

# PHIL COOREY – WELL SPOTTED

This month, *QHA Review* stops in at The Spotted Cow Hotel in Toowoomba to catch up with Phil Coorey, Hotel Manager.

**Phil, you have been the Hotel Manager at The Spotted Cow Hotel now for over 10 years, but have been involved in the hotel industry for 17 years. What is it about this industry that keeps you turning up for work each day?**

I am probably bringing out every single cliché that has been printed before but I really do love my customers. By spending lots of time at the bottleshop and the pub, I get to meet and serve many different people from all walks of life. I always seem to have something in common with most of them and find I can learn a lot from them. Although a few don't like my movie and music tastes which is a worry.

**The Cooreys are a well known pub family in the Toowoomba area. With a number of great hotels in the Toowoomba region, what makes The Spotted Cow unique?**

While born in Toowoomba, we were only here till 1980. We grew up in Sydney and that is where I think the Cow gets its uniqueness. The family took over the hotel in 1995 and immediately we put into place some ideas that we really liked from Sydney hotels that were not necessarily thought possible in large country towns. Dad and Mum always encouraged us to add our own touches to the hotel while we were here as well which helped.

**What was your first ever paid job?**

After I left school I took on two jobs – one with Dad at our old sandwich and catering business in Sydney and one at the Sydney Football Stadium (so I could be closer to the Rooster players when I wanted to pour beer on them).

I did not think 15 years later I would be doing hospitality still to be honest as I was studying commerce at the time and looking forward to a life in a suit.

**You must have learned a lot from your parents about the hotel business over**

**the years, what was the most important lesson they have taught you?**

Dad and Mum have taught me a lot and they both work in different ways. Dad is very customer orientated and seems to know a person from every single town in NSW and Queensland, which is always a tremendous icebreaker from him at the hotel.

He put a lot on the line when we brought the hotel, but he has tremendous self belief in us and was sure we could run a pub. He strives to be at the hotel every single night so he can catch up with the customers and pass on the latest gossip (mainly justifying the existence of Souths and talking about his old school Joeys!) and his opinions to locals.

Mum is very hands-on in the kitchen and loves looking after the restaurant. She is often mentioned by many people as one of the hardest working individuals they know. Thankfully my brother and I have kids now to slow her down a bit but she is still crazy.

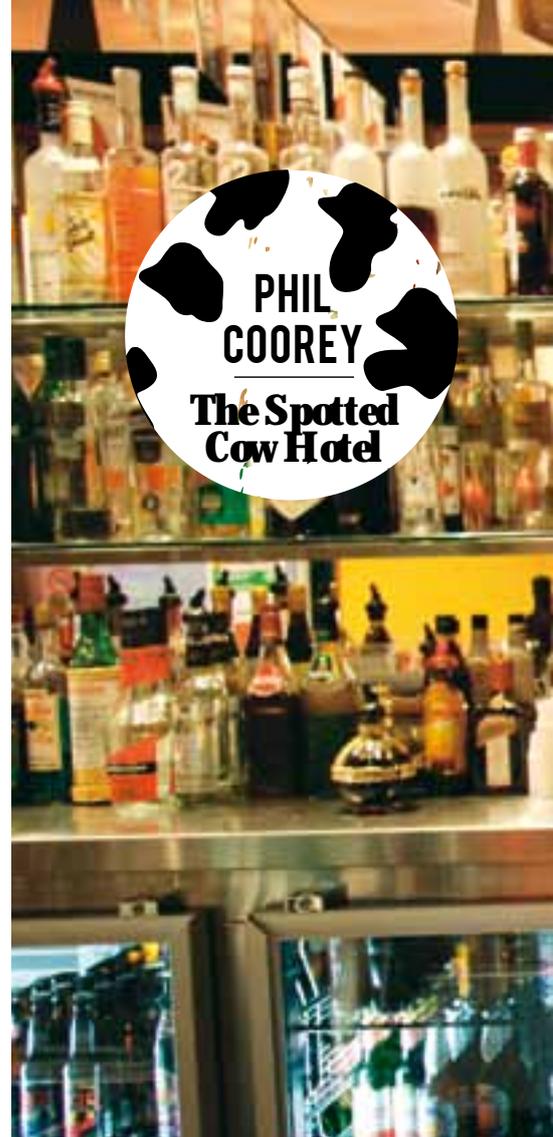
**And your parents must have learned a lesson or two from you and your style of hotel management. What would you say you have been able to teach them?**

I have equal parts of Mum and Dad in me (except the hair, that's a mystery). But I think I still show them a trick or two. It's hard to say what I teach them really – they have been in business longer than I have been alive, so I am still learning every day.

