

Weekend

with *The dailys*



a winter gathering in the Australian bush

To Julia & Phillip,

About 70 kms west of Tenterfield, through the river gums alongside the Dumaresq River, you will find Moorabinda Station, our glorious headquarters for this weekend and the full-time home of farmers Julia and Philip Harpham.

More generous hosts could not exist.

Not only did they open their doors to us (all but one total strangers), they led a mission up the mountains to find the brumbies, entertained us with their wild stories at the dinner table, cleaned out and fired up the crazy wood

stove, mowed around the woolshed and fossicked through their sheds for old wheelbarrows and milk pails and other photographic treasures.

Julia and Philip thank you so much for sharing your beautiful part of the world with us. It was a privilege to spend this time with you on your farm and Julia, even though you could've just as easily ended up writing novels in Paris, I am so glad you are here.

Annabelle Hickson x





Workshops

Because we had such a blast this weekend, we decided to open it up to other people and hold a workshop at the shearers' quarters in September 2015. It sold out in less than 24 hours. We've already begun planning more. For information, go to www.the-dailys.com/workshops



INTRODUCTION

WORDS: Annabelle Hickson

"As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship, as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners; decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can." - Virginia Woolf in Mrs. Dalloway

I was standing in line, waiting my turn to climb up on a box to take an aerial shot of a cheese and charcuterie spread, artfully arranged on a zinc table-top plonked on the ground in a wool shed far from home, surrounded by aspiring food photographers and bloggers and people who say to others without hesitation "move out of my light". I didn't know exactly what I was doing there ("Let me get this straight, your husband is looking after the kids while you go away for three days to arrange food on pretend tabletops?"), but I knew it was important for me that I was.

The course was hosted by Sophie Hansen of the Local is Lovely blog fame. It was two days of photography, styling, flower arranging and eating in a rambling country house bursting with giant roses and vine covered verandahs with that cosy sprawling feeling that only buildings which have been renovated and added to over time can have. I had recently started a blog - The Dailys - after a similar course in Sydney, hosted by Local Milk aka Beth Kirby, had snapped me out of the malaise that came with having young children and being at home with nappies and bottles and never-ending negotiations, quietly going stir crazy. She and her blog were, and are, such a source of inspiration. And her workshops, I've done two now, fuel creativity like nothing else I have known.

So there I was staring down at the charcuterie not thinking "why am I doing this", but rather "hurrah, at last, this is something I want to be doing".

I have never liked playing tennis or much sport at all really. I played the cello for years, but more out of duty than passion. I enjoy a lunch with friends, but more than one or two a week and I start going bonkers. I do like cooking. I like making things look beautiful. I like writing and I like taking photos of it all. Ordinary things, but things that feel worthwhile to me. And as I looked about the wool shed, and could see other people thinking "if only I could move that marbled wagyu bresaola a bit to the right", I knew I had found my people.

Undoubtedly these courses are what got me going with my blog - something which has greatly improved the quality of my life. It gives me a reason to actually make time to do the things I enjoy doing, rather than letting the whoosh of life as Nikki Gemmell calls it completely takeover. But without doubt the most marvellous thing to come from the courses is the people I have met. The teachers - like Sophie and Beth and the joyous photographer Luisa Brimble - and the fellow students, many of whom have become friends. I guess it shouldn't come as a surprise: we had already gone through a sort of compatibility sieve in that we had all enrolled in these slow living courses in the first place. But as I sit here on my computer on a farm in the middle of nowhere I am astonished I have a new, diverse group of friends from different parts of Australia and the world to be writing about.

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In July winter 2015, nine of these ladies came up to stay with me in the Dumaresq Valley where I live. It's nine hours from Sydney and four from Brisbane - quite a trek by any stretch. We organised our own quasi workshop where we stayed in the neighbours' original shearing quarters and cooked over fires and on a crazy wood stove. We had candlelit dinners and brunches on the old verandah. We had cardamom and vanilla infused coffee in the chilly morning. We learned how to kill and prepare ducks and chickens to eat, we took millions of photographs and we laughed and laughed.

To spend the weekend with these women, working together to making a version of art important to me is just the sort of intimate and joyful human activity I would like to occupy my time on this sinking ship of life. Ladies, my world has become so much wider because of you.

What follows is a collection of photos, recipes and stories from our weekend together, in part to celebrate these new friendships and common ground, but also to inspire others out there who want to get involved in gatherings like these. There are so many great workshops and courses and blogs where you can learn everything from photography to pastry making and meet other people who are into the same things. Or you can just organise it yourself with a group of like-minded.

So in the spirit of Virginia Woolf, may we all find time to decorate the dungeon...with flowers, food, glorious photos and friends, new and old.

And a special thanks to Megan Trousdale, whose idea it was to put this e-book together and whose efforts have made this possible. Your thought and care and lovely willingness to share is an inspiration.







A close-up photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue wide-brimmed hat and a light blue sweater. She is smiling broadly, showing her teeth, and has her hand near her chin. The background is a field of tall, golden-brown grasses, slightly out of focus, creating a warm, natural atmosphere.

"So in the spirit of Virginia Woolf, may we all find time to decorate the dungeon ... with flowers, food, glorious photos and friends, new and old."





COUNTRY AIR

WORDS: Hannah Mccowatt

There is something about country air; it gets deep inside your bones and fills your lungs with energy. It brings about a sense of returning home, even if you have never been there before.

I felt exactly this when we arrived at Mingoola. Driving past beautiful landscapes, so foreign and raw and brutal and unforgiving, like entering a new country through a foreigner's eyes. The smell of cow dung, the feel of tall golden grass between your fingers and the warm smiles of those that greet you at the farm gate.

"I want that house," we scream again and again pointing out dilapidated sheds along the road, "and that one," we yell, as we pass another with a beautiful verandah and a view over the mountains.

