

GOURMET FOOD CHAINS.....

A trip to the supermarket used to be merely an innocuous excursion for essentials, but now on offer down at your local chain of choice you will encounter a literal treasure trove of produce and ingredients.

Supermarkets are cottoning onto such global food phenomenons as celebrity chefs, speciality ingredients, and multicultural culinary expectations. Not to mention pandering to our ever increasing consciences with regard to food in relation to carbon footprints, fair-trade and food miles, as well as our concern for what we put into our bodies – whether food is organic, free range or biodynamic.

With the enormous buying power and market share that supermarkets have, the future possibilities for this are endless. A recent example which cites the massive shift occurring within the collective consciences of the broad demographic is the recent purchase of the entire chain of eight Macro Wholefoods by Woolworths. This supermarket giant will transform Macro into its own brand of boutique style grocery in the form of Thomas Dux Grocer, of which there's already four located within metropolitan Sydney.

Having a dinner party at your place? Dusting off those glossy-paged cookbooks and hitting the shops for tamarind, palm sugar and duck breast? The Celebrity chefs and their (I call it food porn, but you don't have to) ahem –let's just say 'luxuriously published tomes of gastronomy' – have made an enormous impact on our food purchasing habits. Most notably there's Jamie Oliver – responsible for altering (for the better) the diets of an entire nation of schoolkids in the UK. Not only that but his approachable persona and amazingly simple recipes have managed to transform a sizeable chunk of our food awareness and knowledge over the last decade.

Seared Tuna, St Andre Brie, Buffalo Mozzarella, Artichokes and Prosciutto are all common fare today- most likely thanks to Jamie. In fact Jamie was the public face of UK supermarket giant Sainsbury's between 1998-2004, doing over 65 ads and earning around £1.2 million a year (around 2.8 million Aussie dollars). Now that is a force to be reckoned with and an individual who has singlehandedly transformed our culinary habits to boot.

Naturally, we can do it all at home..... Look at Masterchef for instance, the new reality TV show where seasoned home cooks get to play at being chefs with the hope of fast-tracking into the industry without the four years spent obtaining a commercial cookery qualification and the countless years of industry experience. Students, Mums, Sportsmen and Solicitors all applied hoping to

prove that they're worth their salt in the kitchen. And we love to watch it too....the fabulous and the dud dishes, the searing appraisals from the judges, the tearful eliminations, the passion for food and cooking....

Can we just put it down to Jamie Oliver getting us all hot and bothered about food? There's a new Top 10 bestseller list added to weekly book reviews in weekend newspapers now and that's Top 10 Cookbooks. This genre is so massive that it requires its own separate list to other literature.

What happened to our island continent full of meat and three veg devotees? Sausages on the barbie with tomato sauce have metamorphasized into Balmain bugs on the barbie with confit garlic and chilli lime dressing. Apple pie and icecream has become vanilla bean crème brulee with raspberry coulis.....and it's not just the sort of people that read **Gourmet Traveller**.

Basically, the idea is that everyone should be capable of creating gourmet food in the privacy of their own homes. The ingredients are freely available in our supermarkets and groceries, the recipes- straight out of the famed restaurants are there for your convenience. Even cookware and appliances are becoming more like those in commercial kitchens –take the latest Electrolux ad featuring Tetsuya Wakuda for example –‘ Everything we learn here’ (professional kitchen)-‘we apply here’ (your kitchen)

So I ask myself, with some trepidation- Why bother going out at all? The answer is clear.....I don't need to worry about the **CLEAN UP!**