



by Sean Edwards

*It was five years ago when a friend told me I should check out a café named Danks Street Depot, in the then unpopular suburb of Waterloo, in Sydney.*

I took the journey out to this industrial strip of warehouses, to find and have one of the best café experiences ever. Today, I can still taste the pork and duck rillettes that I washed down with a cold, organic beer. Back then, Danks was a converted warehouse with an open kitchen and coffee bar. What surprised me at the time was how many well dressed people there were sitting down to dine, and how most of them must have travelled some distance there for the experience.

Danks Street Depot is the brainchild of Jared Ingersoll and his partner, Melanie. Jared has an impressive chef's background; coming out of the Bayswater Brasserie stable and also having spent time travelling and researching food overseas. Originally from Upper Hutt, north of Wellington in New Zealand, Jared grew up experiencing the outdoor life – hunting, camping and fishing. Here, he tasted what fresh food is really all about. These experiences led him to appreciate fresh grown produce and where food really comes from.

Danks Street Depot's menu is very different from most café line ups – it is re-invented daily taking into account what is available at the produce markets. Jared has forged some good relationships with regional farmers, securing their special produce that would normally be destined for export. This philosophy has been quite a difficult one to follow and requires more effort than just getting on the phone to a company and ordering bulk goods. An example of his buying technique is to buy directly from a farmer in Cowra, NSW; who supplies Jared with his Angus beef and/or a whole carcass of Suffolk lamb, when in season.

The Danks Street Depot ethos is to eat the whole animal, and nothing is wasted – including the offal. This concept has given Danks Street Depot's menu a unique style. Jared wants his diners to understand that as humans we should not be wasteful, and that all food, when it's prepared properly, will taste great.

Part of the success of Danks Street Depot is the practice of supporting local small scale and artisan food producers and growers in Australia.

"I believe that Australia is one of the best food producing countries in the world. Australia has a wonderfully diverse population and climate and at Danks Street Depot we try to celebrate the hard work of growers through our daily changing menus."

Last year in October, Jared was one of 27 Australians selected to attend 'Terra Madre' in Italy, which is a bi-annual conference hosted by the City of Torino and Slow Food. Terra Madre in 2006 was special, as it was the first time chefs were invited to discuss issues and attend workshops about food production. Last year 6,500 people (5,000 growers and primary producers, 1,000 chefs and 500 academics from 127 different countries) gathered to share ideas and swap stories.

"We have always supported Australian produce over that of imported, because we believe that food should be enjoyed as close to the source as possible. I have discovered over the years that working with the land and buying food when it is produced in a clean environment and in season is an excellent way to ensure quality."

Issues of sustainability, such as which species of fish to eat and supporting organics and bio-diversity, and how far food has travelled in order to help reduce carbon emissions, mean that when visiting Danks Street Depot you will always have the very best produce the markets can provide. Danks Street Depot are a small business, but they have a real point of difference – simply by using fresh, local products in their café.

Danks Street, Waterloo has become a very popular foodies' destination, with businesses like Fratelli Fresh starting up, as well as a strip of new cafés. I jokingly called Jared a pioneer in the area; bringing a fresh feel to this nearly forgotten suburb of Sydney. In the last five years, the whole area has been revamped, with a stack of trendy new apartments and warehouse conversions.

I asked if the developers had thanked him for his insight, and maybe given him a few penthouse units for his part in changing the demographic of the area. He assured me that he has definitely been overlooked! He knows the growing popularity of the area will keep his

business moving for the next cycle of his ten year plan.

Danks Street Depot has also gone through some new conversions, with the extension of the dining and bar area – keeping in sync with the original industrial feel. The café has a warm, unique feel and you get the impression that you are part of the excitement of the engine room when you are dining.

One thing I am always impressed with when I go to visit Danks Street Depot is the professionalism of the staff. Jared has some pretty clear guidelines when he recruits, which are all based around employing passionate people. He told me the business is a mixture of very clever and eclectic people, who come from all walks of life. One thing they have in common is the 'Danks Street philosophy' of contagious passion.

Jared has had a few career advancements himself. He has just released his second book, 'Sharing Plates'. Becoming an author is something many professional celebrity chefs do, and Jared is no exception. He is enjoying the media ride, featuring in a bundle of lifestyle magazines and foodie publications nationally and internationally. Jared has just completed a series of segments as a guest chef on the Popular "Ready Set Cook", which airs in the next few months.

Jared and his partner, Melanie, have their second baby on the way and they are both looking forward to sitting back a bit now and spending more quality family time. Having an excellent team supporting them, it is now much easier for them to do this. This will not distract him from steering Danks Street Depot in some new and exciting directions. Danks Street Depot was designed around quality and longevity, which is often not connected to Australian hospitality businesses.

I definitely would like to extend a big thank you on behalf of the Australian hospitality industry to Jared and his team, in recognition of his unique ethical and sustainable business concepts. I look forward to seeing where this humble gentleman ends up, and I wish him all the best with his future projects.

(Danks Street Depot is situated at 2 Danks Street, Waterloo.)