

Pies to pavlovas. The culinary landscape of the Australian Hostess Cookbook (1969)

February 2025

In 1969 the *Australian Hostess Cookbook* was published, edited by Hanna Pan¹. The Cookbook is in the form of a contributory cookbook of dinners from 40 winners of the 1968 'Hostess of the Year' competition conducted by the *Australian* magazine *Women's Day* and sponsored by Holbrook's Division of Reckitt & Colman Pty.² Among the winners seven were from cattle or sheep stations or other rural property. There are 202 recipes in the *Cookbook*.

In Part 1 of this article, I look at what the *Cookbook* tell us of the culinary landscape in 1969 in which these hostesses held their dinners?

In Part 2 I look at what the *Cookbook* tells us of the role of the hostess and host at these dinners.

Part 1

Styles of dinners

There are recipes in the *Cookbook* for formal dinners (black tie for men), semi-formal dinners (lounge suits for men), buffets, parties, outside dinners (though there is no mention of barbecues), and themed dinners.

Fancy dress always adds interest to the party, and it is easy and inexpensive to dress to suit a Roaring Twenties theme...³

Styles of dishes

There are recipes for a wide-range of dishes; curries, salads, roasts, pot roasts, appetisers/nibbles/canapes/hors d'oeuvres, pies, tarts, puddings, casseroles, rice dishes, dips, aspics, jellies, fondues, soups, desserts, rolls, sautés, fruit salads, pizzas, quiches, punches, pilafs, mousses, bakes, sauces, ice creams, biscuits, offal, cakes, pastries, pancakes, flans, and pavlovas.

My guests are welcomed with hors d'oeuvres and drinks against a background of music in the sitting-room. A large relish tray containing celery curls, carrot sticks, radishes, olives, and pineapple slice arranged in circles is set on a small round table with six-inch napkins supplied.⁴

Ingredients

Ingredients reflected the dishes covered by the *Cookbook* recipes.

There was meat of all kinds with lamb being the majority.

The sausages were cut into small pieces beforehand, but the original shapes were retained to keep the 'rustic' atmosphere of the table.⁵

There were only six fish dishes, crustaceans had 20, and shell fish had eight.

¹ The *Australian Hostess Cookbook* Pan, Hanna (Ed) Nelson 1969

² I couldn't find the criteria by which the meals were judged.

³ Cookbook p. 126

⁴ Cookbook p. 82

⁵ Cookbook p. 94

I then crumb the fish, make the tartare sauce, coat the veal in egg and cheese, prepare and put into crystal bowls the punch crème and prepare and put in cocktail dishes the avocado and oyster cocktail, and store them all in the refrigerator.⁶

Vegetables were those common to the Australian kitchen with one surprise – endive. I thought there would have been recipes for eggplant but no. There were recipes for using it as early as 1935.⁷ Similarly, zucchini did not appear in any *Cookbook* recipes though there were recipes for it at least by 1937.⁸

Some non-Anglo identified ingredients are used in Anglo-Australian dishes in the *Cookbook*. For example, prosciutto, liverwurst, csabai, olives, gherkin, and dill cucumber.

Tinned/canned foods are sometimes used as are packet soups. This does not vary for urban versus outback dinners as may have been expected with the latter relying more on them.

All these ingredients were readily available except in outback stations.

As we live on a cattle station 10 miles to the nearest town ... dinner will consist of station supplies from the store and any fresh foods available from our garden, lagoon or river.⁹

When planning my menu, I have to consider the conditions out here in the Australian bush. Our nearest town is fifty-six miles away and the mail lorry, with my ingredients on board, has to spend a whole night on the dusty dirt road before it finally arrives at our door early in the morning. Fruit and vegetables travel 500 miles in a goods train before they reach the mail lorry.¹⁰

Some focussed on showcasing local products.

When we are entertaining visitors from overseas we feature Australian foods and wines.¹¹

Because this occasion is intended to introduce newcomers to Tasmania I would use local foods: scallops, lamb, apples, devilled beans, chocolate and cider. The dinner wines would also be Tasmanian.¹²

A full list of ingredients is Appendix 1.

