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The rise and fall of *MasterChef magazine*: An object biography

Abstract:

One of the most high-profile recent entrants into the competitive and lucrative field of Australian special interest magazines was *MasterChef magazine*, which ran from May 2010 until November 2012. *MasterChef magazine* was a component of a self-referential group of media products that spun off the eponymously-named television series in Australia which, premiering in 2009, itself developed from a suite of British television programs and associated media that has been expanding and morphing since 1990. This article presents a biographical history of *MasterChef magazine*, focusing on an account of the magazine's genesis, development, growth and demise. It offers a preliminary survey of its covers, content and writers, and begins to outline its relationship to a range of other MasterChef related media, with particular reference to other publications. It also describes the role *MasterChef magazine* plays in the highly branded contemporary culinary media environment and suggests areas for future research.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Creative writing – Food writing – Magazine history, Australia – *MasterChef magazine* – *MasterChef Australia*

Introduction

In 2008, Williamson argued that special-interest magazines provide ‘a rich, exciting vein of inquiry’ for researchers in the writing discipline, as they not only comprise a significant component of the contemporary publishing industry, but also represent a gap in existing research, in that ‘there is little scholarship that sheds light on the[ir] generic characteristics, production processes and industry contexts’ (2008).¹ Such close investigation of magazines not only has significance in terms of writing studies, but also more broadly, as magazines not only reveal much about the time in which they are produced and the readers who consume them, but have also been demonstrated to be influential on their readerships. In 2007, Abrahamson utilised the phrase ‘magazine exceptionalism’ to summarise his argument that, while recognizing that all journalistic media share characteristics, the magazine is, in his terms, ‘genuinely different’ as magazines are not only products of their times, but they can also function as ‘singularly useful markers of the sociocultural reality’ (667).

In Australia, the special interest magazine market is significant. At the beginning of 2014, the *National title tracker* (NTT) lists more than 5,000 magazines in more than 50 special interest categories available in Australia (NTT 2014). 2013 figures reveal Australian consumers spending more than \$850 million on magazines annually (MPA 2013a) translating to some 20.2 million copies sold in the three months to September 2013 (MPA 2013b).² Abrahamson has written that special interest magazines play ‘a special role in their readers’ lives, constructing a community or affinity group in which readers feel they are members’ (2007: 669). Activity is also implicit in the otherwise seemingly passive consumption of these texts, for special interest magazines:

encourage readers to be more active in their leisure interests ... the editorial content of magazines is specifically designed by its editors and looked to by its readers as something that will lead to action ... information that will allow the reader to do something – and, in many cases, to do something better or more enjoyably. (Abrahamson 2007: 670)

One set of activities that it seems Australian magazine readers want to ‘do better, or more enjoyably’ appears to be culinary related: cooking and eating/drinking. Although the term ‘gastronomy’ defines such activities, this is rarely, if ever, used in popular media. In January 2014, the NTT listed some 34 titles with ‘food’ in the title, and a further 27 with ‘cook’, ‘cooking’ or ‘cookery’. Another 18 with ‘wine’ in the title show that – although there is some repetition across these categories – the food and wine category of special interest magazines is healthy in terms of numbers of titles in Australia (NTT 2014). Yet while Australian food writing is attracting increased interest and scholarship, and there has been inquiry into the culinary content of Australian magazines – Sheridan on expressions of cultural difference in *The Australian women’s weekly’s* cookery sections (2000) and Santich on Margaret Fulton’s work at *Women’s day* (2007), for instance – Wilson’s recent study of the *Australian gourmet traveller* noted the paucity of sustained studies of individual Australian culinary magazines (2010). Jones and Taylor agree, finding that food journalism, despite a plethora of media reporting and discussion, has received ‘little

academic scrutiny in comparison to other forms of leisure and lifestyle journalism' (2013: 97), which has itself attracted less scholarly attention than news journalism.

MasterChef magazine provides an opportunity to consider an entire run of a recent, popular cookery magazine produced for the Australian market. This article takes as its objects of study the 29 issues of the magazine published between May 2010 and November 2012.³ It draws on the proposition that such magazines, and for *MasterChef magazine* the other publications with which it was associated, are popular artefacts that play an important part in everyday life, and are therefore worthy of consideration both in their own right and for what they might reveal more widely (Fiske 1992).

More specifically, the article conceptualises *MasterChef magazine* as a cultural object with its own life history, and it charts that history. Doing so accords with Kopytoff's assertion (1986) – following Appadurai (1986) – that such inquiry can reveal much about the objects under consideration and the times in which they were created and used. Guiding the biographical documentation of the magazine is Hicks' work on a more venerable object, the Bayeux Tapestry, from which she discovered that 'the outline of its known history fitted the chapter headings for writing a life' (2007: 304): antecedents and birth, growth and development, decline and demise, and posthumous reputation and influence. In the case of *MasterChef magazine*, these key, chronological milestones are manifest in certain changes to the magazine over time, including its size, cover, cost and circulation figures, and the types of content and themes that are prominent. Focussing on these aspects highlights the relationship of *MasterChef magazine* to associated publications, along with its role in the highly branded contemporary media environment, where advertising and product placement become the purpose of, rather than an element of, cultural production.

This article does not seek to be either a definitive or exhaustive study of *MasterChef magazine*. It is, however, the first sustained study of this title and as such provides a basis upon which further research may be undertaken, some suggestions for which are made in the closing paragraphs.