I quietly start to plan the logistics of moving to the country inside my head, figuring out how I could make a living here, how I can convince my loved ones to move with me and how on earth I'm going to get organised enough to plan groceries an entire week in advance.

That is where Annabelle Hickson comes in, because she has done just that. She is someone who knows all too well what the country life has to offer day in and day out. She is also coincidentally the one to show us just how beautiful daily life here can be. Her kind heart has shared this wonderful place with us, a bunch of creative city girls dreaming of the country life.



WELCOME DINNER

WORDS: Megan Trousdale

It is the magic hour, when the setting sun casts Midas' golden touch. Driving for the first time through the Dumaresq Valley, in northern inland NSW, I want to stop and photograph long retired, putty-coloured tobacco barns in nests of thigh-high grass. But I also want to arrive at Moorabinda Station, the location for our weekend retreat with 10 like-minded creatives, before dark.

Moorabinda Station gate, tin cut into the shape of a kookaburra, stockman crouched for smoko, and sheep baled up by a sheepdog, sets a playful tone. At a cluster of buildings, once used to house annual temporary communities of shearers, a new community gathers, exchanging embraces and welcoming smiles. I join them and the introductions are easy and relaxed. I know Annabelle and Luisa from a photography workshop with Sophie Hansen of Local is Lovely blog, but the other faces are new to me.

We choose rooms among the corrugated iron shearers' quarters, Scout-green painted timber doors creaking with renewed use, sometimes needing an idiosyncratic jiggle and shove to close.

The campfire beckons and we settle on kitchen chairs and hay bales, softened with sheepskins. Caitlin sits with an enamel bowl between her knees peeling parsnips.

"My family owns a cottage on a huge freshwater lake on a native Indian reserve in northern Canada," Caitlin tells us. "As kids we'd get shipped up there to spend summers with my grandparents. My grandpa used to peel potatoes on the back porch every afternoon. He had one of his fingers blown off by gun shrapnel in WW2 and I remember always being fascinated by his hands as a kid. The potatoes were always fresh from the farm as my grandparents lived near by. Whenever I peel anything I think of my grandpa."

We sip prosecco from next-door's Reedy Creek Wines and talk tactics about the how to cook the parsnips and brussels sprouts on the campfire.

When Annabelle invited me to this reunion of Slow Living workshop graduates we immediately started talking food. I suggested a recipe for beef cheeks cooked by my father-in-law. Beef cheeks are not a popular cut, too literally cheeky perhaps, but when marinated and slow cooked they are melt in your mouth tender. I went to two supermarkets before finding them at a butcher shop.

Back in the rustic shearers' quarters kitchen Clare reveals a 18g prized French black truffle (\$37 or about \$2/g), bought at a Melbourne farmers market from Noel Fitzpatrick of Black Truffle Harvest, Gippsland. We are in awe of this Holy Grail of fungi fruit as Clare grates it onto the parsnip mash, carefully scraping the last remnants of truffle off the box grater.

We take our places in the dining room at two tables joined and decorated with linen cloth, butternut pumpkins, quinces, and eucalypt. During dinner we make appreciate sounds over the truffle parsnip mash and fall apart beef cheeks. A few of us have seconds. I ask Annabelle "Did you want me to remind you about dessert?" She gasps, remembering the bread and butter pudding crisping in the wood fire oven, adding an appropriate smokiness to the flavour and a textural contrast to the custard filling.

Just like the sunset earlier in the evening the candles and fireplace cast a golden glow, this time on the timber lined walls, wine glasses, and our conviviality.







CAMPFIRE BRUSSELS SPROUTS

RECIPE: Annabelle Hickson via Sam Giacca who supplies the best fruit and veg from his shop near Stanthorpe.

INGREDIENTS:

Allow about four sprouts per person.

METHOD:

Prepare sprouts by cutting off a bit of the white stalk at bottom and then cut a deep cross into the sprout from the bottom end.

Par boil in salted water for two to three minutes (so they have some bite).

Finish off on the campfire just before serving.

You want nice hot coals rather than a raging flame. Get a large skillet, add three parts olive oil, one part balsamic vinegar, one part sugar (could also use honey) swirl around over heat and once the sugar has had a chance to dissolve, tumble in the sprouts.

Put the skillet over the heat - you want it pretty high - and break some of the sprouts in half with a spatula or knife. Toss in the pan to get the juices right into the sprouts and cook until there is caramelisation (the burnt bits are the best). Should only take a couple of minutes.

Et voila.

PS - Long handled camping pans are best so there is some distance between you and the hot coals.

POT ROASTED BEEF CHEEKS WITH TRUFFLE PARSNIP MASH

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 beef cheeks (or 1kg of blade or rump, sliced)
- 1/2 tsp juniper berries
- 1/2 tsp peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp chopped thyme
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp star anise
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 250ml red wine
- 2 cloves garlic finely sliced
- 1 litre veal stock.

TRUFFLE PARSNIP MASH INGREDIENTS:

- 8 large parsnips
- 125g butter
- 1 small piece of fresh truffle.

METHOD:

Place all ingredients except veal stock into a bowl, stand overnight then drain well, saving marinade. Sear beef cheeks well and place in a large braising pan. Reduce marinade by half then add to beef cheeks and cover with veal stock. Place lid on and cook in a 180C oven for two hours or until tender.

Place the cheeks on a tray to keep warm, reduce braising juices by half, return cheeks to braising liquid to keep warm until ready to serve.

For Truffle Parsnip Mash: Peel and dice the parsnips and boil in salted water until tender. Drain and then tumble back into the pan with the butter, generously season with salt and pepper and grate over the fresh truffle and mash.

Serve one piece of beef cheek per person on top of a bed of mashed parsnip.

