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Putting Adelaide on the food map

FOOD (/FOOD-WINE-COFFEE/CATEGORY/FOOD)

By David Knight
August 28, 2014

"There was a massive hospitality brain-drain from Adelaide where the young hospos would go, 'Fuck it. This place is crap. I'm going to Melbourne, Sydney' and that's where they'd stay. Now, they're staying [here] and opening their own places."

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Since moving to Adelaide four and five years ago respectively, Chefs Duncan Welgemoed and Jock Zonfrillo have witnessed and are vocal about the exciting changes to Adelaide's food culture. In their own words, the Restaurant [Orana](#) (/food-wine-coffee/article/review-orana) and [Bistro Dom](#) (/food-wine-coffee/article/bistro-dom-review) big kahunas take us through the local food resurgence.

ARRIVING IN ADELAIDE

Jock: I'd been living in Sydney for 10 years and there, like most of Australia, was this attitude of Adelaide being a backwater, a big country town. I moved here five years ago, drove here in a ute with all my worldly goods. At the time I was at the tail end of my second marriage – they [the family] came down in a plane, and I drove, which was a nice drive from Sydney. I'd never been here before. The first thing I saw coming into the city was a huge billboard for Caffe Primo – prawn gamberi \$9.90, pretty good eh. I thought, 'Wow. I've arrived in Adelaide – this is it.' A friend of mine owns the Austral Hotel, so I did a bit of consultancy for a year. I went to [Magill \[Estate\]](#) (/food-wine-coffee/article/magill-estate-named-sas-best-restaurant) after that. It was a very different experience from Sydney, and from any other city to be honest with you. Adelaide's a very different place. The only thing I'd heard about from here was San Jose Smallgoods,

because they had it in Sydney and they were good. And I knew that Maggie Beer (</food-wine-coffee/article/maggie-beer-foundation-mission>) was down here. But once I got here and into it; there's a phenomenal wine scene, incredible ingredients and, as it turned out, geographically it's a fantastic place for what we do [[Street ADL and Orana \(/food-wine-coffee/article/street-adl-and-orana\)](/food-wine-coffee/article/street-adl-and-orana)]; in terms of native ingredients, we're right in the heart of the country. I was able to get native ingredients 24 hours earlier than I would have on the eastern seaboard.

Duncan: I moved here four years ago. I knew nothing about the Adelaide food scene to be honest. I came here with Catherine, my wife. She was pregnant, and since we'd never had a child before, I thought I'd settle in a little bit, get a big money job. For a year I worked as the Executive Chef at the Adelaide Showground, which was actually really good – just learning big functions, the logistics of putting on a massive event. Then the Big Day Out came along and I got to cook for all my favourite bands that happened to be headlining, which was sick. You make the best of what you get I suppose, and once I'd done the [Royal Adelaide] Show and Big Day Out I'd done the biggest two events, it was time to get a real job. I went to Bistro Dom.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Duncan: When I moved here I thought, 'I'm just going to eat at the best places in Adelaide'. Coming from the UK I didn't think much of it. But I could see the ingredients were awesome. There's an awesome wine culture, something that the UK lacks. I thought this is definitely a place I'd like to cook and show what I could do. There were some decent restaurants but there weren't any 'wow restaurants', I suppose, without sounding like a dick.

Jock: Too late [laughs].

Duncan: What Lachie [Lachlan Colwill] was doing at The Manse was good.

Jock: That's true, there was The Manse. What else was there? Vincenzo's. Auge. Magill [Estate]. I ate at all of them when I arrived, probably the same as what you did. You arrive and see what's around town.

Duncan: The Lane was another.

Jock: Chloe's. Fino – high-end places but that was about it. Much like Duncan, I had some great meals but I wasn't blown away. And the food that I do is different. I always questioned, 'Why aren't they using X,Y and Z? Even down to the local stuff and not making the best of it. Nobody was talking to each other – none of the chefs. I was like, 'Wow, what's going on here?' It was odd. As a food scene, I found that a bit confusing. Back to what Duncan said, the produce and the people here were amazing. That was another reason for me to stay. Then I had a choice – do I go back to Sydney or do I stay here? I've got a child in each state and it would have been easy for me to go back to Sydney and open a restaurant.



DOING THEIR OWN THING

Duncan: When I was working under the previous owner [at Bistro Dom], we had to stick to the line of corporate canteen. When I took it on and started doing my own thing, it became a natural progression from that. We thought, 'Fuck it, we'll do what we do and try to cultivate an individual style within that area'. We weren't really concerned at that point what anyone thought of us. We just did what we did. It wasn't like, 'Let's explore a gap in the market'. Fine dining is hit and miss in terms of the trade, so we stripped it back, brought it back to basics.

Jock: I wasn't thinking there's a gap in the market that I could exploit at all. It was more trying to move to what I've always thought about, which is our current philosophy upstairs [Orana] and trying to get one step closer to that as the market would let me. We've always been the black sheep, when you say native ingredients they think witchetty grubs and worms and it's not. Therefore it's been an uphill battle and it would have been an uphill battle anywhere ... I think people are generally amazed that it's not witchetty grubs or whatever, it is something refined and delicious. I'm very thankful we're still in business today, and that's because of the people of Adelaide at the end of the day.

DINING SCENE NOW

Duncan: People are throwing caution to the wind, cultivating their own style. One big thing we've been trying to fight against is that Melbourne/Sydney influence in our cooking. I think we have enough talent in this state to develop our own style.