Genesis and antecedents

MasterChef magazine was a highly visible component of a self-referential series of television programming, publications and other media that was spun off the *MasterChef Australia* television series. The series, premiering in April 2009, puts competitors through a series of challenges and elimination rounds until one emerges with the Master Chef title. This format developed from an eponymously-named suite of British television programs and associated media that has been expanding and morphing since 1990 into other formats and countries. Khamis has described how 'MasterChef Australia has become one of the most remarkable brands in Australia' (2013), and many viewers as well as critics have noted the growing trend of what is known as 'contextually congruent advertising' – where advertising closely matches or even mimics the television program or other vehicle in which it appears (Nitschke & Bogomolova 2012; Fleck & Quester 2007). This type of advertising ranges from matching advertising placement to the mood, genre and content of, or product

featured in, for instance, a television program (or magazine or newspaper story, blog or other cultural product), and ‘hybrid’ advertisements where advertisements between segments mimic the main content (Nitschke & Bogomolova 2012: 1), to what could be classed as wholly ‘advertorial’ programs or other content where the advertiser funds production of the content and is unashamedly promoted in it – product placement taken to its most extreme (see Russell 1998). This final type of advertising moves beyond any separation of content and advertising, to the situation where the advertising *becomes* the content. The *MasterChef Australia* television program acted, in part, as this kind of advertising, where the advertiser’s name is mentioned and logo displayed during the program and noted as an official sponsor. These final two types of ‘blended’ programming (hybrid and advertorial) have become increasingly common in Australian reality television with such popular lifestyle shows – which Gareth Palmer identifies as ‘agent[s] of consumerism’ (2008: 6) – as *Better homes and gardens* (home and lifestyle) and *The block* (home renovation) recommending by name a number of stores and products including major hardware chains and certain brands of power and garden tools.⁴ This kind of amalgamation of product and advertising also informed the development of the program-branded product-as-advertising vehicle, *MasterChef magazine*.

The development of *MasterChef magazine* drew on models for linked television series and magazines, with some long running magazines spawning television series (*Better homes and gardens* in the USA and Australia, for example) as well as the converse, where the television show gives rise to a magazine, as in the case of *MasterChef Australia*. There are also examples where magazines and television series are synergistic components of an individual culinary celebrity’s global brand environment. Examples are Jamie Oliver’s brand, which incorporates his television series, cookery books, websites, mobile telephone ‘apps’, food products, homewares and the food magazine *Jamie* (Hollows & Jones 2010; Jones & Taylor 2013); Martha Stewart’s, with her branded products and endorsements alongside *Martha Stewart living* magazine and the syndicated television program of the same name (Byron 2002; Brunsdon 2005; Allen 2006); and Donna Hay’s series of cookery books, television shows, products and *Donna Hay* magazine (Whitaker 2005).

Like *Jamie*, *MasterChef magazine* built on the success of a high profile television presence and alongside the growing prominence of social media in branding strategy (Khamis 2013). Paradoxically, at a time when the decline of print media is widely heralded, MasterChef and the other celebrities listed above have also successfully incorporated print media into their strategies. Although there are both similarities and differences in format between the Australian and international versions of the show (in countries including the UK, USA, New Zealand and India), a larger diversity and number of publications and other products have spun off the Australian series than in any of these other countries. This in part reflects the Australian appetite for magazines reported above but also, as will be discussed below, both the success of the television series, which was unprecedented for a cookery or lifestyle show, as well as a significant public interest in culinary literature at this time.

In terms of publication spin offs, winner of the first series Julie Goodwin, for example, secured a high profile contract as food writer to bestselling monthly print magazine

The Australian women's weekly from August 2009 (Writer 2009). In April 2010, Goodwin launched her cookbook, *Our family table*, the production of which was part of her *MasterChef Australia* prize.⁵ Featuring a foreword by Margaret Fulton, *Our family table* acknowledges its sources, including recipes Goodwin was given by family and friends alongside those she created on MasterChef. The final section of the book comprises blank pages for recipe clippings and photographs that readers might, Goodwin urges, similarly collect and in this way, themselves become co-authors. Goodwin continues the show's emphasis on building narratives around food's central role in family and community cohesiveness, writing, 'In this book I'm not just presenting recipes but exploring the role of food in families and communities ... *Our Family Table* is full of lovely stories' (Goodwin 2010; see also Khamis 2013). Although featuring foundational recipes and basic cooking tips, by October 2010, *Our family table* had sold 138,603 copies, generating \$3.7 million in sales for publisher Random House, and becoming the top selling cookbook for the year (Wilden & Thomsen 2010). The next, second-best-selling cookbook was the television program tie-in *MasterChef Australia the cookbook: volume 1* (2009), with sales of 51,000 in 2010 (Wilden & Thomsen 2010). At that time, Nielsen BookScan, which tallies national book sales by major retailers, revealed that some 10 percent of the annual total Australians spent on cookbooks in 2010 had been paid for these two volumes. *MasterChef Australia* judge Matt Preston's collection of previously published (mostly magazine and newspaper) food writing, *Cravat-a-licious*, launched in October 2009, and co-host and judge, chef and restaurateur Gary Mehigan's first book-length publication *Comfort food*, released in March 2010, also achieved solid sales during this period (News.com.au 2010).

Alongside these books, those involved in the show (judges, contestants and guests) generated text for magazines, newspapers and online publications, including the show's official and unofficial websites, blogs and social media sites. There was also a plethora of writing about the show and those involved in it, including significant MasterChef-related advertising on television, in print and online. This was especially evident in relation to one of Australia's two major supermarkets, Coles, which was the major sponsor of the series. Coles' 'Feed your family (like a MasterChef) for under \$10' advertisements featuring celebrity chef and cookbook author Curtis Stone, for instance, although obviously promoting the store, also underscored its relation to the program by drawing on one of its stated goals, that of encouraging home cooks to not only cook more, but to cook more creatively using fresh foodstuffs. Even Coles' main rival recognised this, with Woolworths' supermarket spokesperson stating that 'It's created a much greater level of interest in food and cooking' (Buchanan qtd. in Washbrook 2010b), and engaging Margaret Fulton in a series of similar, recipe-based advertising. Coles reported significantly increased sales of ingredients after they were used in recipes on the show, and both supermarket chains acknowledged that a high proportion of this was on fresh produce including certain seafood and cuts of meats, and basic processed foods such as bread, cheese, yogurt and prepared stocks rather than highly processed items (Australian Food News 2010). Despite some cynicism around the claim, this amplified interest in all products culinary – including food writing – was named the 'MasterChef effect' (Hunter 2010).

