A Revolution in Taste, or, Is There Haute Cuisine Without the Michelin Guide?

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European colonisation of the Australian continent only began in 1788, at around the same time as the restaurant, as we know it today, was beginning to take shape in Paris. For many years the penal colony at Sydney Cove was only concerned with eating to survive but gradually a restaurant culture developed. This paper begins by looking briefly at the history of restaurant dining in Sydney and Melbourne and, drawing on the work of Mac Con Iomaire (2014), considers some of the differences and similarities between these antipodean cities and the growth of restaurant culture in Dublin.

As in Dublin, the 1960s and 1970s saw a growing number of restaurants run by enthusiastic amateurs and a trend towards more suburban restaurants in Australia's major cities. From the 1970s onwards restaurant critics and restaurant guides played an increasingly important role in fostering discerning diners and encouraging creative chefs. In the absence of a *Michelin Guide* to restaurants in Australia local critics have been the sole arbiters of good taste in Sydney and Melbourne since the restaurant revolution of the 1970s when eating out became a fashionable and popular leisure time activity. In this paper I argue, with reference to Lane's assessment of the influence of the *Michelin Guide* on chefs in Britain and Germany (2014), that this local approach allowed Australian diners and chefs to follow a more eclectic and adventurous path than may have been the case had they been constrained by Michelin standards.

The emergence of restaurants

Few of those who landed at Sydney Cove in the early years of the colony, mainly convicts, soldiers and officers, would have much idea of the concept of the restaurant let alone eaten in one. For many years the fledgling colony struggled to feed itself; there was no thought of, and no need for, public eating-houses, other than those required to feed travellers. The colony's first restaurant was attached to the first licensed public house, the Freemason's Arms, established in Parramatta in 1798, where the cook was a French convict (Symons 1982, p. 112).

By 1840, when transportation of convicts to New South Wales officially ceased, more free settlers were arriving in the colony. The discovery of gold in the 1850s further boosted the population, both in numbers and diversity. Both Sydney and Melbourne, where settlement had been officially established in 1835, now had a sufficiently large number of people with the time and the money to devote to restaurant dining. As in Dublin, restaurants operating

independently of hotels and clubs became part of the dining scene from the 1850s onwards. In Sydney the Café Restaurant Français opened in 1853, advertising 'service à la Parisienne' (*Sydney Morning Herald,* 30 May 1853). In the following year, M. Cheval opened the Maison Dorée where he hoped 'to introduce into this colony the elegance and refinements that are found in the celebrated Maison Dorée in Paris' (*Empire*, 10 November 1854), and Ernest Budin, invited all those seeking 'good and fashionable refreshment' to his Aux Frères Provencaux (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 1854). In Melbourne, Spiers and Pond opened the Café de Paris in June 1858 (O'Brien 2008, p. 74) and, by the 1880s, gentlemen could dine well at the Maison Dorée,, the French Club, La Mascotte, the Crystal Café or the Café Anglais (Comettant 1980, p. 64; Symons 1982, p. 119).

The most famous of the early French restaurants in Sydney was Paris House. M. Desneaux announced the opening in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 16 November 1886 promising that 'the Bill of Fare will be inserted daily in this journal so that the real epicure who wishes to have a good lunch can, without the least trouble, be aware of the provisions thereof'. The sample menu lists: *crevettes, Potage Julienne, Schnapper les Anchois, Aloyan de Boeuf, saucisses aux choux, pommes nouvelles, salad, beurre, fromage* and *glace à la vanilla* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 November 1886). By 1896 Paris House was described as the oldest and best restaurant in Sydney, the 'haunt of the epicure, the abode of the gourmet' (*Sunday Times*, 26 April 1896) and, twenty years later, it was lauded as 'the premier restaurant of Australasia' (*Evening News*, 25 March 1912). Paris House continued to operate under various owners until 1931.

How truly French, or how closely the food served at any of these restaurants approached French *haute cuisine*, is hard to judge. Whilst Frenchness, achieved in part by appropriating the names of famous Parisienne restaurants, was an important gastronomic signifier, in the absence of a moneyed and knowledgeable aristocracy it is unlikely that there were many epicures and gourmets in Sydney or Melbourne to haunt any of these establishments. European visitors certainly found that the antipodes offered little that was to their taste.