Alcohol

Most dinners began with pre - dinner drinks: cocktails, beer, sherry and wines.

For pre-dinner drinks, I will have a welcoming champagne punch bowl and sweet sherry.¹³

⁶ Cookbook p. 86

⁷ Egg-plant recipes, Advice for Kitchen and Pantry, *The Argus* 27 February p.14

⁸ An Italian Recipe, *The Sun-News Pictorial* 26 August 1937 p.37

⁹ Cookbook p.24

¹⁰ Cookbook p.68

¹¹ Cookbook p.58

¹² Cookbook p.98

¹³ Cookbook p.106

Wines were served with the meal. Liqueurs sometimes were served after the meal. Serving alcohol is always the role of the host, with an exception:

Serving wine at dinner is simplified by placing a small flask of red wine at the right hand of each male guest, allowing him to pour himself and his companion.¹⁴

Australian wines are specified in some instances.

This party, which we gave for thirty guests, was planned as a wine-tasting with a variety of Australian dry red wines for the guests to sample and identify.¹⁵

Hostesses were aware that some guests may not drink alcohol.

A few bottles of tonic water, dry ginger ale, soda and bitter lemon are all that is needed in the soft drink line.¹⁶

A full list of the alcohols is part of Appendix 1.

Cheese plate

Cheese plates with biscuits - 'plaza crackers' - were served after the main meal.

I have a large revolving wooden cheese board which I place in the centre of the table with several cheeses such as Emmenthal or Danish blue, Camembert and a semi-matured natural cheddar. I think it is important to have several cheese knives so that flavours aren't mixed.¹⁷

Coffee

Most dinners finished with coffee, often percolated.

Coffee is served at the dinner table, as I have found that conversation never regains the same interest if guests are made to break it at this stage to move to another room.¹⁸

Smoking

Nearly everyone (at least the men) smoked, sometimes over the course of the meal, and the deployment of ashtrays was an essential part of organising.

My husband ... sets out ashtrays and cigarettes, and fills the pre-dinner nut bowls with cashews.¹⁹

I place individual ashtrays on the table after the main course has been cleared away.²⁰

Native Foods

Not unexpectedly the only native foods for which recipes are given are fish (Coral Trout, Red Emperor), crustaceans and shellfish. There had been little engagement with native plants from

¹⁴ Cookbook p.42

¹⁵ Cookbook p.94

¹⁶ Cookbook p.142

¹⁷ Cookbook p.32

¹⁸ Cookbook p.42

¹⁹ Cookbook p.38

²⁰ Cookbook p.58

the early days of the colonies. Engagement with native animals was mostly kangaroo which had jumped out of the Australian kitchen some time before the *Cookbook* was published.

Culinary diversity of dishes

Pan wrote: 'The French salad and spaghetti Bolognese with their attendant garlic cloves are the first foreign flavours to set their tiny feet within the Australian kitchen door and become part of the family. Meanwhile German, Dutch, Italian, Greek, Chinese, Jewish, Asian, Spanish and Turkish migrants and visitors have settled in our country, bringing with them the variety of their own cuisines. We are becoming more adventurous as numbers of us travel and return with recipes and ideas from other countries.'

How well do the dishes in the *Cookbook* bear this out?

There is a *Continental Menu: Pumpernickel Savouries, Honeydew Melon Balls, Estonian Kidney Soup, Schnitzels with Mushrooms, Continental Chocolate*.

There are eight nominally French dishes: Coq au Vin, Bouillabaisse, Quiche Lorraine, La Bonne Soup, Veal A La Tante Marie, Pommes de Terre Parisiennes, Lamb Chops En Cuirasse, Pommes De Terre Fondantes, and Madeleines. Australians were still enthralled by French cuisine and would be for many years to come. A much-noted sign of this was restaurant dishes being given 'French' names much like above.