Launch and first issue

Produced by News Magazines, which is owned by publisher of *The Australian* newspaper, News Limited, *MasterChef* magazine was launched in May 2010, when the second series of *MasterChef Australia* (which ran from 19 April to 25 July 2010), was airing six nights a week. At this time, the show was averaging more than 1.5 million viewers per show and leading the ratings in its timeslot (Jackson 2010). After months of speculation, the magazine's cover price of \$4.95 was lower than many had expected, situating it between such aspirational titles as *Australian gourmet traveller* (\$9.40) and *Delicious* (\$6.95) and the basic supermarket-style *Super food ideas* (\$2.95), which was then, as now, Australia's top selling culinary magazine. The closest direct competitor was Australian Consolidated Press Magazines' *Good food* (launched in 2008 modeled on the eponymous BBC title), which at the time of *MasterChef* magazine's launch was priced at \$5.25.



Fig. 1. *MasterChef Australia* television series judges – Gary Mehigan, Matt Preston and George Calombaris – on the cover of the first issue of *MasterChef Magazine*, May 2010

The first issue was published under the masthead subtitle of 'Become a MasterChef at home'. News Magazines stated that they had designed *MasterChef* magazine as a 'masstige' title (Jackson 2010), with its editor-in-chief explaining that the magazine sought to 'bring a whole new audience to food magazines' (Trudi Jenkins qtd. in Jackson 2010). To attempt to do so, the first cover clearly referenced the television series. It prominently featured (as did each subsequent cover) the font of the television program's title and its distinctive logo – a lowercase 'm' inside the rings of an old fashioned stove top electric cooking coil – on the cover, spine and throughout each

issue. The first cover also showcased the series' stars – Gary Mehigan, Matt Preston and George Calombaris (judges of the first series, and co-presenting judges from the second onwards) – with the tagline 'Matt, Gary & George share their Masterclass dishes tips and tricks' (2010: cover). It also listed four high profile guest chefs and judges from the show – Matt Moran, Neil Perry, Donna Hay and Curtis Stone. This cover also promised *MasterChef Australia* restaurant-style food, 'chefs' recipes made easy', and referenced three of the popular and trademarked segments of the show, the 'Invention', 'Mystery box' and 'Taste' tests as well as the Junior MasterChef spinoff series in a banner across the bottom of the page. These elements reveal an agreement between the television show producers and the magazine's publishers to use these trademark features, and underscored the continuity between all the products displaying the MasterChef brand. Unlike almost all other Australasian food titles, images of delicious food are reduced to two small, boxed images in the bottom left-hand corner of the cover. 'No-fuss everyday food' is, however, one of the capitalised textual selling points, and the only text printed in the orangey-red of the title. This first cover thus makes clear a number of themes that would guide the magazine at least in its first issues: that it would underscore the 'chef' in the MasterChef branding, promote individuals and dishes associated with *MasterChef Australia* and include both easy to prepare and more challenging recipes.

There are clear similarities between the content and format of the first and subsequent issues, and the official tie-in cookbook that preceded it. Both cookbook and magazine incorporate recipes from the show's participants, and information and advice on ingredients and their storage, kitchen equipment, cooking skills and dish presentation – known in the show and related publications as *plating up*. Both cookbook and magazine also contain foundational recipes for such culinary mainstays as stocks, sauces and classic recipes. These are presented alongside recipes for dishes that are often based around what are called fresh *hero* (as in highlighted, but not necessarily expensive) ingredients – whether these are seafood, prestige cuts of meat and unusual vegetables or basics such as potatoes, eggs and cheese. A notable characteristic of the cookbook is its series of photographs of the show, including behind-the-scenes images, and this feature definitely differentiated *MasterChef magazine* from other culinary titles. Features more in line with other food magazine are food-related news and events, product promotions and travel-focused items.

With strong advertising interest – and just over a third (35 percent) of the first issue's 160 pages devoted to advertisements – the magazine was backed with a \$5 million marketing push centred on the series, clearly indicating an agreement between the two entities. The inaugural issue of 226,000 copies sold out in four days with a 15 percent reprint ordered a week after the launch (Kirk 2010a, 2010b). Some newsagents had, it was reported, sold out of their orders in two days or less (Kirk 2010b). The second issue also sold strongly, again selling out completely despite an increased print run, and not delivering the dip expected after a strong launch (Kirk 2010c). Released when the show was not only rating extremely highly but also growing – with some weeknight episodes attracting 2.2 to 2.3 million viewers (Media Spy 2010; Kirk 2010e) and regularly topping nightly and weekly viewing figures – the third issue also sold well (Kirk 2010d). At this time, viewer interest in the finale of the second series

of the show was so strong that the single federal election debate between Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott was rescheduled from its longstanding timeslot so as not to clash with the program (Washbook 2010c). This level of viewer interest was unprecedented for a cookery or lifestyle television show.

Early issues and first year

The format and content of the magazine developed for the early issues remained largely stable throughout almost all of the magazine's life. This content focused on cookery stories related to the show or its personalities; recipes and food information organized by ingredients in season and special occasions such as Christmas, Australia Day and Mother's Day; at least one travel story each issue; and sections comprising hints, tips and new products. Much of this content was built around associations with chefs and other food professionals mostly, but not exclusively, from *MasterChef Australia*, as in 'The professionals' column, which was featured in each issue but only named as such for issues 2 to 18. This column presented high profile food personalities providing signature or representative recipes, recast for the home cook. These chefs, food writers and other culinary professionals include a roll call of major contemporary Australian culinary figures such as Maggie Beer, Frank Camora and Tony Bilson (issue 2), and Christine Manfield and Shannon Bennett (issue 4).