**Beef cheeks recipe originally by Wayne Rowe, Bambini Trust Cafe, published in a Fairfax supplement.*







BREAD AND BUTTER PUDDING WITH GLACE CUMQUATS AND BRIOCHE

RECIPE: Annabelle Hickson and Barbara Small

GLACE CUMQUATS INGREDIENTS:

- 250g nagami cumquats (the oval ones)
- 75mls water
- 75g caster sugar

METHOD:

Wash the cumquats and remove any stalks.

Blanch by putting into a pot of cold water and bringing to the boil. Strain in a colander and repeat this process.

When cool, cut the cumquats in half and remove the pith and seeds.

Stir the sugar and water in a small saucepan until boiling. Add the cumquat halves and simmer for 15-20 minutes stirring often until the cumquats are translucent.

Transfer with a small fork to a cake rack lined with baking paper. Make sure they are separated. When cool put in layers separated by baking paper in a container and store in the fridge. They should keep for at least six months.

BREAD & BUTTER PUDDING INGREDIENTS:

- 6 eggs
- 6 tbs sugar
- 4 cups cream
- Butter
- Loaf sourdough
- 6 brioche rolls.

METHOD:

Butter a large baking tray. Slice one loaf of sourdough and six brioche rolls and butter both sides of each slice.

Cut each slice in to thirds, on the angle so they

make little triangles, or in half if the slices are small. Place in lines in the baking pan, crust side up, one row of sourdough followed by one row of brioche.

Mix eggs, sugar, cream and the glace cumquats in a bowl and pour over the bread. Sprinkle with sugar and bake in a 180C oven for about 30 minutes.

*Quince Custard from Stephanie Alexander's The Cook's Companion

INGREDIENTS:

- 600mls quince poaching syrup (see Easing into Sunday for poached quinces recipe)
- 12 egg yolks, whisked
- Juice of one lemon
- Pouring cream

Bring syrup to simmering point then pour onto the egg yolks and mix well. Return to rinsed saucepan and cook gently, stirring all the time, until custard thickens.

Strain into a bowl, add lemon juice and stir now and then as it cools. Dilute with some cream to taste and cover with glad wrap to stop a skin from forming and pop in the fridge.

I made a large one, to feed up to 16, but you could just as easily halve the recipe to make a more family friendly version. I also baked it the day before and reheated in the oven while we were eating dinner.

Annabelle xx

FORAGING AFFAIR

WORDS: Natasha Roberts

Immersed in our surroundings we bantered and drove along the Bruxner Highway towards our destination. Surrounding us were silvers, gold, ochre and charcoal trees, amber spikes of the grasses and a backdrop of clear light blue skies. The rhythmic swaying of the leaves and drifting clouds on muted teal skies was meditative and exhilaratingly beautiful all in one.

In a moment, I was halted out of my daydream state as our car reared to a stop. In that moment, we decided to collect some treasure. Led by Lean, we were scrambling out of the car and clambering over rocks. "Someone grab the Leatherman," echoed down the hill. Low lying branches of the most beautiful blue silver dollar gum were clipped and bundles carried down the hill. I caught a glimpse over my back as we headed back to the car. All was well. We had left no mark. The bush quietly moved and whispered with rhythm as it had when we arrived.

From across the hill, Cecille called out. This time, we are looking at the golden brown and green branches of a captivating tree. "Mistletoe," exclaimed Clare. Pieces were carefully selected and clipped away. Into the ute they were gently stacked. Our luggage took on a new character surrounded by the colours, forms and smells of our bounty.

Proudly we stepped back into the car. Yet only moments down the road again, the car swerved to a halt. Prickly pears. They stood in the middle of the bush landscape with their desert shapes, concise and round. They are noxious, but still a food source. Within moments, we had a calico bag, the Leatherman and prime position. One slice at the base, and they plopped into the bag.

As we drove off again, I planned how we would prepare them. The prickle in my lip was a side issue, and I assumed the pins and needles in my fingers just a rookie mistake. The plan was for dessert the next night. My final decision was poached prickly pears with lemon and vanilla sugar syrup.

Soon after arriving at our destination we gently unpacked our prizes. Stacking our branches in a cute barrow. Prickly pears gently stowed in the kitchen. Finally, a few sprigs of gum on my bedside table.

The next morning we travelled to a nearby farm and were recognised from the day before. I explained (to the gentleman) that we'd been collecting prickly pears. He then explained a technique used by Italian tobacco growers who had huts along the river. They loved prickly pears.

"What you need," he said, "is a big woolly sock. Chuck the pears in the sock, roll them around in it, it gets rid of the prickles. You can't use that sock again though," he laughed. I asked how we could cook them. "No need, just eat them fresh out of the fridge." On our way home, I thought it through. No woolly sock, no gloves, too far from shops. I resolved that paper towel would suffice.

That afternoon, I sat at the kitchen table, wood fire oven at my back. One, two, three, I roll the pears to remove the prickles. Was it working? No, pain in my fingers like pins and needles. I couldn't understand it; there were layers of paper between my fingers and the pears. I adjusted my technique. Four, five, six. Not working, I took a break and picked out the fine needles. As other people drifted through the kitchen, they offered the possibility of leaving the pears. And, in the end, I did. Sadly, the pears went into the fire. The prickles in my fingers persisted for days.

As I slowly moved out to the dining table, defeated, with a hot toddy in hand, I pondered that sometimes foraging is not always a romantic success. I leaned back and looked at the table setting for the evening meal. There, meandering through the settings was our mistletoe. The golden brown branches were shiny and strong. I reflected some more, foraging can be more than a romance, it can be breathtaking life long love affair.







TASTING LIFE

WORDS: Clare Yazbeck

We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect. - Anais Nin

Weekend with The Dailys was an ode to tasting life and our brunch embraced that wholeheartedly. It filled our bellies and captivated all our senses. It sparked inspiration that then flowed out of us and fuelled the entire weekend.

Knowing we wanted to slow down and savour every part of the process, Lean's suggestion of recreating Karen Mordechai's Sunday Suppers winter brunch menu was perfect for our gathering. We loved the idea of taking the time to make bagels from scratch and the challenge of banding together to try something new and make this classic Jewish New Yorker meal our own in country Australia.