There are four nominally Indian dishes: Poulet Simla, Madras Curry, Rice Pilaf, and Bengal Curry. Indian dishes were in the Australian Kitchen from at least 1864 when Edward Abbott gave a recipe for Curry in his *English and Australian Cookery Book* in 1864.²¹

There are six that are nominally Italian; Spaghetti Diable, Veal Scallopini al Marsala, Spaghetti Romano, Italian Ice Cream, Prosciutto Mellone, and Pizza. Italian recipes were published by at least 1899.²²

There is one dish nominally Hungarian - Orange Borscht. The earliest recipe for borscht albeit Russian, I found was in 1918.²³

There was one nominally Viennese dish – Viennese Coffee. The earliest recipe for this I found was 1942.²⁴

Surprisingly, there are none for Chinese cuisine though Sweet and Sour, Chow Mien and Chop Suey had their 'tiny feet within the Australian kitchen' since the earliest days of the colony. The earliest recipe for a Chinese dish I found was for Chop Suey in 1926.²⁵ Three English language

²¹ Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cook Book*, Cookery for the many as well as the "Upper Ten Thousand" London Sampson Low, Son, and Marston p. 25

²² Some Italian Recipes, *The Braidwood Dispatch and Mining Journal* 9 December 1899 p.2

²³ Borscht, Novel Russian Dishes, *Sunday Times* 3 February 1918 p.18

²⁴ Viennese Coffee, *The Propeller* 8 October 1942 p.3

²⁵ Chop Suey, Some Recipes, *The Capricornian* 30 January 1836 p.5

Chinese cookery books had been published in the past decades.²⁶ The non-Chinese recipes in the Cookbook use soy sauce – Crisp Celery Sauté²⁷, Chicken a la King²⁸, and Mushroom Sauce²⁹

Nor are there any Asian dishes. In comparison in 1967 the *Australian Women's Weekly* published a two-page feature on Sates.³⁰ Recently, too, Asian focussed cookery books had been published.³¹

That means just 17 out of 202 dishes are from cuisines other than Anglo-Australian, none of which are from the cuisines listed by Pan except for Italian.

But non-Anglo-Australian cuisines listed by Pan had been in the Australian kitchen for some years before the Hostess competition. There were German recipes as early as 1881.³² There were Greek recipes since at least 1934.³³ There were Dutch recipes since at least 1933.³⁴

The earliest Spanish recipe I found was in 1927.³⁵ There are Turkish recipes as early as 1865.³⁶ The earliest Jewish recipe I found was in 1906.³⁷

The Cookbook was not alone in having little diversity. In 1963 the *Australian Women's Weekly* Published 'Recipes from Famous Brand Cooks'. It had just 19 non-Anglo-Australian recipes out of 500.

Part 2.

How to be a hostess

The Cookbook wasn't only about the recipes. It suggested what to think about when constructing a menu and the hostesses' and host's roles during the dinner.

To plan a dinner

Some hostesses described their approach when planning the menu.

I am often tempted to serve highly spiced oriental and continental dishes, which would be fine if I was sure that all my guests would enjoy them. However, I find it safer to serve a plain meal with one unusual dish such as beef rolled in a cheese pastry. This way I can please both the gourmet and the unadventurous eater.³⁸

²⁶ *Cooking the Chinese Way*, Roy Geechoun, W. D. Joynt & Company 1948; *Chinese Recipes for Home Cooking*, Yep Yung Hee Associated General Publications 1951; *Chinese Cookery*, Mrs. Mai Ling Wong Southdown Press 1966 (?)

²⁷ Cookbook p.56

²⁸ Cookbook p.74

²⁹ Cookbook p.135

³⁰ Sates *Australian Women's Weekly* 19 April 1967 pp.67-68

³¹ Maris Kozslik Donovan, *The Far Eastern Epicure*, Heinemann 1961; Doris M. Ady, *Curries from the Sultan's Kitchen* A. H. & A. W. Reed 1968.