International figures dominated the 'Last bite' final page column. These interviewees were asked a series of slightly personal culinary-related questions such as: 'Cooking style in three words?', 'Guilty pleasure?', 'Career highlight?' and 'Drink of choice?'. UK celebrity chef and restaurateur Gordon Ramsay was the first. Those following Ramsay included a who's who of international superstar chefs, restaurateurs and/or foodwriters, with only five of these Australians.⁶ Despite this focus in this column, and visiting superstars featured throughout the run of the magazine,⁷ *MasterChef magazine* consistently promoted and valorised the work of Australian chefs, cooks, food writers and other culinary personalities. Although this consisted of the expected pantheon of figures, such as Margaret Fulton, Maggie Beer and Donna Hay, who also appeared on the show, the magazine profiled a number of younger and lesser known individuals alongside these celebrities. The back cover is another important page of a magazine in terms of visibility, attracting high profile full-page advertising (see McCracken 1993: 96). A large number of these advertisements contained images of, or textual references to, *MasterChef Australia* related chefs and/or food writers, with Australian show regulars Donna Hay, George Calombaris, Matt Moran and Frank Camora presented alongside Gordon Ramsay in this way.

By mid-2010, *MasterChef Australia* was a record-breaking success, with almost four million people in the five major capital cities⁸ watching the announcement of the series finale winner, and rural and regional viewers adding to this total. Its popularity spilled over into other product consumption and buoyed sales of *MasterChef magazine*. Although the series had finished in July, issue 5 (September 2010) continued to draw heavily on this popularity, with Trudi Jenkins drawing attention to this in her editorial and asking for reader input: 'We've brought back our favourite contestants from Series Two ... asking them for a signature recipe ... see if *your*

favourite is featured, and if not, write in and let us know' (2, italics in original). This suggested that contestant writers might be chosen (at least in part) for their popularity, rather than any particular ability or interest.

While News Magazines' food titles publisher Fiona Nilsson had predicted average sales settling somewhere just above 80,000 copies (qtd. in Jackson 2010), this proved a very conservative estimate and, within a year, *MasterChef magazine* had become one of the market leaders in culinary magazines in Australia, attracting strong subscriptions to back up store purchases. According to July 2010 figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations, in a weak sales market for magazines – in this period, monthly men's title *Alpha* slumped 30.1 percent, for instance – most food magazines were on the rise, an increase directly attributed by many to the MasterChef effect of which *MasterChef magazine* was then a part. During this time, the culinary magazine market was also shifting in its focus, with some readers and titles responding to one of the strongest trends identified by Australian Consolidated Press magazine's publishing director, that of 'dining out at home' – eating at home rather than at a restaurant, but making it a 'special occasion' meal (Phil Scott qtd. in Kent 2010). This was MasterChef territory and was also perhaps a reflection of changes in dining behaviour attributable to the global financial crisis.

By the end of 2010, *MasterChef magazine* was one of the Australian market's success stories, despite magazine sales falling overall: 3.44 percent in the six months to December from the corresponding period of the previous year, and 2.8 percent from the June half of the year. The food magazine market showed some significant decreases, with *Woolworths good taste* sales plummeting 12.3 percent, *Super food ideas* falling 8.8 percent and *Recipes+* down 5.9 percent. Monthly sales of *MasterChef magazine* were, however, growing, and reached 150,000 in this period (Capel 2011). At its launch, News Limited had predicted that the magazine would be successful as it would attract 'non-traditional food magazine buyers' (Nilsson qtd. in Jackson 2010) – that is, the television show viewers – but at this time the title may have also been drawing readers away from these other magazines.

During its initial year and a half, the covers of *MasterChef magazine* continued to strongly reference the show, by both referencing personalities and segments of the program and featuring chefs. Of these first 18 covers, four pictured the *MasterChef Australia* judges (with issues 1 and 8 featuring all three, issue 13 Mehigan and Calombaris, and issue 7 Anna Gare, the presenter and one of the judges of *Junior MasterChef*), two featured Curtis Stone (issues 2 and 9), while six covers showcased Australian 'star' chefs who were guests on *MasterChef Australia* – Adriano Zumbo, who made the cover twice (issues 3 and 12), Matt Moran (also twice, issues 5 and 15), Neil Perry (issue 14) and Maggie Beer (issue 17). These covers reflected the strong focus on Australian individuals, businesses and foodstuff in the content of the magazine and the first of the television series, with only one international celebrity chef, Rick Stein, on the cover of issue 10. The remaining of these first 18 covers promoted popular *MasterChef Australia* competitors – Adam Liaw (issue 4), Marion Grasby (issue 6), Adam Liaw and Callum Han (issue 11), Kate Bracks (issue 16) and Hayden Quinn (issue 18) – reflecting their contributions inside the magazine. Another element that remained consistent on these covers was the bright banner across the

bottom. On the first 15 issues, this entirely referenced the television program, listing a selection of four segments from the popular ‘Invention test’, ‘Mystery box’, ‘Taste test’, ‘Master class’, ‘Pressure test’ and ‘Junior MasterChef’, except for issues 12 and 14, which both listed popular personalities from the show: ‘Matt Preston – George & Gary – Curtis Stone – Matt Moran’.

While the first 19 issues ranged in size from 144 pages to bumper issues of 176 and 200 pages, many of the extra pages were advertising, and there were more consistencies than changes during this time. The price, for example, hardly altered throughout the entire print run, except for the first double issue for the summer of 2010/11 (issue 8), priced at \$5.50, and a minimal 4 cent rise to \$4.99 from issue 25. Subscription prices similarly did not vary significantly, beginning at \$38 a year and rising to \$40 with issue 2, to settle at either \$39 or \$40 for one year (\$76 to \$79 for two years) throughout the life of the magazine. The core contributing staff and content of the magazine also remained largely stable throughout this period. A number of other consistencies, and changes, throughout the magazine’s publishing history are discussed below.