The English journalist Richard Twopeny first came to Australia in 1876 and published his observations, *Town Life in Australia*, in 1883. Twopeny was not impressed with the state of gastronomy observing that 'cooking is an unknown art' across all classes of society (1971, p. 64). He considered the local meals to be monotonous and unimaginatively prepared, and commented 'If it be true

that, while the French eat, the English only feed, we may fairly add that the Australians grub' (Twopeny 1971, p. 71). Co-incidentally Edmond Marin La Meslée also arrived in Australia in 1876. In 1883 he published a chronicle, *L'Australie nouvelle,* of his experiences travelling in Australia as private secretary to the French consul-general of the time. His experiences were similar to Twopeny's and his criticism equally scathing.

> It is true to say that no other country on earth offers more of everything needed to make a good meal, or offers it more cheaply, than Australia; but there is no other country either where the cuisine is so elementary, not to say abominable.

> At a *sixpenny* (twelve sous) *restaurant*, or at the Royal Hotel in Sydney or Melbourne, you will be faced with exactly the same dishes … Invariably beef, mutton and poultry, boiled and roasted, roasted and boiled: the everlasting dish of potatoes and sometimes some soggy boiled vegetables: the meal ends with a kind of hash, an incredible concoction rejoicing in the title of *pudding* (La Meslée 1973, pp. 45-46).

Oscar Comettant, visiting as a judge for the Centennial International Exhibition in 1888, enjoyed the food he ate at the French Club and the two or three good restaurants in Melbourne, but, to the French palate, he thought the rest were more or less bad:

> No more than in England do they know how to make a stock in Australia. What they call soup is a kind of very thick, highly seasoned sauce, bearing no relationship to what we in France eat under the name of *potage*. The appetising hors-d'oeuvre served after the soup are significant by their absence at restaurant tables. There is no logical order about the serving of courses, which are in any case lacking in variety, and in the true art of cooking (Comettant 1980, p. 65).

When wealthy and well-travelled Melburnian George Meudell published his memoirs in 1929, he was still able to lament that 'there is no epicureanism in Australia, no fine sense of gastronomy as the prop of happiness. There is no first-class restaurant in the Commonwealth so far' (quoted in Symons 1982, p. 123).

Towards a restaurant scene

By the end of World War Two and throughout the 1950s and 1960s both Sydney and Melbourne had a restaurant scene largely dominated by hotels and establishments run by immigrants with some experience of European dining who employed cooks and often head waiters who had some European training. Romano's was opened in 1927 by Azzalin Orlando Romano who had trained in hotels and

restaurants across Europe, including time as headwaiter at London's Ritz hotel. His eponymous restaurant was one of *the* places to dine in Sydney in the 1930s and the years immediately following World War Two until its closure in 1964 (Ritchie 1988). At The Hermitage Henri Renaud and his wife Jeanne served traditional French provincial fare from1942 until 1957 (Newton 1995). Sydney's first French-style bistro, The Bistro, opened in 1957 with French chef Paul Harbulot in the kitchen (Walker 1968). Beppi Polese, who had trained in hotel restaurants in Italy and began working in Australia as a waiter at Romano's, opened Beppi's in 1956 (Newton 2007). Yolande de Salis arrived in Australia from Hungary in 1957 and started her career as a restaurateur in 1959 with the Salad Bowl, which was later reinvented as La Causerie (Walker 1969).

Similarly by the 1960s Melbourne boasted a number of well-respected long-established restaurants (Florentino, Latin, Society), run by what was affectionately nicknamed the 'spaghetti mafia' (Forell 1981), a network of Italian families, intertwined through friendship and marriage. Spaniard Vincent Rosales, who arrived as a stowaway, took up the lease on Maxim's in 1957 (Downes 2002, p. 27) and Mirka and Georges Mora opened Balzac, 'a highly professional restaurant where you consumed well-cooked, traditional bistro dishes and drank fine wine', in 1958 (Downes 2002, p. 31). Swiss born chef Herman Schneider, who came to Melbourne as part of the contingent of chefs officially recruited to cater for the 1956 Olympic Games, opened his restaurant, Two Faces, in 1960 (Downes 2002, p. 36). These chefs and restaurateurs and others like them set standards of food and service and provided important training for the next wave of chefs and restaurateurs who learnt their craft in Australia. It should be noted that by the 1950s both cities also boasted well- established Chinese communities with Chinese restaurants already spreading out into the suburbs (Nichol 2012). Whilst dining out was becoming more common and more popular for many Australians their experience of foreign cuisine was limited to a cheap meal at a Chinese restaurant.