Making it our own started with working with what was available and in season.

We cured barramundi instead of sea bass (it's an Australian member of the sea bass family), and we chose pecans instead of figs for the tart due to the season but also as a nod to Annabelle's pecan farm. And then there was the creative licence of using nigella and poppy seeds for the bagels just because we like them and substituting sparkling wine from Zappa's vineyard up the road in the dressing for the warm citrus salad because it was what we had in abundance and, really, why not?

In our shearers' quarters, there were none of the modern machine conveniences we were accustomed to - just a wood oven, our hands, a couple of basic utensils and the essence of country inventiveness to make do with what we had. And with a 6am start in the kitchen, we found a whole new appreciation for the generations of women who had to wait for the fire to get going to boil the water for their morning pot of tea. Such patience is

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rare in the world of instant gas stovetops, electric kettles and your local barista.

In the quiet darkness before dawn, there was a dull clatter as we gently went about our work in the kitchen - Lean with the bagel dough, Natasha with the cream cheese and salad, I with the pecan tart and Taj the German Shepherd occasionally passing through to check on our progress.

As the others rose, so did the activity. Luisa and Hannah took charge of styling the most idyllic table setting with Annabelle and Cecille in the creamy long grass outside. Megan rekindled the campfire to make her delicious cardamom coffee. Lean took the risen dough out into light for us to shoot the shaping of the bagels. Rae joined us to help decipher the art of boiling and baking the bagels with our wood oven.

After rolling the pastry with a wine bottle (no rolling pin), I then popped the tart shell in the oven and hoped for the best without pastry weights and only a vague oven temperature. With all that was going on I almost forgot about the pecans toasting in there too.

Lean sprinkled seeds on the bagels, I drizzled honey on the pecan tart and on the table Natasha placed her citrus salad with its brilliant pinks and oranges.

Eventually, we took it all out to the dining table and we dived in. There were oohs and aahs with every bite. We savoured each morsel, yet wanted more. And as a result, we all ate way too much, even though we were due to have lunch in just two hours. Lean's fluffy bagels were the stars and worth the early start without a doubt.

Looking back, our Sunday Suppers winter brunch was both a loving dedication to slow living and the fun of creative play. More than taking time to make and savour a delicious meal, it was an occasion to taste life. That taste is what remains, what we are sharing here and what we're longing to experience again.













MENU



Homemade bagels with nigella and poppy seeds

Whipped cream cheese with crème fraiche and olive oil

Tea and ginger cured barramundi

Citrus salad with a warm honey, lemon and sparkling wine dressing

Pecan tart with lemon crème fraiche, cream cheese and honey.

For detailed recipes see Sunday Suppers:
Recipes + Gatherings by Karen Mordechai.

GIVING THANKS

WORDS: Lean Timms

We would sit, him and I, in the shed on upturned buckets. There was his wooden bench, his carpentry tools and his old vice. In front of us were more buckets. One rolling hot, the other quite cold. He'd just brought in two chooks – maybe an Old English Game and a Rhode Island Red. His birds were one of his many loves and these two chickens, freshly killed, had been well loved too. His job was to prep them for dinner and my job was to help. As we sat and dunked and plucked and pulled, we did a job well done. Me, playing too much with the gizzards, and him reminding me to give thanks.

If you are lucky to grow up on a farm or to be an outdoors kid, when it comes to childhood meals, taste is often an afterthought. Much clearer is the hunting and gathering of your food and the ritual when something living becomes a meal.

It had been many years since I'd sat there with Dad, preparing these birds for dinner. And in fact the past 14 years I would have none of it as a strict vegetarian. But when the word got out that we, our group of food and adventure loving ladies, would be taking part in the killing and preparation of two chickens and a duck on a neighbouring farm to Moorabinda Station, well I was pretty excited. We all were. This, I thought, not only a dear memory of mine, is exactly what we stand for - appreciating our ingredients and documenting the true process of our food.

On Paul and Jenny Magner's farm, most everything is hunted, grown and gathered. They are pretty well self-sufficient. They built their house using a Lucas mill with trees from their property, use locally foraged indigenous flora for medicines and serve milk, hand squeezed from their cow, in their tea. Their animals run freely and happily and the view they have is majestic. If there was any place to kill two chickens and a duck, it was here on their farm.

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IMAGES: Caitlin Melling / Lean Timms



There seemed to be a mutual understanding among us that the food we were to kill would first be happy and healthy, then killed quickly, then carefully prepared. These birds were to be our dinner, cooked back on the station on the quarters' wood fired oven. We knew it wouldn't be easy, but we were all eager to partake. We appreciated that in a meat loving country, this process happens daily. However, this way, the way we were about to witness, was one of the kindest ways there is. Thankfully Paul's net was swift, his knife was sharp and his gratitude was present.



From the catching to the killing, to the plucking and later roasting, we were mindful, and we were appreciative of our food. We understood where it came from and how it had been raised. Something many of us don't always have the privilege of knowing. We also learned the practical how to's – how to not scorch the skin when plucking, and how to properly de-gizzard the birds (I resisted my childhood temptations here). We also learned about the reality of our consumption – eating dinner that evening meant taking three birds' lives.

There is something so special about cooking and eating a meal together that you have all partaken in from procurement to preparation. Unlike my memories as a kid, as we ate dinner that evening over candlelight and with wine, the taste wasn't quite the afterthought. However, much clearer was the hunting and gathering of our food and the rituals and lessons we had learned and documented that day.

We ate. We gave thanks to Paul and Jenny and also to the birds. And if Dad had have been present, well I think he'd say that we did a job well done.

COMING TOGETHER

WORDS: Jenny Magner

Years ago, lost on a bush track, we called into a farmhouse for directions and found an old man in the process of constructing a brick igloo. On inquiry it turned out to be his new bread oven and he showed us the basic principles of construction.

