolls**
- 1 Cook the pointed cabbage for 50 minutes at 220°C fan oven. Leave to cool.
  - 2 Then remove the black outer leaves. Carefully detach the inner leaves.
  - 3 Spread the Brussels sprout cream and the squeezed sauerkraut generously on each leaf and roll up. A sushi mat is ideal for this.
- Serving**
- 1 Stand the pointed cabbage roll upright. Place a little sauerkraut on the roll. Drizzle with the sauerkraut stock. Grate the horseradish over the rolls. Serve with the white cabbage chips on the side.