A golden age

Mac Con Iomaire (2014) calls the period 1947–1974 the 'golden age' of *haute cuisine* in Dublin when more award-winning world-class restaurants traded in Dublin that at any other time in history. In Sydney and Melbourne the golden age of dining was only just beginning in the early 1970s and Australian restaurants had yet to establish any sort of international reputation. However the 1970s and 1980s saw restaurant dining become a legitimate leisure time activity for middle class Australians.

An important influence on the developing restaurant scene in Melbourne and Sydney were changes to the licensing regulations. Temperance inspired legislation, first introduced in both Victoria and New South Wales in 1916, had a long and profound influence on local drinking habits

(Kirkby 2003, 2007). The regulations allowed hotels to provide meals to drinkers but restaurants were severely limited when it came to providing patrons with alcoholic beverages. In Sydney up until 1955, when new laws allowed liquor to be served with meals until midnight, wine was only available in restaurants between 6 and 8.30 pm and all bottles and glasses had to be removed from the tables by 9 pm. In Melbourne after 1960 restaurants could serve wine with meals until 10pm, but obtaining a wine license for a restaurant was an expensive, complicated bureaucratic process right up until 1988 (Harden 2009, p. xi). In the meantime the exacting standards the Liquor Control Commission in Victoria imposed on those wishing to obtain a restaurant license resulted in a two tier system of fully licensed restaurants and restaurants with a BYO license, where diners consumed wine they had brought with them, which was a cheaper, quicker and altogether easier option for the restaurateur (Harden 2009, p. 55; O'Brien 2008, p. 242).

Another significant contribution to the restaurant revolution was the beginning of a public conversation about food and dining. Magazines dedicated to the serious discussion of eating and drinking in the Australian context first appeared in 1966 with the publication of *Australian Gourmet* and *Epicurean,* the official journal of the Wine and Food Society of Australia. French food was still very much in the ascendency and these magazines maintained that status quo. The first newspaper columns talking about food and wine began in the popular press in the 1960s. These pieces were not restaurant reviews as such, rather the writers concentrated on describing their own eating and drinking experiences in restaurants both in Australia and overseas, and their contributions served more as advertorial. The most obvious sign of an increasing interest in restaurant dining were the first columns dedicated to serious reviews of local restaurants, which started in the 1970s. The authors of these reviews – Peter Smark, Eric Page, Leo Schofield and Richard Beckett – were journalists with no particular qualifications to write about restaurants other than an enthusiasm for good food and their own varied dining experiences.

The first restaurant guides were a logical extension of these newspaper columns. Leo Schofield's *Eating Out in Sydney 1975* (Schofield 1974) was the first guide to offer any form of commentary on the restaurants listed. The restaurant guides of the 1970s were published independently of the newspapers for which the journalist critics wrote and only continued for a few editions. At this stage there was no attempt to rank restaurants, the authors merely made recommendations of restaurants they felt offered both excellent service and a pleasant atmosphere (Schofield 1974, p. 5; Smark 1977, p. 3).

In his introduction to his first guide Schofield wrote that he shuddered to think how the editors of a 'well-known French food guide' would react to Australian restaurants. He believed that for Australians 'eating well seems still to be considered a pagan excess'. In his opinion only a handful of the then more than 1000 eating places in Sydney rated as 'good, well-run and consistent' and even then 'they don't begin to approach the standards of food and service offered in even middle-range restaurants in France' (Schofield 1974, p. 5). For Schofield there was no such thing as 'great food' in Australia but there were a handful of people doing 'good work' (Schofield 1975, p. 19). He placed Tony and Gay Bilson and Claude Corne at the top of his list. Restaurateur and vigneron, Len Evans similarly believed that there was no Australian restaurant of Michelin three or two star rating, and only two in Sydney, Claude's and Tony's Bon Gout, which might possibly be considered one star quality (Evans 1976, p. 54).