Many years later we purchased a property that had such an oven and I befriended an Italian lady who regularly baked in one. She taught me and I will forever be hooked.

When we built our new house from scratch, we of course had to build a brick oven too. It is central to extending food and hospitality to our friends, relatives and neighbours. It's the easiest way to feed and entertain groups of visitors, and we have many of those. It's the age-old coming together with wholesome food and good company, which makes Paul and I very happy. It's also such a great way to bake. After the initial firing for pizzas, there's plenty of retained heat for bread, then for roasting poultry or joints of meat or whatever, ready for the next day. How's that for ease and economy.

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IMAGE: Clare Yazbec

JENNY'S PIZZA DOUGH

RECIPE: Jenny Magner

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 dippers of flour (Jenny's dipper is about 1.5 cups) Jenny uses Laucke Flour from Victoria, which she says is excellent although she is interested in trying the Wood's organic flour from Inverell.
- 5 x teaspoons dried yeast
- 1.25L warm water.

METHOD:

Using a large stainless steel bowl (nicer than plastic said Jenny, although you could just as easily use it), tip the yeast and flour in and mix.

Then tip in the warm water and with a wide wooden paddle mix until it is a damp conglomeration. If you were making bread, at this stage you could add sunflowers seeds or whatever, but for pizzas she keeps it plain.

Tip out onto a floured bench, knead for a minute or so until it feels right. Wash the bowl with really hot water so it is warm, then dry it and smear with olive oil. Place the dough back into the bowl and let it rise for an hour or two or until "whenever I come back inside".

Knock back the dough, cut into small portions and form small balls. Then get everyone to roll out their own base and choose their own toppings.

Jenny personally likes her pizzas without the traditional tomato base. Instead she and Paul use a good quality olive oil and then on top of that scatter torn bocconcini, fresh tomatoes and shallots from the garden and field mushrooms if they are at hand, with a scattering of grated cheddar and mozzarella on top.

Makes about 25 pizzas, rolled thinly.

Jenny laughed when I asked her for the recipe. "Oh it's just bread dough," she said. And when I asked her for the recipe for that, she realised she had to put a process that had become more intuitive than scientific back into instructions and measurements. Cups and litres instead of "until it feels right" and "when it looks good". Thank you Jenny.

Annabelle xx

A SEARCH FOR BRUMBIES

WORDS: Lean Timms

There is a lure that pulls us off the beaten trails and into the deep bush of the 10,000 acre property. We pile into the utes - on the tray and in the cab. The wheels skid and the seats bounce along the rocky, muddy track as we pass over grids and stop to open gates. Our eyes are peeled and our ears are open. A mob of kangaroos bound beside us and the sound of kookaburras give way to the lucent onset of early evening. We squint and peer through bushland seeking movement in the scrub. We've been told there are brumbies out here - we are on the search for the wild and the untamed.

After charging through two creek crossings and skirting many a gum-lined ridge, the landscape opens up and our engines slow down. We saunter along the creek bed through settling clusters of fog. We stand up and peer out, holding onto the roof of the ute. There are whispers of the untamed afoot. The brumbies are close, out there in the beguiling wild.

In our movement we see their stillness, and in their stillness everything is heightened. The stallion stands tall and brown and strong. Although distant, he stares at us and we stare back. The view is striking, ghostly and great. The mob behind him shifts, one hoof to the next as their tails whip and their ears prick, uncertain. As the stallion bolsters bravery, the leading mare turns the mob away. A flash of tails and galloping hooves and they are gone, leaving the foggy, flat riverbed as their backdrop.

The evening light dims lower and setting rays flicker through the gums. We transfer into the one ute, all in the tray, to climb up, up, to the property's utmost vista. We reach the very top of a barren hill and are greeted with a view where the sky and the land go on forever. The sun has just set and the dry, wispy grass still glows golden.

We get out and wander, then stand and pause for a while. We salute the fading sky and look down to the 10,000 acre property and beyond, where there are mountains and valleys and brumbies below. This beautifully stark, Australian winter landscape mirrors our wonder as we watch.

The view is striking, ghostly and great. We were told there are brumbies out here. And we found them, and this place. It is beguiling and surrounds us. This wild and this untamed.





IMAGE: Luisa Brimble



*"The view is striking,
ghostly and great.
We were told there
are brumbies out here.
And we found them,
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It is beguiling and
surrounds us.
This wild and
this untamed."*





COOKING WITH FIRE: A CAUTIONARY TALE

WORDS: Cecille Weldon

Rekindle: to excite, stir up, or rouse anew: to cause to begin burning again; ignite again.

The ancient Greeks would drink a toast to Hestia, the goddess of the home and hearth, at the beginning and end of every meal, honouring the importance of coming together, of nourishing our body and soul before moving out into the world.

The hearth of the home whether it be kitchen, fire or oven is steeped in lore and cultural value – and of course the kitchen has been traditionally a woman’s world. Certainly for me it’s where the unrelenting rhythm of the day is marked out in meal times – preparing, cooking and cleaning. With the pressure of hungry mouths to feed or deadlines to make or travel times to keep, the hours can literally eat up the opportunity to do what you love – to take the time to craft a meal with care, consciousness and creativity.

So it’s no surprise that a slow living reunion, a weekend away in the country with like-minded creative friends would be so compelling. It was the opportunity to connect, to rekindle friendships, to enjoy good company and great conversation, and to refine our photographic craft.

Of course, despite one’s best efforts and despite hearts filled with the love of a slow life, of a simple life, it’s not always going to go according to plan. You can slip back into old habits and hanker to fit in everything you can in the shortest possible time.

Such was the case in the late afternoon on our way back to the shearers quarters when the lure of seeing wild brumbies accidentally caught in a top paddock was just too much for some. For others

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it was the simple promise of a really hot, blissful shower in the house up the hill that was enough and soon we were reduced to a small group to keep the home fires burning.

