



WORDS NEIL PERRY

Divine providence

The rise of the providore in Australia means we can all cook with ingredients of restaurant quality.

AS RECENTLY AS THE EARLY 1980s in Australia, sourcing great produce was tricky and there was little choice. Salad was iceberg lettuce – you fancied it up a bit with mignonette and cos, if you could find them. Rocket was something that went to the moon and fresh herbs were parsley, thyme and rosemary.

We had just discovered sea salt. Who knew that soon we would have 50 different salts to choose from? Once you had to hunt around for extra virgin olive oil and there was this strange dark vinegar called balsamic making an appearance. We started a love affair with everything Italian and followed it on with a lusty desire to eat Spanish. Ham was boring – there wasn't the amazing array of imported and locally produced charcuterie there is today. Most of the specialty items we take for granted when menu planning now were impossible to find.

Fast-forward to 2010. There is broccolini, wombok (Chinese cabbage), galangal, chillies, cavalo nero and 12 different lettuces on sale, even in supermarkets. Thanks to the immigrants who brought new ingredients to the country, and the desire of chefs and home cooks for flavour, quality and novelty, demand has grown for artisan products and exotic produce. And, thanks to a few entrepreneurial providores, these goods are now readily available.

We have super-suppliers such as Fratelli Fresh in Sydney, where you can buy all the Italian staples you need along with your fresh

vegetables – and have a great lunch or dinner at the same time. Simon Johnson, who has stores in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, offers a staggering range of imported and local oils, vinegars, salts, pastas, polentas and so forth, while Lario, another importer of fantastic Italian products, brings in wonderful pasta flour, bottarga, farro and a fine grappa or two. Most importantly, all of these providores also have online stores that enable you to purchase quality ingredients wherever you live in Australia.

You can even buy the dry-aged beef that we use at Rockpool Bar & Grill at Victor Churchill butchers in Woollahra (Sydney). Their fantastic offerings include David Blackmore's full-blood wagyu, Rangers Valley grain-fed beef, Castricum lamb, and free-range chickens off the rotisserie.

When I think about where we have come in the past 30 years, I'm filled with pride and admiration for all the suppliers, producers and importers in this country who have turned it into such a great place in which to live and eat.

PRODUCING THE GOODS

FRATELLI FRESH

www.fratellifresh.com.au

Online ordering. Delivery available to inner Sydney.

SIMON JOHNSON

www.simonjohnson.com.au

Online ordering. Sydney, Melbourne and Perth stores will ship anywhere.

VICTOR CHURCHILL

www.victorchurchill.com.au

Order by email/phone. Free delivery to selected areas of Sydney. Online store soon.

LARIO

www.lario.com.au

Online ordering. They ship anywhere in Australia.

BLACKMORE WAGYU

www.blackmorewagyu.com.au

RANGERS VALLEY

www.rvalley.com.au

CASTRICUM LAMB

www.castricum.com.au

Sydney chef and restaurateur Neil Perry designs Qantas First and Business menus. For recipes and cooking tips visit www.neilperrychef.com or rockpool.com