From strength to strength: writers and contributors

Founding Food Director of *MasterChef magazine* Sophia Young (who remained in this role until the final three issues) came to the magazine with a strong background in the industry. Initially training in New York as a chef and with experience working in restaurants in the USA, Young relocated to Australia and found work in the *Australian women’s weekly* test kitchen and on the popular *Women’s weekly* home library cookbook series (for discussion of this series, see Williamson 2013). Young then moved to *Gourmet traveller* as associate food editor, writing, developing and styling food stories, as well as contributing to eleven *Gourmet traveller* cookbooks. In 2005, Young became the launch food editor for *Notebook: magazine* (a mixture of personal, home and lifestyle focus) and then took up a position as food editor of *Vogue entertaining + travel* (Nikas-Boulos 2010). Despite these positions with high-end publications, it was her new role with *MasterChef magazine* and the media interest in all aspects of the MasterChef franchise that brought her own work to the interest of the press, and she was profiled in *The daily telegraph* newspaper in June 2010 (Nikas-Boulos 2010). The careers of very few magazine staff are of general interest in this way, and this is especially so for those who lack a high profile elsewhere, such as in other print media or on television.

Alongside Young who, as the magazine’s food director, featured in almost every issue, a series of other writers contributed to *MasterChef magazine* over its life. Analysis of the list of contributors and author bylines in each issue shows that these writers can be divided into two groups: figures from the television show and others. Of those from the show, Preston, already a food writer and restaurant critic before joining the MasterChef franchise, contributed to all 29 issues, while Calombaris and Mehigan, with very little literary experience, were each credited as contributors to the first 19 issues. *Junior MasterChef* presenter Anna Gare similarly contributed to issues 7 through 19, either in stories related to that program or in themed columns. *MasterChef*

magazine also helped a number of popular *MasterChef Australia* contestants establish themselves as food writers. Marion Grasby came to *MasterChef Australia* with a professional background in media and foodwriting, having studied journalism and worked as a reporter with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and also having undertaken a Masters in Gastronomy and maintaining an early Australian food blog, *The hedonistic hostess* (Grasby 2009–2010). The day after the program in which she was eliminated was aired, it was announced that Grasby – who had been the favourite of many in the audience (and of the bookmakers) to win the second series – had been signed exclusively to the magazine as its first ex-contestant columnist. With a bylined column in each issue thereafter, she was also promoted on the cover of issue 4, which noted ‘Marion joins the team’, and her photograph was featured on both the cover of issue 6 and the contents page of issue 8. Grasby, whose recipes both on the show and for the magazine varied from Asian classics to fusion inventions, provided an example for Kate Bracks, winner of series 3 in 2011, who wrote her ‘Country cook’ column for the magazine for issues 20 through 29. Both Grasby and Bracks released their first cookbooks during this time – Grasby’s *Marion: recipes and stories from a hungry cook* was published by Macmillan in 2011, Bracks’ *The sweet life: desserts from Australia’s MasterChef* by Random House in 2012. Both books reproduced elements from *MasterChef* magazine and were promoted and advertised within it.⁹

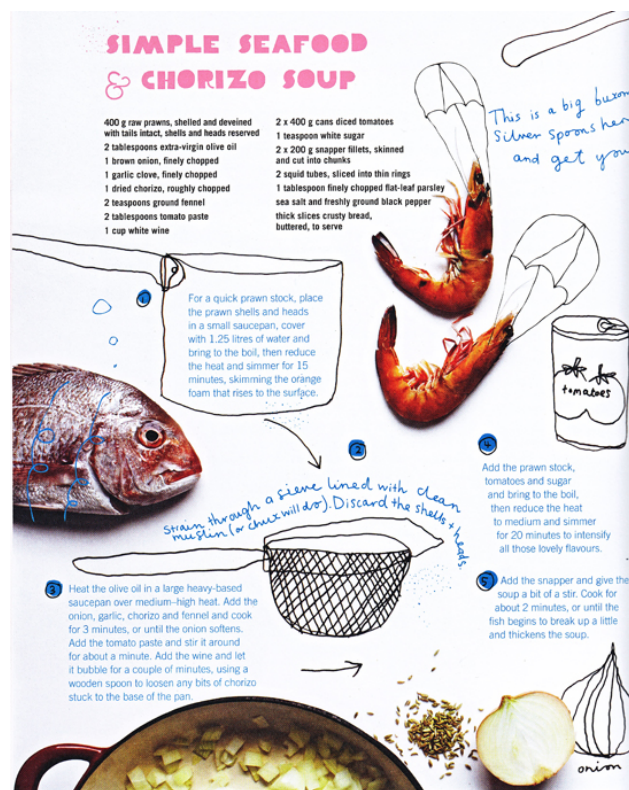


Fig. 2. ‘Simple seafood & chorizo soup’ recipe from Marion Grasby’s *Marion: recipes and stories from a hungry cook* (2012: 36), mimicking the layout of a magazine page

kate bracks



I wander into my favourite butcher and make my selection – some locally produced chicken thigh fillets. I stroll back home, pulling some fragrant rosemary sprigs from the garden before I head through the back door into my kitchen. It's going to be stuffed chicken thighs tonight. I grab some dried figs and almonds – they'll go nicely with the rosemary. I've not tried rolling chicken thighs before, but it's easier than I anticipate once I've flattened it into a suitable shape. Mind you, I could almost sit down and eat the bowl of stuffing on its own, but I resist and spread it over the chicken thighs, roll them up and leave them in the fridge to rest.

Then, it's back outside to find something to go with my chicken. Right now, the garden is offering up bright green beans and plump little cherry tomatoes that are bursting with flavour. I'll keep the cooking simple – with ingredients this fresh they need minimal input from me.

Since we moved to Oranget in regional New South Wales about five years ago, I've revelled in the fact that so much of what I eat is produced locally. I've even started growing some of it myself and, despite having never had a green thumb, my occasionally erratic efforts are now being rewarded by a variety of vegetables and fruit trees growing in the garden. We even keep some chooks to lay eggs for us. I'm not quite up to raising chickens to eat though, so I'm thankful my local butcher has there to supply them!

24 MasterChef

country cook on a roll

In her first column for us, 2011 MasterChef champion Kate Bracks finds inspiration in her own backyard.

ALMOND AND FIG STUFFED CHICKEN

Allow an extra 3 hours to chill chicken rolls. You'll need 4 toothpicks.