And keep the home fires burning was exactly what we had to do because dinner needed to be prepared: we had one campfire away from the house, one fireplace in the dining room and a wood-fired stove in the kitchen with which to create a dinner for 14.

I mean, how hard could it be? We had two freshly killed and plucked chickens and a duck. We had wonderful local produce: beetroot, carrots, parsnips, sweet potatoes and potatoes. This was really just a big roast dinner, right?

Prophetic words from my faded leather copy of Cassell's New Universal Cookery Book, 1894:

"... everyone who has had any experience in cooking knows how much ovens vary and this is but a type of a thousand and one departures from any one precise standard. To be able to cope with such difficulties, should they necessarily arise, is the duty of most women ..."

We styled the long table as the chill of the night wrapped itself around the shearers' quarters: crumpled linen, rusted tin cans filled with wattle, flickering candles and rough bush lemons still on their branches. We stoked the fire. As the temperature rose the dining room became cosy and comfortable and we enjoyed a glass or two of locally made prosecco.

The crew in the kitchen had stoked the old wood-fired oven and the food preparation was in full swing. Baby carrots and parsnips on one baking tray, baby beetroot with balsamic in another and cubed potatoes doused with olive oil and salt in another. Huge white sweet potatoes were halved and wrapped in foil. Each chicken was placed in a Dutch oven, covered in lemon and garlic, and the lids tightly closed. The prepped duck was covered in foil on its baking tray.

So far so good, no need to be concerned. The next step was just to "check the temperature and place in the oven". Oh how we take this little note in a recipe book for granted. We were all so used to that being a simple next step but it wasn't ...

Despite all efforts the campfire outside failed to rekindle in enough time to deliver the vital coals needed for our Dutch oven chickens. Then it dawned on us that there was no room for them in the oven either.

The cook had left the kitchen to catch up with old friends outside, Clare was (wo)manning the mulled hot toddy simmering in the saucepan and the party feeling was beginning to overwhelm the cooking agenda. The guests were due to arrive soon and I had a sinking feeling there was now no-one in charge.

We had one fire left: the dining room fireplace. We needed to transform this from a gentle fireside experience to a serious heat deliverer; we loaded the fire up with logs and stoked it furiously, hoping it would deliver the consistent heat needed to create succulent roasted chicken. But we were running out of time.

Back in the kitchen we realised only one side of the oven was really delivering enough heat

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to cook anything; we had raw carrots and beetroot and soggy potatoes. Oh Lordy. We moved the carrots to the top to pan-fry them a little. The duck had been in the good side of the oven for a while so it was uncovered to get it browning, and the sweet potatoes were thrown into the coals in the fireplace in the room next door.

The freshly showered ones were now milling in and out of the heat of the dining room and sipping hot toddys in complete ignorance of the drama unfolding around them.

And then we noticed a whole other tray of raw carrots were still sitting on the bench behind us ... of course, while we were trying to come to grips with the idiosyncrasies of the wood-fired oven we were distracted from the chicken!

By now the fire in the dining room was raging to such an extent that you couldn't get near it even with a spade! Everyone had moved out of the room and we could see the Dutch ovens in the midst of a sea of radiant coals and we knew we were in trouble. This kicked in our primal desire to save them... after all, we had witnessed these chickens get the chop and we didn't want to see them to die in vain. Red-faced and running the risk of third degree burns we stepped in then reeled back; it was hopeless. Right at that moment Annabelle's husband, Ed, arrived and deftly moved the burning coals around enough for us to retrieve our Dutch ovens.

One chicken was safe, the other I'm afraid, well, its charred skeletal remains were blackened and fused to the base of the Dutch oven; a lemon still artfully propped up by the searing heat was black as night and dried to a crisp ...

The guests had arrived and, as is always the case, were milling around the kitchen looking for tidbits to nibble ...

Crap. The duck!

We ran back to the oven and the lightly browned skin we were hoping to find was dried and sinewy. We looked in the oven searching for answers ... the roof of one side was rusty and had begun to collapse so it acted more like a grill than an oven. The poor duck had been under direct flame and there was nothing we could do but sigh ... not even a sprig of parsley could save the look of this bird.

So at this point our head count for the food was as follows: our baby beetroot were still crunchy and uncooked; our carrots and parsnips were a bit oily and charred and varied from raw to well done; we had two cooked halves of sweet potato and two semi-cooked in foil; mushy cubed potatoes; one overcooked dry chicken (with a nice onion and lemon gravy we managed to salvage from the chook pan); an even dryer duck; and one cremated chicken.

Annabelle arrived in the kitchen like a rock star, grabbed the radicchio we didn't even know was there and in a moment whipped up a glorious radicchio salad with parmesan, balsamic and oil to distract our guests from the rest of the meal.

Thank Hestia for the hot toddy, the candlelight, a fair amount of wine and a good sense of humour...It was time for dinner!

Tips for working with an old wood-fired stove;



- Have a ready supply of dry wood already sorted the day before, including kindling
- Plan your meal so that some dishes are cooked on top of the stove and they're not all "oven dependent"
- Double your cooking time; this will allow the opportunity, without pressure, to get to know the quirks of your oven: each side might have a different temperature profile
- If using a Dutch oven in the campfire, place coals on the lid as well for a more regular temperature and lift the lid regularly to check if it needs water (even when you're not meant to).
- If it's too hot for you it's too hot for the food! #3rddegreeburns
- Dried orange skins are great to help a fire along and release a wonderful orange scent (they can be dried out on the top of the stove).

Tools for campfire cooking

- Fire starters
- A cast iron fire blower (it works like magic to literally breathe life into a lacklustre fire)
- Cast iron lid lifter with spring handle
- A collapsible hot plate that sits over the fire
- Long-handled skillet
- Saucepan
- Dutch oven
- Cast iron tripod for hanging stuff over the fire (we used this away from the fire to hang hot water bottles while we filled them from a saucepan of boiling water!)