³² German Recipes, Household, *Weekly Times* 29 October 1881 p.14

³³ Greek Dishes. Some Good Recipes, *Western Mail* 25 October 1934 p.30

³⁴ Cookbook p.35

³⁵ A Spanish Recipe, *North Star* 21 September 1927 p.11

³⁶ Turkish Recipes, *The Australasian* 6 May 1865 p.3

³⁷ Jewish Cookery, *The Hebrew Standard of Australia* 13 April 1906 p.7

³⁸ Cookbook p.122

I always choose the main dish first as this is the axis on which the meal revolves. I try to avoid similar in successive dishes, and consider colour when combining foods, planning a meal which as far as possible does not necessitate leaving the dining-room for the kitchen.³⁹

If I know that a guest suffers from a disorder, such as diabetes or a gastric ulcer, I make some allowance for this in planning the meal so that no guest is embarrassed by special fuss during the dinner.⁴⁰

A fine dinner should not be a series of delicious, unrelated courses; it should have harmony as well as contrast. A record of menus from previous parties help me considerably in achieving this.⁴¹

This menu is designed so that most of the work can be done early in the day, letting the hostess have a rest before the party begins.⁴²

In order to spend the maximum amount of time with my guests, I organise a menu that will look after itself in the latter stages of the dinner party.⁴³

I try to choose a menu which will not be spoiled if dinner is delayed.⁴⁴

Ins and outs of hostessing

Some entries describe the role of the hostess, some of it contradictory.

Remember to have everything at your fingertips in the dining room such as the coffee service in readiness. There is nothing worse than a hostess who starts digging around in cupboards while guests are present.⁴⁵

Golden Rule of my house: to leave all washing-up until the guests' departure.⁴⁶

I wash up after every course, using a double-bowl sink with very hot rinsing water and putting the plates in a drying rack. I dry cutlery and pots as I go.⁴⁷

During the dinner the hostess should ensure there is no noise from the kitchen, and that each dish is perfect. Her guests may then relax. The dishes and silver from each course should be removed with no disturbance.⁴⁸

Avoid repeated departures from the table.⁴⁹

I prefer to sit where I can leave the table easily without disturbing anyone.⁵⁰

³⁹ Cookbook p.66

⁴⁰ Cookbook p.90

⁴¹ Cookbook p.76

⁴² Cookbook p. 62

⁴³ Cookbook p. 86

⁴⁴ Cookbook p. 90

⁴⁵ Cookbook p.9

⁴⁶ Cookbook p.68

⁴⁷ Cookbook p.79

⁴⁸ Cookbook p.82

⁴⁹ Cookbook p.98

⁵⁰ Cookbook p.111

The secret of entertaining is to have everything under control. which means that as much as possible must be done beforehand.⁵¹

A good hostess should be a woman whose interest is quickly aroused by the interests of another person. She is a good listener, as well as an entertaining conversationalist who does not talk about her own hobby-horse, and mixes quickly and warmly with any group.

... I will do the last round-up by washing the remaining dishes, and putting away food, feeling secretly proud of being mother, organiser multi-purpose cook, gardener, kitchen-maid, waitress and dish washer.⁵²

Some also describe the role of the host.

A host who unobtrusively helps the hostess promotes a congenial atmosphere.⁵³

Introductions are important, and the hostess can be making them while the host prepares the drinks.⁵⁴

The host sets the mood by keeping everyone happily engaged in conversation while the hostess is absent.⁵⁵

The *Cookbook* published 'Ten Tips for Success' by Mrs. Scott. These are Appendix 2.

Coda

The culinary landscape in 1969 into which the *Australian Hostess Cookbook* was published was one that had a range of styles of dinners and dishes and the ingredients needed to make the dishes. It's significant failing was to lack culinary diversity though it was not alone in this.

⁵¹ Cookbook p.9

⁵² Cookbook p. 30

⁵³ Cookbook p.98

⁵⁴ Cookbook p.11

⁵⁵ Cookbook p.82

Appendix 1. Ingredients

Meats

Unsurprisingly meat was a major part of the dinners. Lamb chops, saddle of lamb, crown roast lamb, boned shoulder lamb, lamb kidneys, pork fillets, boned pork loin; duckling, duck, chicken; topside, chuck fillet steak, minced steak, bladebone steak hamburger mince, veal steak and veal chops, giblets.