• SERVES: 4

• PREPARATION: 35 MINS

• COOKING: 35 MINS

45g (½ cup) silvered almonds, finely chopped

5 dried figs, stalks discarded, finely chopped

3 tsp baby capers, finely chopped

1 tbs finely chopped rosemary

1 lemon, zested, juiced

4 x 200g chicken thigh fillets, trimmed

60ml (¼ cup) extra virgin olive oil, plus extra, to drizzle

16 large cherry truss tomatoes, cut into 4 clusters

400g green beans, trimmed

1 tbs verjuice

¾ tsp Dijon mustard

1 small red onion, very thinly sliced

½ cup flat-leaf parsley, torn

60ml (¼ cup) dry white wine

120ml (½ cup) good-quality chicken stock

1 To make stuffing, combine almonds, figs, capers, rosemary and lemon zest in a bowl. Season with salt and pepper.

2 Place a chicken fillet between 2 sheets of plastic wrap and, using a meat mallet or rolling pin, pound until thin. Repeat with remaining fillets.

Place fillets, smooth-side down, on a work surface. Season, then drizzle with extra oil. Divide stuffing among fillets, then, using your hands, press evenly

over fillet. Starting at one short end, roll up each fillet to enclose stuffing.

Wrap in plastic wrap, twisting ends to form a compact log. Make 4 rolls. Refrigerate for 3 hours or overnight.

3 Preheat oven to 180C. Unwrap rolls and secure with a toothpick. Using sharp scissors, trim toothpicks. Heat 1 the oil in a large, ovenproof frying pan over medium-high heat. Add chicken rolls and cook, turning frequently, for 5 minutes or until browned all over. Transfer pan to top shelf of oven. Cook, turning halfway, for 30 minutes or until cooked through.

4 Ten minutes before chicken is cooked, place tomatoes on an oven tray, drizzle with extra oil, then season. Roast on bottom shelf of oven for 10 minutes or until softened.

5 Remove tomatoes and chicken from oven. Transfer chicken to a plate and cover loosely with foil. Rest for 5 minutes. Reserve pan.

6 Meanwhile, cook beans in a saucepan of boiling salted water for 3 minutes or until just tender. Drain, refresh in cold water, then drain again.

7 Whisk verjuice, mustard, remaining 2 the oil and 1 the lemon juice in a large bowl. Season. Add beans, onion and parsley, and toss to coat.

8 To make jus, return reserved pan to high heat. Add wine and, using a wooden spoon, scrape bits from bottom of pan. Add stock and bring to the boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer for 3 minutes or until reduced. Strain through a fine sieve into a bowl. Season.

9 Divide bean mixture and roasted tomatoes among plates. Remove toothpicks, then slice chicken. Drizzle with jus to serve.



TOP TIPS

• Large cherry truss tomatoes are sold at selected supermarkets and greengrocers under the Bush brand.

• Verjuice from supermarkets and delis, is the juice of unripe grapes. Substitute 2 tsp lemon juice.

Almond and fig stuffed chicken. Opposite: Kate and her daughter, Maya.

Fig. 3. Kate Bracks' first 'Country cook' column, *MasterChef* magazine 20, February 2012, 24–25

Other contestants featured in the magazine as columnists include the 12 year-old inaugural *Junior MasterChef* winner, always known in print by her first name as 'Isabella' (issue 8). The show's guest chefs and judges are also a recurring authorial presence in the magazine. Most prominent among these is Curtis Stone, who contributed a major piece to all 29 issues, and popular *MasterChef Australia* judge, Sydney-based chef Matt Moran, who joined the show as a regular from the third series and the magazine from issue 12 until its closure. Moran's 'Chef at home' column – ostensibly meals that he was cooking when not in his restaurants – provided another example of the blending of high-end skills with home dining.

Writers and other contributors who were not obviously related to *MasterChef Australia* also produced significant content for *MasterChef* magazine. Scholarship is beginning to track the work and careers of well-known Australian food writers who often also have a significant television or high profile entrepreneurial or other culinary career (see, for instance, Bonner, 2003, 2005, 2009; Gunders 2008; Brien 2006, 2010, 2011; Khamis 2013); however, it has often focused on cookbooks rather than magazines (see National Centre for Research into the History of Food and Wine 2006; Wessell & Brien 2013; Brien & Wessell 2013). The work of lesser-known writers for special interest magazines – either in contemporary or historical contexts – is an extremely under-researched area and little is known about many of these writers' careers. Although named in the contributors' list in each issue of *MasterChef* magazine, few of these authors had bylines in any issue, and it is thus difficult to suggest exactly what part they played – whether composing entire articles or parts of these, or working as co-authors, editors or ghost writers for others featured in the magazine. One of the few contributors with a byline is Greg Duncan Powell, author of a number of cookbooks and other volumes on wine and beer, who wrote a wine column for all 29 issues. Leanne Kitchen, also a published cookbook author, similarly contributed to all issues, in her case without a byline; however, her food travel book,

Turkey: recipes and tales from the road (2011) (promoted in issue 10) suggests the travel articles were, at least in part, her work.

Food bloggers were another unique set of writers profiled in *MasterChef magazine*. A series of sites was promoted in the first six issues, until these were perhaps identified as possible competitors for readers and this segment was discontinued. After this, the only food blogs cited were by those connected with the MasterChef franchise – such as that of regular *MasterChef magazine* contributor Olivia Andrews, who was profiled in issue 9. The work of series 3 competitor Billy Law appeared in a number of issues. And an extract from the cookbook that was based on recipes from his blog and time on *MasterChef Australia* was featured in issue 28. A further exception to this embargo was the ‘Food blogosphere’ story in issue 22, under the banner ‘Meet 6 of our favourite food bloggers. Their styles are unique, but they share a driving passion for all things food’ (121). As a full-page advertisement for the digital iPad version of the magazine (120) faces the first page of this, it is clear that an attempt to attract digital readers to the magazine was being launched with this story.