CARDAMOM COFFEE

RECIPE: Sophie Hansen www.local-lovely.com

INGREDIENTS:

- 350g freshly ground coffee
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 vanilla pod (seeds scraped in and pod added too)
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar
- 6 cups cold water.

METHOD:

Place freshly ground coffee, ground cardamom, vanilla pod and brown sugar in a large jug and pour over cold water. Let it infuse overnight.

Place a sieve over a large bowl and line with 2–6 pieces muslin (depending on how refined you like it and if you don't have aesthetically

superior muslin on hand do what I do sometimes and make do – use a clean Chux).

Pour coffee mixture through sieve and discard the coffee grounds.

To serve, mix 1 part coffee syrup (heated gently in a saucepan) with 1 part boiling water (or to taste) and add milk (to taste).

We served the cardamom coffee in 125ml Falcon enamelware mini mugs from Megan's shop.

The coffee syrup can be brewed and kept in a glass jar in the fridge. Take a jar on your next weekend away; no-one will seek out a takeaway coffee from the nearest cafe.

CLARE'S BLOOD ORANGE AND GIN HOT TODDY

RECIPE: Winter on the Farm by Matthew Evans

INGREDIENTS:

- 250ml tonic water
- 100ml freshly squeezed blood orange juice
- 2 tbs gin

METHOD:

Put the tonic water in a saucepan over high heat and bring to the boil.

Add the blood orange juice and heat until nearly boiling again.

Remove from the heat and add the gin, to taste. Pour into a warmed glass or enamelware (as we did) and serve immediately.

Makes 1 generous serving (multiply the quantities for the number in your party)

RADICCHIO & PARMESAN SALAD

RECIPE: Adapted from Toro Bravo: Stories. Recipes. No Bull by Liz Crain, John Gorham and David Reamer.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 to 3 heads radicchio
- 1/4 cup good-quality balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups parmesan, finely grated and divided

METHOD:

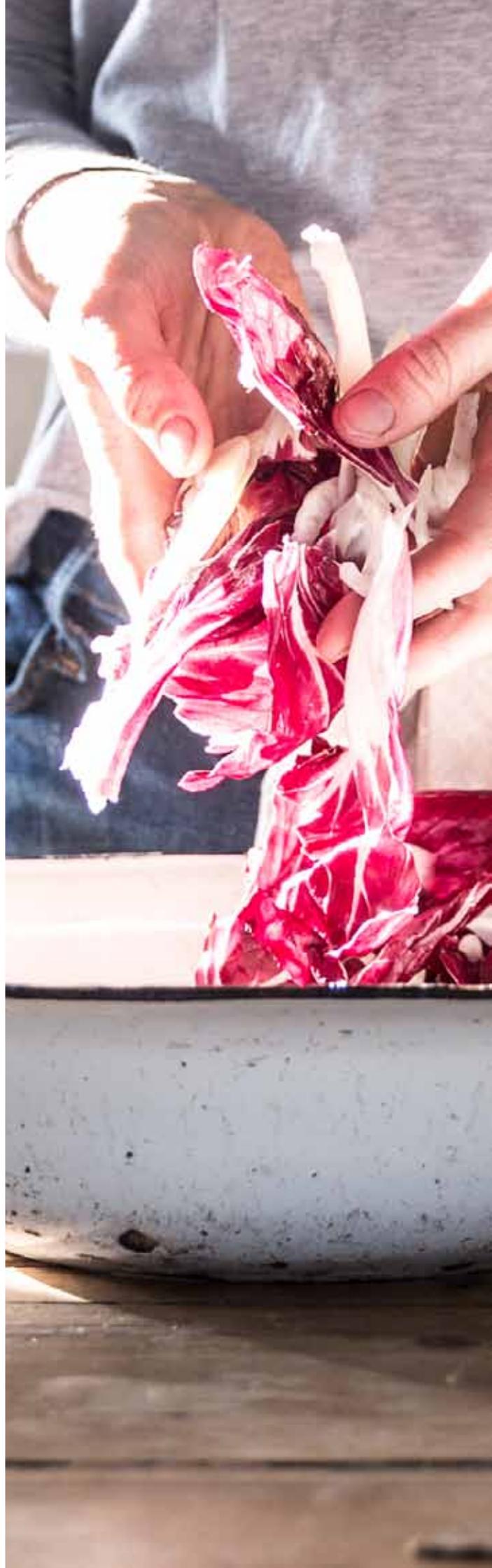
Remove the white cores from the radicchio and discard. Chop or rip leaves into small pieces.

In a large bowl add the balsamic vinegar, sherry vinegar, the honey and olive oil and whisk.

Add the leaves and using your hands, toss the radicchio with the dressing until evenly coated.

Add 1 cup of finely grated parmesan, salt, and toss again. To serve, transfer the salad to a serving bowl and top with the remaining parmesan.

Serves: 12 as a side.







EASING INTO SUNDAY

WORDS: Annabelle Hickson

After the rather chaotic Saturday night wood-oven feast, and a wild stormy night during which I had accepted with surprisingly calm resignation that the roof could well blow off and we would be snowed on in our beds, it was with much relief we eased into Sunday with the roof still on and a something-we-prepared-earlier breakfast that only required gentle heating from the wood oven rather than any actual cooking.

This was a wonderful no-fuss meal that had a whiff of the day after Christmas about it. Leftovers of the best kind. Some hot, some cold, and a good coffee to wash it down.



GREENS & RICOTTA TORTE

RECIPE: Megan Trousdale

FILLING INGREDIENTS:

- 450g green leaves
- 400g ricotta
- 6 tbsp grated parmesan
- 3 eggs,
- 1 large onion
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- Salt, pepper, nutmeg.
- Sprig tarragon (or other herbs).