Fish/seafood

Crayfish, yabby, prawns, lobster, whiting, scallops, mud crabs, tinned tuna, and tinned sardines.

Vegetables

Beetroot, mushrooms, potatoes, lettuce, tomatoes, endive, canned asparagus, onions, celery, shallots, chives, capsicum (green and red), cucumber, carrots, avocados, parsnips, watercress, beans, turnips, shallots leeks, radish, cabbage, artichoke hearts, and champignon.

Fruit

Strawberries, oranges, lemon, raspberries, canned pineapples, tinned, pears, apples, bananas, tinned cherries, lychee nuts, grapes, melons, grapefruit, passionfruit, rock melon, peaches, Chinese gooseberries, prunes, and pawpaw.

Dried fruit

Sultanas and dates.

Nuts

Almonds, hazel nuts, cashews and Brazil nuts, and hazel.

Herbs

Thyme, bay leaves, dried mixed, tarragon, mint, rosemary, marjoram, oregano, bouquet garni, coriander.

Spices

Nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, dry mustard, prepared mustard, saffron, cayenne, root preserved ground dry crystallised or syrup ginger, pepper, and garlic, chilli powder and curry powder.

Delicatessen/small goods

Prosciutto, liverwurst, csabai, stuffed olive, salami, red caviar, Parmesan cheese, vinegar, mixed peels, capers, black olives, stuffed olives, almond essence, vanilla essence, pistachio essence, chestnut puree, roll mops, and angelica leaves,

Pickles

Gherkin, and dill cucumber

Native animals and plants

Coral Trout, Red Emperor, crayfish, and scallops

Sauces

Tomato, Worcestershire, chilli, mayonnaise, cranberry, soy, stock, cocktail sauce, tomato paste, tomato puree, barbecue, bearnaise, mustard, anchovy, and mushroom

Juices

Canned Tomato, canned Orange, grapefruit, orange, and lemon,

Cheeses

Tasty, Swiss, Danish blue, cream, Romano, Cheddar, blue, Gruyere, and camembert.

Dairy

Cream, evaporated milk, butter, milk, and sour milk

Breads

Grissini, French bread stick, brown, white, and pumpernickel

Alcohol

Brandy, sherry, rum, port, red wine, whiskey, Cointreau, white wine, Curacao, Kirsch, French vermouth, Marsala, Grand Marnier, champagne, claret, bitters, vermouth, Crème de Cacao, Tia Maria, Benedictine, Drambuie, cognac, Bundaberg rum, and other liqueurs.

Rice

Fluffy boiled rice, plain rice, packet chicken rice-a-riso, Mexican rice-a-riso, and Chinese rice-a-riso

Other ingredients

Ham, bacon, eggs, capers, gherkins, horse radish, glace cherries, Maraschino cherries, cream, apricot jam, chutney, olive oil, rosewater, chocolate, tinned beef consommé, breadcrumbs, brown sugar, rice, sugar, castor sugar, salt, flour, coffee, gelatine, lard, dripping, icing sugar, caster sugar, cream of tartar, instant coffee powder, , biscuits, coconut, cocoa, honey, arrowroot, cheese finger biscuits, meat extract, spaghetti, baking powder, rice bubble cereal, , glucose, noodles, long grain rice, meat extract, ginger extract, custard, dry ginger ale, lemonade, tea leaves, escargot, instant coffee, French dressing, vanilla ice cream, cold tea, lime jelly crystal, corn flour, desiccated coconut, and chocolate ripple biscuits

Appendix 2. Ten Tips for Success

Be ready well before your guests are due, and plan to relax for ten minutes before the first one arrives.

Ensure that the room temperature is comfortable, that ventilation is adequate, and that there are no draughts.

Try to have your home looking gay.

Keep a bedroom free for coats, with mirror, tissues and clothes brush.

Stay chatting with your guests until everyone is settled.

Have very soft music in the background.

Use table and standard lighting rather than strong central lighting

Introduce guests to each other and give them a talking point if possible.

Do not break up a conversation unless two people have been involved for too long.

Relax and enjoy your guests, and they will relax also.