

The Great Australian Cookbook

Edited by Helen Greenwood and Melissa Leong.

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A kangaroo is turning a sausage over a barbecue on which there also is a small fish, a prawn, and a pineapple ring. A dingo is looking on tongue hanging out. A one-eyed koala up a tree watches the reader. All on a grassy spot by a beach.

It's the Reg Mombasa inside front and inside back cover illustration of The Great Australian Cookbook riffing on the Great Aussie Barbecue and it brings a smile. Which is apt for a cookbook of which editors Helen Greenwood and Melissa Leong write in their introduction:

We think this book is more than just a cookbook. For us, this book is an affectionate snapshot of Australia and the food we eat.

Greenwood and Leong did this by starting with 'Chefs, cooks, bakers, and food heroes we admire' and asking them 'What do you cook for the people you love'.

Throughout the book the chefs, cooks, bakers and food heroes write a snippet about the dish or cooking or family. Or all of it.

The best thing we could have done was to move to the country so we could spend more time with our young girls. Children love to be involved in anything their parents do and there are so many things they can do that make them feel like they're contributing. Those times create memories for them which will last forever.

Dave Campbell

When kids start to see things when they're really young it becomes instilled in them. And so that's when our sense of connection with the earth comes from when you're Indigenous. You really feel that connection right down. I know a lot of Indigenous people feel lost because there's something missing and they want to know. I feel privileged to have that sense of knowledge and ownership and respect.

Rayleen Brown

The pictures on the first pages for me set out themes in the book which of course may not be the way Greenwood and Leong see it.

A hand dips a tea bag into a mug beside which are two slices of toast spread with vegemite (the label on the jar of vegemite discreetly turned away from the reader). It's simple food, a theme carried throughout the book. Max Emery squats in a desert landscape beside a camp oven the lid of which he lifts to show his Bush Tomato Damper looking like a humongous chocolate chip cookie. This is the second theme I think runs through the book, using native ingredients. I have a word or two to say about that below. A couple of pages later a smiling Margaret Fulton dusts icing sugar on top of a Classic Sponge Cake for theme number three, recipes for Australian classics. Two pages on again the Salloum family is in their backyard with patriarch Salloum grilling Lahem Meshwi - Marinated Lamb Skewers. Theme four, multiculturalism at the Australian table or as I now call it the multiculinary Australian table. A few more pages in and Colin Fassnidge gives his recipe for Salad of Watermelon, Fennel, Peas & Feta. Theme five, eclecticism, bringing together seemingly disparate ingredients successfully. Theme six is tweaked Asian food like Kylie Kwong's - Stir-Fried Hokkien Noodles With Chicken, Chilli and Bean Sprouts.

Now to the themes in practice. Simplicity is everywhere in the book. Pam Brook makes Creamy Parsnip Mash with a favourite vegetable of mine, the eponymous parsnip. Frank Camorra gives a recipe for Salmorejo, Chilled Tomato & Bread Soup, using just tomatoes, day old bread, hardboiled eggs and serrano ham. (An alternative to gazpacho?) Andrew Puglisi makes a Steamed Pot of Mussels from mussels, olive oil, garlic, and parsley. Fiona Weir Walmsley and Adam Walmsley make the delightfully named Marry Me Caramel Biscuits using one of my favourite ingredients caramel made from condensed milk.

Aunty Beryl Van-Oploo brings native Australian food to the table with her triple header - Chargrilled Kangaroo Fillet With Sweet Potato Mash, Quandong Jus & Warrigal Greens. Our other leaping marsupial comes to the table as Ross O'Meara's Twice-Cooked Wallaby Shanks With Salsa Verde. It's arguable that native food cuisine is the youngest cuisine we have in Australia but now goes in leaps and bounds (and yes I get the joke). The market for native products has never been as big and there are now many players in the bush food/native food industry. Now to get it off my chest, any fish or shellfish native to Australia is native food as far as I am concerned. So David Moyle's Wood-Grilled Calamari Salad is welcome at the table. As are Clayton Donovan's Oysters With Finger Lime, Carrot Foam & Avocado Cream.

Now for those Aussie Classics. I'll throw in some Australian food history along the way. Where to start? Emma and Jay Patey get pole position with Lamingtons - first made between 1895 and 1901 - cause who doesn't love chocolate, sponge and shredded coconut? When I was a schoolkid after school it was down to the fish and chip shop - the first reference I found for the pairing of fish and chips was in 1900 - so I am happy to see Nikki & Doug Govan's Ale-Battered King George Whiting With Hand-Cut Chips - the Ale batter making a welcome advance on my after-school treat. Lindy Milan fronts up with My Ultimate Macaroni & Cheese which takes this dish - the first recipe for which I found in 1897 - to a higher level with ricotta, cloth-bound cheddar, and Australian blue cheeses taking the place of the generic yellow block of cheese. Glad to see pineapple still an ingredient in Victor and Evelyn Leong's Sweet and Sour Pork - the first reference to it being in 1949 which doesn't sit right with me. And I take my hat off to Merle Parrish's Anzac Biscuits - first recipe around 1920 - which has ginger as an ingredient something, I might try next time I bake them, too. And then there is the meat pie, gravy stainer of shirts and laps. They had been sold from the earliest days of the colony. But it is missing from this book. Sausage Rolls - the earliest reference for which I found is 1894 - don't share that fate, with a recipe from Daniel Wilson for Sausage Rolls With Tomato Relish.

Asian-wise I have a strong bias to the all-in-one Sri Lankan Lampries from Charmaine Solomon's recipe - Ghee Rice (or yellow rice) Lampries Curry (traditionally made from three meats), Frikkadels (forcemeat balls), Vambotu Pahi (Eggplant Pickle), Seeni Sambola (chilli sambol) and Prawn Blacan (prawn paste) all wrapped in a banana leaf and baked. The Lau family's Roast Chicken comes in second with its gravy comprising soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, sesame oil, ginger and brown sugar.

Eclecticism wise Dave Campbell's Barbecued Wagyu Skirt Steak With Chimichurri is a winner. As is the Bruce Family's Smoked Duck Breast, Duck Liver Mousse, Butternut Pumpkin, Turnip & Baby Carrots With Chocolate Jus (it's the chocolate jus that does it for me).

The multiculinary Table is based on diverse cuisines sitting down together. So for the multiculinary meal from this cookbook I'd kick it off with everyone making their own Banh Hoi Chao Tom, Vietnamese Sugar Cane and Prawn Rice Paper Noodles under the benevolent eyes of Angie & Dan Hong. of . Then serve Avgolemono - Greek Lemon Chicken Soup - courtesy of Peter Manifis. Then Nick Holloway's Palm Heart, Papaya, Young Coconut & Lychee Salad. We'd

have it with Pork Schnitzel With Potato Rosti, Fennel Slaw & Roasted Garlic Aioli . For sweets I can't go past Brigitte Haffner Cherry Crumble. To round it off a coffee and Abla Amad's Baklava.

Or we can have a sit, a good cuppa tea, a slice of Bush Christmas Cake (skip the vegemite toast) and have a yarn about this triffic snapshot of Australia and the food we eat.