



# Family AFFAIR

*British chef Jack Stein is following in the footsteps of his famous father, Rick, hosting a TV series that delves into the dirtier side of WA.*

Story *Fleur Bainger*

**T**he water in Augusta's peaceful inlet is dead flat, the sky a pale blue and English chef Jack Stein is screaming like a girl. It's understandable. He's being savaged, repeatedly, by a feisty blue swimmer crab. Adding humiliation to the pain, the seafood specialist from Cornwall has only just finished assuring a fisherman he knows how to pick one up correctly. "Of course I do, I'm British," he says, reaching his hand into the net. Cue high-pitched yelping and hooting laughter.

The ginger-haired son of celebrity chef Rick Stein is getting immersed in WA produce, and it's all on camera. His first solo hosting gig, *Born to Cook: Jack Stein Downunder* is part cooking show, part travelogue, filmed entirely in WA's South West. In between baking figs and poaching marron, the 36-year-old explores truffle farms in Manjimup and finger lime crops in Pemberton, rides the waves at Margaret River (with former pro surfer Taj Burrow, no less) and bobs above the abalone reefs of Augusta. It's all in the pursuit of rudely fresh ingredients procured direct from the farmer – Stein's overriding passion.

While Jack is the comic star – regularly poking fun at himself, the Australian cricket team and posh French cooking terms – each TV episode is also peppered with cameos of his famous father. The pair shoot the breeze on work, life and food while plonked in camping chairs by the mouth of the Margaret River. Stein senior is understandably proud to see his middle son (of three) beat a similar path to the one he cleared.

Since 2013, Jack has held the reins as executive chef of the family's numerous restaurants, pub and cookery school and has been progressively delving into television, on his dad's and other UK programs. Starting out as a 12-year-old kitchen porter in his school holidays, he's put in the hard yards to become the heir apparent. "I'm very happy that Jack's proving to be a chip off the old block," says Rick, whose career was transformed by television.

"I thoroughly enjoyed filming with him last November in Margaret »



Jack Stein puts together some WA ingredients, left, and with surfing legend Taj Burrow, above.

tricky thing to marry those flavours and connect them to your palate in a way that isn't too sharp, sweet or sour. It's great fun to work with, that's for sure."

Less tricky is the message he wants to send to viewers: Primary producers deserve to be valued. As people get better at knowing where their food comes from, he believes the next step is for the everyman to visit the places where it's produced. "To be able to say, 'I've met that supplier', whether on a restaurant or a home-cooked menu, it gives you more of an understanding of where produce comes from, and then you might start to make slightly different purchasing decisions," he says.

"Wineries have been doing this for years."

Stein's other great love is surfing, something the program indulges. Not only does he roar through the South West's toothpick-straight forests in a rusty-red Sandman, he also scores a wave session with champion surfer and Margaret River resident, Taj Burrow. "It was one of the best days of my life. No one at home even believes it happened," Stein says.

"Surfing with him is like the parting of the Red Sea – everyone moves out of the way."

Stein's self-described "hero" also took him out for lunch at Rustico at Hay Shed Hill. "We talked about where he likes to eat, the wineries he likes," says Stein. "I find when you meet somebody and they're really good at something, you talk about anything but that."

Stein's UK mates will soon have proof of his brush with surfing royalty. *Born to Cook* will air in the UK this August, barely a month after Australian audiences see it. The series was the brainchild of WA production company, Mago Films, the same outfit behind 2003's *Surfing the Menu*. That program turned baby-faced chefs Curtis Stone and Ben O'Donoghue into household names, and went on to screen in 80 countries. Last year, Mago Films rebirthed the cooking and surfing road trip as *Surfing the Menu: The Next Generation*, starring Hayden Quinn and Dan Churchill. Along with a slew of awarded, non-food related programming, it has produced *Recipes that Rock* with Matt Stone, *Quickies in my Kitchen* with Anna Gare, *Best in Australia*, with Gare and O'Donoghue, and *On Country Kitchen* with Mark Olive. One family is behind the lot.