Flying high: ‘the real winners’

While writers and other contributors were featured in each issue, the highest profile was given to those who gained most from the MasterChef effect in terms of public exposure: the three judges/presenters – Mehigan, Calombaris and Preston. Scott Ellis, television critic for the *Sun-herald* newspaper, wrote how in two years these three men had

gone from being three blokes with reasonable profiles in the food world to something akin to rock stars. Mobbed when they appear in public, their every word – spoken and printed – is hung upon, and their businesses are booming. (2010: 3)



Fig. 4. Cover of ‘Television’ liftout, *The Sun-herald*, 25–31 July 2010

The magazine drew from this well of popular authority, advertising their presence on almost every cover, whether it was ‘George & Gary’s masterclass’ and ‘Matt’s top 6 chicken dishes’ (issue 2), ‘George and Gary’s home cooking, great pub grub, TV dinners’ and ‘Matt’s top 6 desserts’ (issue 3), ‘George’s prawn kalamaki’ from his Greek masterclass (issue 5), ‘George & Gary’s brunch dishes’ (issue 6), ‘George & Gary’s burgers, ribs and brownies’ (issue 7), and so on for each issue. The eighth issue is indicative of this focus. It featured the trio on the cover, Mehigan spruiking major advertiser Harvey Norman homewares on the inside front cover, a full-page advertisement for Mehigan and Calombaris’ co-authored cookbook *Your place or mine?* (2010) on page 4 and more images from the cover shoot on the next. The contents pages revisit the cover, and also include a new photo of Preston (14), while the three are again photographed on a full-page advertisement for the *MasterChef live* event – comprising cookery demonstrations, classes and ‘talk sessions’ with the judges and guest chefs, a Junior MasterChef area and an entire *MasterChef magazine* area featuring the production team alongside stalls from providores and producers (26), and for a seasonal special ‘All I want for Christmas’ story (29–30). Preston then reviews, and is photographed at, Bondi Beach’s Icebergs Dining Room and Bar (32) and again for his evaluation of six of the national best restaurants (75–86), while Mehigan and Calombaris are named on the full-page advertisement for the *Junior MasterChef Australia official recipe collection* cookbook (2010) (39). ‘George and Gary’s barbeque masterclass’ follows, with photographs of the duo alongside those of the recipes (43–50). The trio recur again in the end pages of the magazine, on the subscription page (173), in another full-page promotion for the live event (181) and Mehigan in advertising for two boxed DVD sets in which he co-starred (183).

Midlife crisis: issues 19 and 20 onwards

This level of exposure continued throughout most of the run of the magazine, even in the final third of the run when, despite Megihan and Calombaris’ names missing from the list of contributors from issue 20 onwards, they were still obviously seen as a drawcard, featuring again on the cover (issue 23) and regularly inside the magazine. Despite their continuing presence, issues 19 and 20 heralded a number of changes for the title. The size dropped dramatically, with issue 20 (at 136 pages) markedly slimmer than issues 18 (150 pages) and 19 (176 pages), and indicative of a drop in advertising revenue. At this time, the cover format changed considerably, with only two covers from issue 19 onwards featuring a main image of a *MasterChef*-related personality and switching to a more conventional, in terms of Australian food magazines, image of a lusciously photographed dish. Most of the covers, however, continued to include boxed inset images and, while these had been food when the main cover image was of a person, once the main image switched to a dish, at least one of the inserts began to regularly depict a show-related personality. These, predictably, featured judges Mehigan, Calombaris, Preston and Moran as well as *MasterChef Australia* guest superstars Rick Stein, Jamie Oliver and Marco Pierre White, and popular contestants. This lineup reflected those who appeared in the series, including – as the show became more popular, and presumably had access to a larger budget – an increasing number of famous national and international chefs. This

change, with the covers focusing more on food, was signalled three months earlier when, from issue 16, the bottom edge banner shifted from referencing the show in terms of segments or personalities to a listing of dishes. Despite this cover rebranding, the content largely continued as outlined and discussed above.



Fig. 5. Changes at *MasterChef* magazine. Winter pies feature, with international superstar chefs Rick Stein and Jamie Oliver in inset boxes, and recipes – not show segments – striped along the bottom edge. *MasterChef* magazine 25 July 2012

Decline and demise

The final 10 issues were notably slimmer than the first 19, with only one of 144 pages (issue 23), seven of 136 pages (issues 20–22, 24–27) and the last two (issues 28 and 29) only 128 pages, indicating falling circulation figures and dropping advertising interest in the title from issue 20 onwards. Falling sales mirrored declining ratings for the television show, which fell steadily after the successes of 2009 and 2010. By early August 2012, Audit Bureau of Circulations figures revealed that the 4.2 percent year-on-year drop in sales of monthly magazines (Ross 10 August 2012) had been massively exceeded by *MasterChef* magazine's sales fall of 36.7 percent in the six months to June 2012, a reverse of the situation two years earlier. This drop resulted in monthly sales totals of 78,721 copies, a marked drop from the 124,301 per month during the same period the previous year, and almost half its first audited circulation figures. At this time, many other food magazines' sales also fell, but by significantly less than *MasterChef* magazine, with *Woolworths good taste* dropping 17.7 percent (more than 20,000 copies) and *Super food ideas* down 12.6 percent, *Delicious* down 10.6 percent and *Donna Hay* down 2.6 percent. Interestingly, at this time, sales of home and lifestyle magazines (with recipe sections) rose, with *Belle's* figures up 11.6 percent, *Real living's* up 8.8 percent, *Australian house & garden's* up 6.5 percent and

Australian home beautiful's up 3.4 percent, indicating an overlapping audience with cognate, but shifting, interests. In response, *MasterChef magazine* instituted a new subscription strategy in an attempt to attract new readers with, by issue 26, the addition of an additional 'taster' category – six issues for \$23. There were personnel changes too, with Sophia Young no longer listed as Food Director from issue 27, although her byline continued to appear on the magazine's columns.



