



Homegrown

Alla Wolf-Tasker AM makes a case for developing a uniquely Australian cuisine that stands strong against global trends.

As a chef, considering how much we now have to work with and how unfettered we are by traditions, is it easier to be creative than it used to be?

There's never been much culinary tradition to constrain us. But it was with the post-World War II migrants that multiculturalism began to significantly affect our knowledge of food and our readiness to absorb.

Given our rapidly expanding lexicon of culinary terms, great produce, growing pantry of available multicultural ingredients, the lack of restriction and some amazing talent — it should be easier to be creative nowadays, right?

Why is it that we often seem to be so predictably bound to modern global culinary trends and an almost universal sameness of approach? Why do we feel the need to be taught what to do in our own backyard by chefs who are from a different place and culture? And why are fads which have little relevance to our own sense of place taken up by so many?

While we may have avidly consumed new culinary information from across the globe in the past, it was only intermittently available. We just got on with things, learning and developing a personal style that was recognised as modern Australian. Among the best practitioners it came with originality and a real connection to who we are.

Thanks to social media platforms, we see fads and even entire dishes taken up, but

their relevance to us is often questionable. Global fads sweep our culinary landscape accompanied by breathless media reportage. The rapid speed of knowledge transfer creates a fair bit of culinary FOMO among the media and us.

It's difficult to stand back and extract what might be of interest or relevance rather than just buy into it wholly. Is there a remnant of culinary cringe that makes original and homegrown somehow not as 'cool' as something foreign with a global listing?

Besides, when it seems like the rest of the world is 'into it' — who wants to be left out? If one doesn't already have a strongly developed personal conviction or ethos, who is one to argue? For relatively new young practitioners of our craft, the prolonged take up of one fad after another can be a waste of personal potential and may doom originality. I've seen the road back take at least a decade.

When I reflect on some of the greatest chefs and cooks I've had the pleasure to work with, they've all developed a strong personal direction, stayed current through maintaining awareness of contemporary culinary thinking and then perfected, perfected, perfected what they did.

With no strong singular global trend currently apparent, I'm sensing the facilitation of a robust chorus of new and individual Australian voices with magic results. Now that's a trend I'd like to see continue. Long may it reign. ■

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