Claude's was an unlicensed restaurant owned by classically trained French chef Claude Corne, specialising in 'adapting and refining the contemporary classics of France for local consumption' and heavily influenced by the new stars of French cuisine, Bocuse, Guerard, the Troisgros brothers and Vergé (Schofield 1977, p. 41). Tony's Bon Gout on the other hand was run by Tony and Gay Bilson, neither of whom had set foot in France. Tony had read Escoffier and had worked with the likes of Georges and Mirka Mora at Balzac in Melbourne and Paul Harbulot at the Bistro in Sydney. Situated at the wrong end of town, on the ground floor of a 'squalid' private hotel (Bilson 2004, p. 10), Tony's Bon Gout provided food that was simple, fresh and original with what Schofield described as 'some inclination towards grandeur' (1975, p. 19). There were however no pretentions to grandeur about the establishment itself. Diners sat on chairs that were 'regular rather than chic or comfortable or stylish' (Schofield 1975, p. 19), and ate off cheap plates with 'nasty' cutlery (Bilson 2004, p. 18). Patrons brought their own wine, which they drank from glassware that was only 'reasonable' (Schofield 1975, p. 19) and needed to collect the key from the wait staff before venturing to the bathroom, which was next to the flat the Bilsons lived in on the first floor (Bilson 2004, p. 24). As unprepossessing as it sounds Tony's Bon Gout was at the forefront of the revolution in restaurant dining in Australia which would see more chef-proprietors, more chefs who had honed their skills in Australia and were familiar with local ingredients and the tastes of local consumers, and a movement towards a sophisticated but less formal restaurant environment.

Restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne went on to weather the introduction of random breath testing for drivers (1976 in Victoria and 1982 in New South Wales), the implementation of the Fringe Benefits tax in 1986 which meant that the cost of long lunches and dinners with clients could no longer be written off as legitimate business expenses, and the economic downturn of the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1991, the opening by Paul Bocuse of his eponymous restaurant in Melbourne, clearly demonstrated that at least one Frenchman thought Australians were ready for *haute cuisine.*

Gatekeepers and tastemakers

In 1980, faced with a 'bewildering proliferation of restaurants' and in the light of restaurant dining now being a more popular leisure activity than going to parties, football or cricket, the cinema, theatres or concerts (Forell 1980, p. vii), Australia's first answer to the *Michelin Guide, The Age good food guide to Melbourne and Victorian country restaurants* (hereafter AGEGFG), was born. The sister publication, *The Sydney Morning Herald good food guide to eating well in and around Sydney* (hereafter SMHGFG), followed in 1984. The *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* were, and still are, newspapers aimed at an intelligent, affluent, aspirational, middle class readership. The *Good Food Guides* grew out of the weekly sections both publications devote to food and wine which feature recipes, restaurant reviews and gossip about chefs and restaurateurs. Originally both guides were published by an independent publisher, Anne O'Donovan, who devised the concept (Knox 1991, p. 2), and were edited by the restaurant critics for the respective newspapers – Claude Forell and Rita Erlich (from the fourth edition) in Melbourne and Leo Schofield (later assisted by Michael Dowe) in Sydney. The AGEGFG and the SMHGFG continue to be published annually.

In her analysis of the fine dining industry in Britain and Germany, Lane (2014) argues that the credibility and authority of the *Michelin Guide* derives from a combination of its financial independence from the restaurant industry and on its large team of anonymous, well-trained inspectors who have some industry background (Lane 2014, p. 289). The AGE and SMH GFG's operate with a relatively small inspectorate of people interested in and knowledgeable about good food and dining practises but who do not necessarily have any explicit restaurant experience and are not given any training as inspectors. The credibility of the guides rests on the connoisseurial knowledge of the contributors whose reviews appear regularly in the pages of the newspaper, which allows for the accuracy and reliability of their assessments to be judged on an on-going basis.

The original editors of the guides, Forell and Schofield, had established their credibility as critics through their regular review columns well in advance of the publication of the first *Good Food Guides.* Forell, a respected political reporter, published his first restaurant review in the *Age* in 1977 while Schofield already had an established reputation as a critic before he began his column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in May 1983. Both guides also reinforce their legitimacy by emphasising their ethical standards, that is that their reviewers do not accept free meals and as far as possible remain anonymous (Blank 2007, p. 50–54).

By the 1980s both newspapers were already long established and reputable publications, which also leant a considerable amount of authority to the guides they published (Blank 2007, p. 138). The reputation of the AGEGFG and the SMHGFG was further enhanced by the fact that they were, and remain, the only guides that rate *haute cuisine* restaurants in their respective cities. It should be noted however that from the beginning the *Good Food Guides* set out to be wide-ranging – for example they provided information on city and suburban restaurants as well as places to eat in country areas, they gave separate awards to restaurants in various categories (for example, the best Italian restaurant or the best vegetarian restaurant), and provided a separate list of restaurants which provided good value.