PASTRY INGREDIENTS:

(I usually double the ingredients)

- 200g plain white flour
- 100g unsalted butter
- Pinch salt
- 1 generous tbsp sour cream
- Iced water.

METHOD:

Rub the butter into the flour and salt until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add the sour cream and just enough iced water to bind it all together. Knead lightly for a few minutes then dust very lightly with flour, wrap in greaseproof paper or plastic wrap and allow to rest in the refrigerator for a couple of hours.

Cut two-thirds of the pastry. Roll out on a floured board (I love to use an old marble topped kitchen table) and use to line a fairly deep (6cm) tart or pie tin. I use a deep-sided cake tin with a removable base.

For the filling, wash the greens well and cook separately. Drain well.

When cool, place in a tea towel (not your favourite), squeeze excess moisture out of leaves, and chop finely.

Dice the onion finely and cook gently in two tablespoons of the olive oil until very soft

and golden. Allow to cool.

Mash the ricotta with a fork and whisk well before adding cooled chopped onion and chopped greens. Add chopped tarragon (or other herbs) then beat in the three eggs. Add five tablespoons of parmesan and mix well.

Sprinkle the extra tablespoon of parmesan on top of the mixture, then use the left over pastry to make a lid for the torte.

Put in a round, well oiled baking tin with the remaining olive oil and bake in a moderate oven for about 50 minutes, until cooked.

It will cook like a cake, rising and with the edges pulling away when it is ready. Leave to cool enough to un-mould, then cut into wedges before serving. As good warm as it is cold.

From Rita Erlich & Alice Murkies Colour Me Healthy: Why You Should Eat Almost Everything, found in Organic Gardener magazine, August 2005.

One pie serves five, easily. We made two to be sure, served with left over bagels, crème fraiche, tea-cured barramundi and Arc-en-ciel trout.





POACHED QUINCES BAKED WITH RHUBARB AND APPLES AND LEMON CRÈME FRAICHE YOGHURT

RECIPE: Annabelle Hickson

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 quinces, washed and peeled
- 2.25kg light sugar syrup (two parts water to one part sugar)
- 1 vanilla bean
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 bunches rhubarb
- 6 apples, peeled, cored and quartered
- 4 tbs sugar
- 3 tbs natural yoghurt
- Honey to taste

METHOD:

To poach the quinces (from Stephanie Alexander's *A Cook's Companion*), preheat oven to 150C.

Cut quinces into quarters or sixths. Cut out cores and tie them loosely in a piece of muslin (I skipped this step). Put sugar syrup in a large cast-iron casserole with the vanilla bean and add the muslin bag, then add the quince.

Cover tightly and bake in an oven for at least 4 (and up to 8) hours until the quince is deep red. Do not stir or the quince may break up.

Cool and remove from syrup.

Note: I saved the syrup to make the quince custard for our welcome dinner (see page 7).

For the rhubarb and apple: cut each stalk in half lengthways and then into little pinkie-sized fingers.

Tumble into a large baking dish (you may need two and if so split it 50/50) with quartered apples and sprinkle with sugar, mixing it

through with your hands. Then add the quinces and bake in a moderate oven for about 30 mins or until soft and you see a bit of caramelisation starting to creep into the edges.

For the lemon crème fraiche with yoghurt: use the leftovers of the lemon crème fraiche from the pecan tart in the Sunday Suppers brunch and dilute with three generous scoops of natural, unsweetened yoghurt and honey to taste.

Serve warm with a generous dollop of the lemon crème fraiche and yoghurt and honey.

Serves: the masses, at least 12 and even more alongside the spinach and ricotta tortes.

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

WORDS: Rae Fallon

Miles from anywhere on a pecan farm in a valley there's an old rectangular telephone exchange building tucked in neatly beside a big country shed. Appearing to be not much more than a shipping container, you're likely to walk right by and not even notice it. But within this humble little shed, there is an inspirational story of up-cycling, appreciation and simplicity.

Annabelle has been filling a corner of the internet with honest writings, unfiltered photographs and original recipes on The Dailys for a while now, with the goal of becoming more conscious of the beauty around her. The newest addition to her online presence came from the recent facelift of the Telstra container, the modest space she now calls a studio. We like to call it where the magic happens.

With a non-existent budget Annabelle, along with her amazing husband and a few handy travellers, installed an old concrete farm sink, hung wooden shelves, painted vinyl-clad walls a crisp white and fitted recycled French doors and windows. Her studio has a marble bench top on wheels, a long, wooden dinner table, an oven and stove and a stunning vintage floor-to-ceiling cabinet; all incredible surfaces to photograph on. A small partitioned office to the side houses the computer with hi-speed wifi (a rare delicacy in the outback) for The Dailys' regular updates.

It's not the beauty of the marble bench or the obscurity of the cabinet collection that demands your attention, though. It's the story behind the studio of a willingness to see beauty in the everyday. We collectively realised that all this was completely possible and affordable. We wanted so much to have perfection in our creative lives, but all we needed was an appreciation of

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what was sitting right in front of us. All we needed was a little natural light.

When we didn't think it could get any better, Annabelle led us up the winding back path to a row of old tobacco sheds beside the original farmhouse.

We hustled around these grand grey stone buildings with open windows, old fireplaces and caved in wooden floors, finding the remnants of past photo shoots - foraged foliage, old vases, dusty tables.

Old sheds and rundown houses are a common sight in the country, but there is beauty in these crumbling stones.

So let's be honest. We're brimming with jealousy over Annabelle's beautiful country home, elegantly styled studio and crumbling historic buildings. But we leave inspired to see the beauty in our own surroundings back at home. Beauty is for everyone and it is everywhere, it's only a matter of looking.

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TOP (L-R) Natasha Roberts



erts, Luisa Brimble MIDDLE Annabelle Hickson, Megan Trousdale, Caitlin Melling, Rae Fallon, Clare Yazbeck, Cecille Weldon FRONT Lean Timms, Hannah Mccowatt.