**The Spotted Cow boasts over 70 different beers, which you personally select. How did this passion for beer come about and how do you choose what the hotel stocks?**

The passion came from my time in England in 1999/2000 – there seemed to be a different beer on tap at every pub I went to and being a West Ham fan I had to visit many pubs.

Coming home at first I would source these beers for myself to drink then look up and see that people wanted more of the Chimay's



and Hoegaardens as well!

I find the range is more important than ever now as there are so many varieties of one particular style. A pub could open tomorrow and have 30 different types of pale ale available and they would all taste fairly differently and the shop would be renowned as a beer haven. We have over 330 beers in the shop and wish we had room for more due to the many customers from outside of Toowoomba we have attracted now.

It is really crazy trying to keep up but my reps are superb. With any limited release that comes out, they let me know straight away. They know where I stand, they know my ego, they know I want to be ahead of the curve, so to speak.

The trends are moving so fast it is just fun keeping up – the best part about beer in the last 10 years without doubt has been the rise of Australian Craft beers – even better – Queensland now has some world class breweries that have emerged in the past five years as well – so freight is not an issue for once!

**What is your favourite beer at the moment?**

Knappstein Lager in the bottle – the man who invented it is now the head wine maker at Wirra Wirra (Paul Smith) but it is still a top class drop and he told me in detail one day



about how it all came about – fun times if you are a beer nerd.

Draught beer would be the Stone and Wood Draught Ale, but then again so was the new Little Creatures Single Batch Brown Ale, I also love Alpha Pale Ale and I have not even started on the imported beers like Rogue and Nogne O that Dave Andrews from Innspire is bringing in. Why did I have to list one? I am more a top five person!!

**If you were Premier for a day, what would you do?**

Look over my shoulder the whole day especially after what just happened to Kevin Rudd.

**What is your most memorable day at work to date?**

I have two... on 19 October 2007 – the day my twins were born. I got the day off. And in March this year when we had Viv Richards at the hotel for a gala dinner one night and lunch the next. It was the culmination of lots of hard work from a lot of us here at the Cow and we were all pretty excited to have a real sporting legend here. There will not be too many legends in cricket left over the years so having Viv was an experience like no other.

**If you had a chance to do something differently in your life, what would you change?**

I would not have played rugby after school

– four knee operations later and I can hardly walk. I would have also studied in America and toured the country tasting Buffalo Wings and watching baseball.

**Apart from The Spotted Cow, what are some of your favourite hotels to visit?**

In Brisbane, the Story Bridge (you always run into someone you know and Richard Deery is always there for a chat), the Paddo (especially when I know Matt McGuire won't be there!), Grand Central Hotel (my brother has found a way to get the cool beers before me and I need to find out why!), and the Wellington Point (if Scott Hogan lets me in).

But I love the smaller bars as well especially Lychee Lounge, Laruche and Bowery as well – great cocktails and these bars are a reason for the evolution of bartenders being able to have a profession to be really proud of, for many now it is not a part time job.

**When you're not working, what do you do in your spare time?**

Spend time with my wife and twins, watching baseball and Souths games without trying to swear too much around them as they start picking up more and more words, and in the gym trying to get under the elusive 100kg mark at the moment.

**If you weren't involved in hotels, what would you be doing?**

1. The assistant general manager for the Boston Red Sox. I'd be willing to be the assistant to the traveling secretary as well
2. Writing music reviews for [www.pitchfork.com](http://www.pitchfork.com)
3. Probably some boring bank job
4. Spending a year in Boston with my wife watching sport literally all year
5. A sports journalist covering American sport for Aussies who need a hand to see the light.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years time?**

Still here – we have just completed a massive restaurant focused renovation. My girls will be thirteen by then so work will come cheap and labour costs will be lowered as well. I would be mad not to stay!

**Tell us something we don't know about you...**

I am a complete and utter baseball fanatic. Imagine the intensity of a Queenslander a State Of Origin game and multiply that by 162 (does not include playoffs). That's how many games the Red Sox play a year.

Thankfully it does not get in the way of work as games are over by midday at the latest and I can focus on work till the early hours of the morning then! **Q**