From the first editions the AGEGFG and the SMHGFG emulated the *Michelin Guide* by ranking the top restaurants, awarding them from one to three chefs' hats rather than stars. Like the *Michelin Guide,* diners and chefs do not necessarily have to purchase the *Good Food Guide* to be aware of its recommendations, in terms of the awarding of hats, since these are widely publicised in the respective newspaper. However, the weekly newspaper reviews coupled with the discursive nature of the guides themselves does provide important feedback to chefs and restaurateurs on what reviewers are looking for and how they arrive at their rankings, which Lane claims is a short fall of the *Michelin Guide* (2014, p. 291). Nonetheless a degree of vagueness does surround the awarding of hats. Over the years there have been attempts to demystify the process and scoring systems have been introduced to better identify gradations between establishments, however there is no direct correlation between a three hat restaurant in Sydney and one awarded three hats in Melbourne. Sydney restaurants are only ever ranked relative to other Sydney restaurants. The standards each guide establishes are based on an understanding of local circumstances, that is, they operate as a tastemaker and gatekeeper within their own 'institutional and cultural environment' (Lane 2014, p. 294). Whilst the three hat system is clearly intended as a reference to the *Michelin Guide's* three stars there is no comparison between the two systems other than three hats denoting the highest possible standard and identifies the elite establishments in each city and thereby defines the local equivalent of *haute cuisine.*

Promoting creativity

Lane argues that the *Michelin Guide,* by not rewarding ethnic restaurants or regional cooking and by rewarding chefs who are French nationals, has tended to act as a brake to creativity and prolonged the hegemony of French cuisine in Western Europe (2014, pp. 293–294). An analysis of the AGEGFG and SMHGFG suggests that these local guides did not have what Lane describes as 'a rigidly French-centric policy' regarding either cuisine or restaurant regime (2011, p. 711). Tables 1a and 1b demonstrate that the number of two and three hatted restaurants classified as French in both the AGEGFG and SMHGFG declined through the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly Tables 2a and 2b show that the total number of restaurants each of the

Restaurant type	4th edition 1984	9th edition 1988/89	14th edition 1993/94	20th edition 2000	24th edition 2004	34th edition 2014
3 Hats						
French	7	4	3			
French/Modern French					1	
Individual		1	1			
Chinese			1	3	1	
Cantonese						1
Italian				4		
Italian/Modern Italian					1	
Modern				7		
Modern British				2		
Seafood				1		
Australian/Modern Australian					1	
Contemporary						3
Total 3 hats	**7**	**5***	**5**	**17****	**4**	**4**

Restaurant type	4th edition 1984	9th edition 1988/89	14th edition 1993/94	20th edition 2000	24th edition 2004	34th edition 2014
2 Hats						
French	8	8	4	2		
French/Modern French					1	
Chinese		1	2		2	1
Japanese			1	2		
Japanese/Modern Japanese					1	
Italian			1	1		3
Italian/Modern Italian					5	
Individual	1	2	1			
Fish	1					
International	1					
Regional/Modern Regional					1	
Australian						
Australian/Modern Australian					3	
Modern			2	15		
Contemporary						8
East/West			1			
Modern British				2		
Mediterranean/Modern Mediterranean					2	
European				1		
European/Modern European					4	
Spanish						1
Total 2 Hats	**11**	**11**	**12**	**23**	**19**	**13**

Table 1a: *Age Good Food Guide,* hatted restaurants by designation. * Total for 9th edition includes restaurants awarded 3 and 4 hats. ** Total for 20th edition includes restaurants awarded 3, 4 and 5 hats.

Restaurant type	1st edition 1984	6th edition 1990	9th edition 1994	15th edition 2000	19th edition 2004	29th edition 2014
3 Hats						
French	2	3	2	3	1	1
Modern French					1	
Japanese/French					1	
Seafood					1	
Australian		1				
Modern Australian			5	1	2	
Contemporary						4
Total 3 Hats	2	4	7	4	6	5
2 Hats						
French	4	3	1	4		
Anglo/French	1					
Modern French		1		1	2	
Modern French/British					1	
Chinese	1	2	1	2		2
Japanese	1	1	1	1	1	1
Italian	1	1	3	4	3	5
Australian			1			
Modern Australian			1	7	7	
Contemporary						10
Australian/Country				1		
Modern Australian Seafood				1		
Brasserie			1			
Thai				2	2	1
Seafood					2	
Modern Mediterranean					1	
European						2
Spanish						1
Total 2 Hats	8	8	9	23	19	22

Table 1b: *Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide,* hatted restaurants by designation.

guides classified as French also declined. It seems clear that there has been no attempt to promote French cuisine at the expense of others in either Sydney or Melbourne. Other cuisines, in particular Chinese, Japanese and Italian, have been well represented, especially at the two hat level (Tables 1a and 1b) whilst the overall representation of each of these categories in the guides has remained strong (Tables 2a and 2b).