Fig. 6. Penultimate *MasterChef Magazine* (October 2012) cover with no images of chefs, although popular contestants are named

In mid-October 2012, News Limited announced that the next, November, issue would be the last (Jackson 2012). Postings to the magazine's official Facebook site stopped at the time of this announcement, although it remains online and has even attracted additional followers since then. Despite this decision, the November issue was still calling for subscriptions – 'Your recipe for success! At just \$49, a one-year subscription to *MasterChef magazine* is the Christmas present that lasts all year' (98–99). A fan site was set up on Facebook calling for the magazine to not be axed, but when this issue went on sale on 22 October, letters were already being sent to subscribers advising that the magazine would no longer be produced and offering two options – to switch the remaining subscription term to *Delicious* magazine or accept a refund for undelivered issues.

Ratings for the television show have, moreover, continued to decline. In 2013, a year after the final issue of *MasterChef magazine*, the grand finale received the poorest ratings of all five such segments since 2009, attracting only half the viewers of the year before. In response, the Ten Network announced it was cancelling the various spin-off series (*MasterChef celebrity*, *All-star*, *Junior* and *Professional*), although the network's chief programming officer denied this was the end of the main series. She was quoted as stating:

There is plenty of life left in *MasterChef*. We are looking forward to a new, fresh version in 2014 ... It is still a great show and we like what it represents ... dream fulfillment. (Beverley McGarvey, qtd. in Lallo 2013)

While the special themed issues of the magazine promised at the time of its closure have not eventuated to date, significant other MasterChef-related print product has been produced, including new cookbooks by judges, contestants, guests and *MasterChef magazine* writers, and columns and features for other magazines, newspapers and online publications.

Conclusion

As well as its obvious connection to, and reliance upon, *MasterChef Australia*'s popularity, the rise and fall of *MasterChef magazine* coincided with a particularly volatile period in culinary print publishing. As cookbook sales first rose to unprecedented heights and then fell during this period (Broadfield 2011), *Australian good food* (launched in 2008) both raised its sales and then collapsed, publishing its final December 2012/January 2013 issue just three months after *MasterChef magazine*'s. Soon after, *Australian good taste* (launched in 1996) was also judged uneconomic and ceased print publication with its August 2013 issue. While other networks produced competitive cookery programs in response to *MasterChef Australia*, including the currently popular *My kitchen rules*, none of these shows or their leading personalities has generated the community interest, media commentary or branded product of the MasterChef franchise.

While public health messaging regarding the benefits of consuming fresh foods, and about cooking at home in terms of improving both personal health outcomes and family social relationships, are not new (see, for discussion, Brien 2011), there is a long history of resistance to such messaging and repeated attempts to produce successful vehicles for these communications (Dutta & Zoller 2008; Gordon 2002; Rothman *et al* 1993). Given this history, the value of any positive messaging from the MasterChef franchise cannot be discounted. Throughout its run, *MasterChef magazine* stridently promoted the desirability of sourcing, cooking and consuming a range of fresh foods. Alongside this, despite its clear links to supermarket giants and processed food advertisers, it also supported smaller members of the Australian food industry, including local growers, farmers markets and boutique manufacturers. It also, through the Australian-based travel stories and restaurants in each issue, regularly promoted owner-operated cafés and restaurants. It also repeatedly acknowledged the contribution of these Australian farmers, producers, chefs and restaurateurs to the Australian economy. Finally, like the television program, *MasterChef magazine* supported the idea of the 'amateur' being able to contribute to Australian culinary culture as well as culture more broadly (Khamis 2013). The magazine also clearly supported and promoted the value of Australian food writers, food writing and culinary-related publications, whether in print or online, and provided opportunities for a number of writers to begin, or develop, their careers.

While this article has provided a preliminary survey of these writers within the context of the lifespan of the magazine, many other related areas remain to be

explored, including these writers' future career trajectories. Deeper interrogation of the magazine's content and the relationship of this content to advertising and product placement will be another fruitful area of investigation, as will an assessment of any brief or longer-lasting influence the magazine has had on its readers. It is hoped, however, that this initial mapping of this fascinating magazine and its publishing history will provide a useful foundation for such inquiries.

Endnotes

1. I follow Williamson, who draws on McCracken's definition of special-interest magazines as those that 'encourage readers to conceive of themselves as members of a distinct group linked to certain modes of consumption' (1993: 257).
2. All figures are in Australian dollars.
3. Issues and dates are: issue 1, May 2010; 2, June 2010; 3, July 2010; 4, August 2010; 5, September 2010; 6, October 2010; 7, November 2010; 8, December/January 2011; 9, February 2011; 10, March 2011; 11, April 2011; 12, May 2011; 13, June 2011; 14, July 2011; 15, August 2011; 16, September 2011; 17, October 2011; 18, November 2011; 19, December/January 2012; 20, February 2012; 21, March 2012; 22, April 2012; 23, May 2012; 24, June 2012; 25, July 2012; 26, August 2012; 27, September 2012; 28, October 2012; 29, November 2012.
4. See Bonner (2005) for a discussion on this topic.
5. Goodwin also secured a regular guest spot on Channel 9's national breakfast show *Today*.
6. These were, in order, from issue 1 to 29: Gordon Ramsay, Fergus Henderson, Heston Blumenthal, Anthony Bourdain, Rene Redzepi, Wylie Dufresne, Raymond Blanc, Stephanie Alexander, Frank Poupard, David Thompson, Tetsuya Wakuda, Michael Roux Jr., Nigella Lawson, Thomas Keller, Marco Pierre White, Roy Choi, Jamie Oliver, David Chang, Diana Kennedy, Ryan Clift, Trinh Diem Vy, Simon Wright, Alvin Leung, Buddy Valastro, Adam Aamann, Antonio Carliccio, John Torode, Tessa Kiros and Ash Mair.
7. Jamie Oliver, Rick Stein and Marco Pierre White are, for instance, featured in later issues, in line with when they appeared on *MasterChef Australia*.
8. Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.
9. Investigating the books and other writing produced by *MasterChef Australia* presenters, judges and contestants and their links to both the series and the magazine is beyond the scope of this article but promises to be a fruitful area of future research, and is already proving to be especially interesting in relation to the role of print in cross-platform publishing.

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