Jock: I think in the last couple of years a lot of guys have grown up a bit and just thought, 'We don't need to follow a trend'. We've got all these great ingredients here.

Great chefs like Duncan and Lachie [Colwill] have come through and said, 'This is what I'm going to do', and not given an arse about what anyone says about it. They've been fortunate enough to either have backers or someone who can assist them with that bold move because it is putting your balls on the table and saying, 'Right, I've got this mad idea'. That takes a big set of balls and people with a wallet to achieve but once a couple of people do it, others look at it and go, 'Yeah I can do it. I can follow my dream, I can do my own thing.'

Duncan: There was a massive hospitality brain-drain from Adelaide where the young hospos would go, 'Fuck it. This place is crap. I'm going to Melbourne, Sydney' and that's where they'd stay. Now, they're staying [here] and opening their own places.

LOCAL PLACES TO CHECK

Duncan: Clever Little Tailor is my favourite bar. Orana is an example of a restaurant in South Australia that is cultivating its own style and is what other restaurants interstate will emulate. Magill Estate, what Scott [Huggins] and Emma [McCaskill] are doing there, it's a really good standard.

Jock: I enjoy Bistro Dom, and he's [Duncan] opening a new restaurant later in the year, which is closer to his heart. Peel St restaurant; the whole Peel Street movement is fantastic and all those bars are super cool, nice places to go and hang out for a night because everything is close. Gouger Street's Cork Wine Cafe. On Ebenezer, the guys have opened the Tasting Room (</food-wine-coffee/article/eastern-promises-mother-vine-and-the-tasting-room>) behind us, which is fantastic. Great that we can send people there with a focus on wine as opposed to a bar. Restaurant-wise, love going to Hentley Farm, Lachie's [Colwill] doing some amazing food there. It's really cool – great food, and Lachie, in the time I've been here, he's more than just found his feet, he's cooking to his own style now; his food gets better year on year. Super nice to see that. Everyone goes to Ying Chow. When I bring people to town, nine times out of 10 we'll end up at Ying Chow. I could name 100 restaurants we go to all the time. The thing is you could pick any of them and have a great night out. The service is so much better than it used to be, generally, around town.

ADELAIDEANS TAKING THE CITY FOR GRANTED

Jock: I think they do actually. They look at the glossy Harbour Bridge and Opera House and go, 'Yeah we don't have something iconic'. Well, we don't have an iconic bridge or opera house, but quite frankly, if sitting in a car for hours every day is what comes with that, then surely we don't want it. We've got amazing natural landscapes, which Sydney doesn't have; that's better than any harbour bridge you can put in front of me, I can tell you that right now.

Duncan: I think this is why we're the most vocal [about Adelaide's charms]; we don't come from Adelaide. We see it with fresh eyes ... Having someone like James Spreadbury, an Adelaide boy, coming back from Copenhagen [NOMA's Restaurant Manager] at the beginning of the year, he was blown away. In the next couple of years, you will be able to put this city against anywhere in the world and it will be a food destination.

Jock: I think everyone forgets that Adelaide gets labelled nationally as a big country town. What's the population here?

Duncan: 1.2 million.

Jock: That's about the same size as Copenhagen; it's twice the size of Glasgow – that's a fucking city. It's not a big country town and it hasn't been for quite some time. I think it's a misconception by people who haven't been here. When they do come down, chefs who have never been here before, and they eat at a few places, and drink at a few bars, they think, 'Okay, it's really cool here actually'. And then you start talking about the lifestyle, where you're not sitting in a car for two-and-a-half hours; 20 minutes to the hills, 10 minutes to the beaches, it's much easier for us to conduct business in Adelaide than any other city. And it's beautiful.

Jock Zonfrillo - The Nomad Chef



From the beginning of October, Jock Zonfrillo's enticing show *The Nomad Chef* will appear on local screens after debuting across the globe on Pay TV and free-to-air channels. In each episode, the chef travels to a remote community to explore and learn their food and culture before returning to Orana to create a meal based on what he learnt.

"It was incredible to see, an incredibly humbling experience going to a lot of those places," he explains. "To come back here and put a dinner on as an abstract expression of my snapshot, although brief, into a dinner for today's diners was also interesting."

"It's nice and natural. I hang around and learn from them for a couple of weeks, cook with them when I get the opportunity and then we have a bit of a party on the last day before I leave because inevitably they want to give you a nice send off. It's a different food program to what's currently around."

Duncan Welgemoed's New Restaurant



The Bistro Dom chef will leave his award-winning Waymouth Street restaurant to open a new bar and restaurant later this year on East Terrace. Welgemoed will collaborate with fellow Happy Motel member, designer James Brown (MASH), as well as Paul Glen and James Hillier (Golden Boy, Rocket Bar) on the yet-to-be named restaurant that will have a capacity for 80 diners and will be influenced by cuisine from South Africa and its surrounding areas, where Welgemoed is from.

"It's basically going back to my heritage," Welgemoed explains.

"We're focusing on southern Africa for the first launch until we can start getting into it. What's really interesting is that South Australia and southern Africa's flora and fauna are quite similar. It's easy for us to do and there are so many recipes. It's what I cook at home. It's so diverse and no one's doing it, really. If you think of African food you're thinking something really home-cooked but it's so much more than that."

bistrodom.com.au (<http://bistrodom.com.au>)

restaurantorana.com (<http://restaurantorana.com>)

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Legends and leaders in our beautiful food scene here in SA. Plenty of talent around here. Good on them for standing up and speaking about it.

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