A study of the guides also shows that over time the food being offered in many of the top echelon restaurants becomes more and more difficult to adequately define in terms of recognisable cuisines. From the first editions terminology like 'Individual', 'Creative', and 'International' had been used in an attempt to classify those places where the food on offer did not fit neatly into a recognised canon of cooking. The designations 'Individual', 'Modern' and later 'Modern Australian', a term invented by the SMHGFG and first introduced in 1994, gained currency as a way of attempting to categorise a more distinctly Australia style. Although the term 'Modern Australian' was not retained for long, being replaced by 'Contemporary' after 2006, it was an attempt to signify cooking based on the imaginative use of fresh, locally sourced raw materials (although not necessarily indigenous ingredients), owing no allegiance to any particular tradition but often involving a synthesis of Asian,

Restaurant type	4th edition 1984	9th edition 1988/89	14th edition 1993/94	20th edition 2000	24th edition 2004	34th edition 2014
French	20.0	14.0	10.6	4.0	3.0	3.9
Italian	8.5	9.0	10.0	12.5	10.7	15.5
Chinese	8.5	9.0	6.5	7.0	6.5	2.7
Japanese	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.5	5.0	4.9
Individual	5.0	8.0	7.9			
International	13.0	13.5	9.5	4.0	3.0	
Cosmopolitan			1.4			
Australian	<1.0	<1.0	1.4	<1.0		
Modern		1.5	5.0	37.0		
Modern Australian					31.0	
Contemporary						34.4

Table 2a: *Age Good Food Guide*, percentage of total number of restaurants by designation.

Restaurant type	1st edition 1984	6th edition 1990	9th edition 1994	15th edition 2000	19th edition 2004	29th edition 2014
French	22.0	16.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	6.2
Italian	12.0	14.0	14.0	10.4	9.0	15.0
Chinese	4.0	8.0	7.5	5.9	8.5	4.1
Japanese	3.0	5.0	5.5	5.9	4.5	4.9
Individual	2.0	<1.0		<1.0		
International		6.0	1.0	<1.0		
Creative	<1.0	1.0				
Australian	3.0	10.0	1.0	1.3		
Modern		2.0				
Modern Australian			25.5	42.0	39.0	
Contemporary						34.4

Table 2b: *Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide,* percentage of total number of restaurants by designation.

Mediterranean and/or Middle Eastern ingredients and methods with classical French techniques, and was generally applied to restaurants with a sophisticated but more relaxed and informal atmosphere, which responded to the local climate and lifestyle. Categorising restaurants as 'Modern', 'Modern Australian' or 'Individual' was a way to acknowledge the creativity of chefs, and allowed critics to promote and reward ingenuity.

This style of cooking was a logical progression for chefs who had begun their career in an environment where there was no firmly established tradition, who were strongly influenced by *nouvelle cuisine* and surrounded by an abundant and diverse array of locally available ingredients. Whilst part of a global phenomenon of 'fusion cuisine', 'Modern Australian' cooking involved Australian chefs responding to Australian ingredients (Saunders 1999, p.42),

that is starting with Australian raw materials and working out ways of using them to best advantage rather than starting with traditional techniques and working out how to incorporate local produce. As chef Neil Perry describes it, chefs were not simply mixing east and west, 'taking a beurre blanc and putting black beans in it, or reducing a demi-glaze and putting sambal in it', rather they combined a sound understanding of the local scene with a knowledge of the origin and context of the flavours being appropriated (Ripe 1996, p. 16). Restaurants were also catering to an increasingly multicultural, and more cosmopolitan clientele. Immigrants from both South East Asia and Europe brought with them their own dining traditions and many Australians had taken advantage of cheaper, faster air travel since the early 1970s to experience the food, the flavours and the different culture surrounding restaurants

in the countries they visited. Post World War Two more adventurous eating was also being promoted in Australia through recipes in newspapers and women's magazines and recipe books (Brien 2010, 2013). Australian diners were familiar with adapting, inventing, swapping and borrowing flavours from a range of cuisines (Saunders 1999, pp. 33–35).

