

## Counter Meal A slice of Australian life

After a chat over a meal at their local, author David Carr and photographer Ned Meldrum made our dream their reality – a day job that let them while away the hours touring some of the country's finest pubs sampling their very best fare.

Traveling from Pine Creek in the NT, via the bottom end of WA, up to Boreen Point in sunny Queensland, these two lucky chaps discovered all the flavours, charm and beverages our great Australian pubs have to offer – and got paid for it!

The result of their unquestionably hard work... a glorious, glossy food and travel tome, *Counter Meal: Recipes and stories from great Australian pubs*. It's a book that brings together a collection of recipes and stories celebrating the publicans, the history and the food of over thirty pubs from around the country.

But they're not foodies or critics, they don't even really cook. So how did David and Ned land this plum job? It was that same chat over a meal at the pub with the bloke who became their publisher!

When asked about their expertise for the 'arduous task', David recounts many, many long hours of research over the years, both in front and behind the bar.

"I've eaten more than my fair share of counter meals, both as a barman and patron," David said. "And some have been pretty sorry excuses. An amazing meal makes a huge difference to a great night, plus all the stuff that goes with being in a good pub - the people, the music, a few bevies afterwards..."

"Which is not to say that pub food is now about highbrow cuisine. It's about sitting down to a top quality meal in a congenial atmosphere.



"The chicken parma and fish 'n' chips are still on the menu, it's just that the ingredients are better, fresher or the dishes have a unique twist. We're also much more adventurous and, according to the publicans we spoke with, will happily tuck into dishes like a yabby salad, crocodile pizza and even ostrich burgers."

The pub is still very much an integral part of our culture, an Australian institution, and the diversity of clientele, food, publicans and beverages at even your bog standard pub is richer than ever.

In *Counter Meal* David and Ned recount their adventures, offering a mélange of interviews, potted histories and vivid descriptions of 'interesting' décor, front bar patrons and publicans along with the odd tale of local larrikinism. Each chapter then wraps with the pub's signature dishes.

The recipes are simple and feature familiar favourites as well as meals for the adventurous and experienced cook.



### COUNTER MEAL

*Recipes and stories from great Australian pubs*



Collected from quiet country boozers and inner city hot spots, the recipes run the gamut of Australian contemporary cuisine and traditional pub fare. They are as diverse in flavour and ingredient as the pubs themselves.

“There is one strong abiding theme across the selection,” David said, “a real focus on fresh, local ingredients. Menus change to suit the seasons and what’s available locally. As one owner said – ‘if our fishermen can’t go to sea, we don’t have seafood’.”

“And you can expect a whole lot more than just a pot of beer or a shandy to wash it down. If pubs are not featuring a house brew, you can generally find a good selection of beers and wines to match the meal.

“We went to a couple of pubs with truly staggering cellars. Wine, beer and food are genuine passions for the publicans we met, which translates into a gastronomic experience for us punters.”



The *Counter Meal* book also doubles as a travel guide.

Whilst readers will recognise a handful of popular pubs, much of the book is about discovering hidden gems with profiles of small towns and tiny pubs that have great atmosphere and serve great food.

“There were pubs recommended by many, and pubs whispered about by a few,” David said. “A perv and pick up joint with lines of people waiting to get in; another nestled quietly in a town with a total population of five.”

“Our research took us to every state in Australia, so we saw some amazing places, met some amazing people - old miners, circus performers, Benedictine monks, Hash House Harriers. A genteel old lady who’s been known to referee fights in the front bar while her Order of Australia medal is stored away upstairs.”

The boys have worked to capture the essence of each establishment, the unique features and regular faces that give each pub its character. So no more stepping into a new pub feeling like an outsider - you’ll be tipped off to the house specialty, who your hosts are and just what sort of shenanigans they’re known for.

*Counter Meal* doesn’t profess to be a collection of the best pubs in Australia. Instead it is a selection from the best pubs in Australia.

“We chose establishments for a couple of reasons,” David said. “While food was the obvious starter, perhaps more importantly, each pub also had to have a certain feel, an indefinable quality that transcends the history, punters and décor. We looked for that all-important binding agent that brings the pieces together and makes it work - the people running the show.”

“Good publicans and good pubs embody community, familiarity and a comfort that has little to do with quality seating.

“Of course not everyone will agree with our choices. We’re preparing ourselves for some flak. But if someone has a serious contender, send us the details and we’ll check it out for next year’s edition.”

*Counter Meal: Recipes and stories from great Australian pubs* (RRP \$49.95\*) is available from August at all good book sellers - each page is a slice of Australia bought to life.