



WILD INGREDIENTS MAKE AUSSIE CUISINE UNIQUE

BY LAUREL MILLER // JANUARY 18

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AUSTRALIAN CHEFS TURN FARM-TO-TABLE UPSIDE DOWN IN SEARCH OF THE AUTHENTIC TASTE OF OZ.

Indigenous, or “bush,” foods have provided sustenance and medicinal cures for the Aboriginal people for nearly 60,000 years. The world's oldest continuous culture, Aborigines still base their creation beliefs, art, dance and calendar on their ties to the land and the nourishment

it provides. Over the past decade, however, bush foods have increasingly gone mainstream and certain ingredients have become an identifiable part of Modern Australian (“Mod Oz”) cuisine.

I first became acquainted with bush foods while working with classically trained Australian chef Andrew Fielke—the founder and then-owner of Adelaide’s groundbreaking Red Ochre Grill—at a food festival in 1997. I’ve always been fascinated with wild foods and indigenous cultures, and discovering then-unfamiliar ingredients like quandong (desert peach), pepperberry, candlenuts, lemon myrtle, and akudjera (bush tomato) in exquisite dishes featuring kangaroo, emu, and marron (freshwater crayfish) was revelatory.

By the early 2000s, I was regularly visiting Australia as a food and travel writer, able to visit Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, Kakadu National Park, and Queensland where I foraged for bush foods and interviewed progressive chefs like Craig Squire of Cairn’s Ochre Grill, and Raymond and Jennice Kersh of Sydney’s Edna’s Table. The Kersh’s grew up living with the Godadjas tribe in Western Australia, an experience that shaped their careers, as well as the evolution of Mod Oz cuisine. Says Jennice,

Food is not just intellectual. Eating together and understanding a culture’s food helps foster community, but you should never fail to respect the land and the history of its indigenous people. Our mission is to incorporate and mainstream native foods while creating awareness about Aboriginal culture.



THE EVOLUTION OF BUSH FOODS

Because most bush foods can't be cultivated, many items are collected by established economic enterprises within Aboriginal communities. Seasonal ingredients including wild greens, fruit, insects (yes, really) and bush honey are harvested and then supplied to brokers for commercial use. In the last decade much progress has been made in the cultivation of native foods. Ingredients like finger limes, sunrise limes, warrigal greens, lemon myrtle (also known as tree verbena, it has a Lemon Pledge-like aroma and flavor, in a good way), lillypilly (Australian cherry), wattle (the roasted seeds have a beguiling coffee-hazelnut aroma and flavor), and rosella—a native species of hibiscus—are grown commercially and on family farms. The demand for bush foods has increased to the point where former Red Ochre owner/chef Andrew Fielke has retired from the kitchen and acts as a full-time consultant and the owner of Tuckeroo, a wholesale/retail company that specializes in native foods.

If you're intrigued by the idea of bush tucker, don't miss these acclaimed

restaurants:



SYDNEY

Billy Kwong: Since opening in Surry Hills in 2000, this contemporary Chinese eating house helmed by executive chef Kylie Kwong has packed them in. An advocate for sustainable food sourcing, Kwong has increasingly featured bush foods on her menu. Now located in a larger space in Potts Point, owner Kwong and *chef de cuisine* Kok Hoong Leong concoct rich, complex dishes like stir-fried spanner crabs with black bean, chilli, sea blite, sea parsley, and samphire, and crispy-skinned duck with organic mandarin and Davidson's plum- a native rainforest species.



MELBOURNE

Attica: Executive chef/owner Ben Shewry, who grew up hunting, fishing, and foraging on his family's farm in New Zealand, is a master at incorporating wild foods, as well as produce from Attica's garden, into elegant, edible works of art. Pipi's (native clams), wallaby, sea lettuces and succulents, greens, and tree and bush fruits find their way into dishes that have made Attica the only Australian eatery to be named in the 2015 World's 50 Best Restaurant Awards. Signature dishes include salted Red Kangaroo with bunya bunya, and King George Whiting steamed in paperbark (a method traditionally used by Aborigines). The decor is dark, moody, and sexy, offset by charcoal-colored walls and stark, black-and-white landscape photography- all the better to enjoy Shewry's small masterpieces.



ADELAIDE

Orana: Executive chef/owner and native Scot Jock Zonfrillo—formerly of Penfold’s Magill Estate—has put this low-key city on the map as a global dining destination with 3-year-old Orana. The polished but unpretentious 25-seat space offers a surprisingly diverse menu of small plates and mains showcasing indigenous ingredients, but Zonfrillo’s exacting technique, stunning presentation, and bold flavors are the ultimate draw. The richness of Kangaroo Island scallops are balanced by the salty bite of iceplant; woogool (black apple) with bush honey and green ants is a still life served on a soup spoon, and blue swimmer crab with yogurt sorbet, beach succulents, and seaweed is a briny wonder. Even if you’re just passing through Adelaide, lunch or dinner at Orana is a worthy detour.

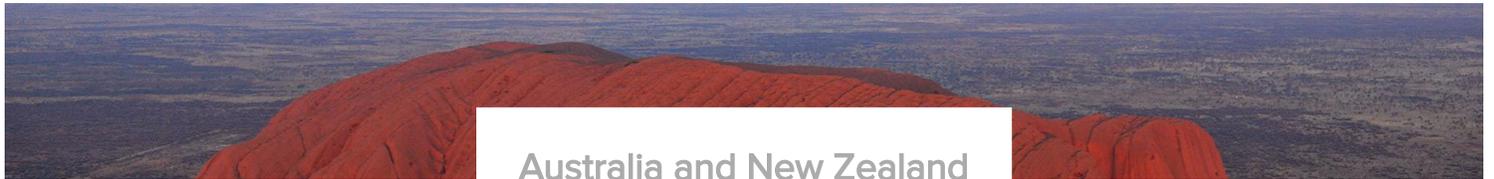
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