By the 1990s half of all the restaurant proprietors and chefs awarded three hats in both Sydney and Melbourne had learnt their skills in Australia and had a familiarity with local raw materials, local conditions and the local market. For example, Janni Kyritsis, a qualified electrician who emigrated from Greece, began his career in the kitchen with Stephanie Alexander at Stephanie's in Melbourne before joining Gay Bilson at Berowra Waters Inn; Damien Pignolet, despite his French name, was born in Melbourne and had studied catering at William Angliss College before working in Sydney and finally taking over Claude's; and Neil Perry, one of Australia's most successful and influential chef/restaurateurs, learnt from local chefs such as the Pignolets, Stephanie Alexander and Jenny Ferguson. The environment in Australia has also encouraged and rewarded a number of female chefs/restaurateurs. Beginning with Gloria Staley who opened Fanny's in Melbourne in 1960, Stephanie Alexander (Stephanie's), Gay Bilson (Tony's Bon Gout and Berowra Waters Inn), Jenny Ferguson (You and Me), Chrissie Juillet (Claude's), Anne Taylor (Taylor's), Mietta O'Donnell (Mietta's), Tansy Good (Tansy's) and Christine Manfield (Paramount Café) were all driving forces behind hatted restaurants in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Conclusion

The assertion that the local restaurant scene was more dynamic in Sydney and Melbourne because it was not constrained by the *Michelin Guide* is of course difficult, if not impossible to prove. Writing in the tenth edition of the SMHGFG Leo Schofield was confident that informed and enthusiastic criticism had helped to transform eating out in Sydney and relegate 'swank French-style restaurants' to gastronomic footnotes and put Sydney on the path to being a great gastronomic capital (Fraser and Greenwood 1994, p. 8). The comments Michael Steinberger credits to French chef Pascal Barbot confirm that there was energy and lack of inhibition in the Sydney restaurant scene. In 1998 Barbot, whose restaurant, Astrance, opened in Paris in 2000 and was awarded three Michelin stars in 2007, worked for Tony Bilson running his restaurant Ampersand in Sydney. Steinberger says of Sydney at the time that it offered 'a dizzying array of cuisines' and 'an exuberant inventiveness' creating an atmosphere where 'the chefs wanted to surprise and diners wanted to be surprised' (2009, p. 195). Barbot told Steinberger

Back in France, when I would try to create different kinds of dishes, I would question myself and worry about how people would react ...but after Australia, I didn't ask myself those questions any more. 'Is it okay to use scallops for something? What will people think?' I didn't care anymore. I was *décomplexe*. (2009, p. 195)

Of course there is no suggestion that Barbot's coming to Australia transformed him into a three star chef, but it is telling that he found the atmosphere in Sydney so liberating (see also Palling 2012).

Clearly the restaurant culture of any city is influenced by a number of factors, not least issues of climate and geography, availability of raw materials and the affluence, diversity and size of the local dining population. Restaurants are certainly not immune from societal changes and economic fluctuations. However, whatever the circumstances, criticism can play a part in creating a demand for interesting food and an environment in which chefs feel the freedom to experiment. In as much as critics are part of the conversation about food in the community and through their ranking of restaurants steer the talk surrounding what is good, better and best, by identifying and rewarding a distinct Australian style critics in Sydney and Melbourne encouraged an atmosphere in which chefs felt free to experiment and follow their personal inclinations rather than adhere to an established orthodoxy.

Is there *haute cuisine* without the *Michelin Guide*? There is still no *Michelin Guide* to restaurants in Australia and we can only speculate what ratings Michelin inspectors would give to our restaurants. The absence of the Michelin imprimatur has however not stopped Australian restaurants from achieving international recognition. In La Liste, which claims to rank the 1000 best restaurants in the world, ten Australian restaurants are ranked in the top 500 and four of these are ranked in the top 100 (Rees, 2016; La Liste 2016). Australia also has four restaurants in the top 100 of the rival list of the World's 50 Best restaurants (Bernoth 2015). This is an impressive record for a country where the Golden Age of restaurant dining began less than fifty years ago.

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