Marian and Alun Bartsch started Mago Films in 1999; their daughter Paloma Bartsch joined last year. Based in Northbridge, Marian says the company's dive into game-changing food television was sparked over lunch at a restaurant in Nornalup, near Denmark.

"It was run by a well-known chef from Sydney. We were surprised to learn the reason he was here, in this backwater, was because all he really wanted to do was surf," she says. "We half-joked about producing a series about a surfing chef set in a stunning location. And the rest, as they say, is history."



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JACK STEIN

River. It was quite clear to me that he loves the place as much as I do. Right from their earliest years, I was keen to build up memories of beautiful Australia for my sons, hoping that they'd all want to go back."

Starting from when Jack was four, the Stein family would escape the English winter for the warmer climes of an Australian summer. It's where Jack was introduced to Vegemite, something he makes use of more than once in *Born to Cook*.

"We spent three months here (at a time) when we were kids, so we would have three months of Vegemite and nine months of Marmite, and we'd go home and have huge arguments between me and my brothers over which was better," he says.

According to Jack, it's many a chef's secret ingredient. "We use Marmite a lot (in cooking) in England. It's a store staple people have and if you add it, it gives a deep, rich, savoury flavour. A lot of restaurants have secret things they do to make dishes taste more delicious and Marmite, or Vegemite, would be one of them."

In the four-part series, which airs at the end of this month, Stein junior stirs Australia's favourite spread through macaroni and cheese and a Singaporean crab dish. "You'd never be able to pick it out of a dish, but it's got that umami flavour," he says, and jokes: "I'm not getting paid by them!"

The series is, by and large, focused on WA's farm-fresh produce. Like Vegemite, Stein describes the flavours of WA as bold. "The abalone, the finger limes, they're huge flavours and very different from anything we get in Europe," he says. "Some ingredients in England seem to be more middle of the road. The ones we found down south, they don't hide. That's quite a



Rick and Jack Stein at the mouth of the Margaret River, with *Born to Cook* producers Marian and Paloma Bartsch.

Fourteen years later, Marian has high hopes for her latest star, Jack Stein, who she describes as a self-deprecating larrikin. "He is a multi-layered character, having graduated with a degree in psychology, then a masters in ancient history," she says. "It was only then that he decided that he wanted to go into the family business and become a chef."

Marian hopes *Born to Cook* will be as popular as the *Surfing the Menu* series and, with its wide camera pans of the WA landscape focusing on lesser-known parts of the State, she also suggests it may encourage more visitors to WA.

While Stein jokingly questions his small-screen talent, he is in wholehearted agreement on this last point. Claiming he'd love to live in WA's South West, the Cornwall-based chef says he sees many similarities between the growth in food tourism in each region.

"Padstow would be like Margaret River; we've got these big names and three Michelin star restaurants in this little area. But 20 years ago it was just Padstow," he says of the small seaside town where Rick and Jill Stein opened their original seafood restaurant. They now also own a bistro, cafe, fish and chip shop, fishmonger and bar there, earning the community the nickname Padstein.

"Food tourism is egalitarian type of tourism," Jack says. "You meet the supplier, buy off the farm shop, spread the money around. We've noticed in Cornwall, food tourism has uplifted the whole area. It was quite depressing back when there was the closing of mines.

Now it's become a food mecca. The same thing is happening in the South West of WA, using Margaret River as a beacon. Dig a little deeper and go to some of the other areas, there are some fascinating areas to visit."

Stein hopes to return to explore WA's south coast. But in the short term, he'll be fuelling his fervour for the South West in Manjimup at the Truffle Kerfuffle festival this coming weekend. The Southern Forests region produces more than

half Australia's truffle crop, making it the biggest output zone in the Southern Hemisphere. The black nuggets, revered for their pungent aroma, retail for between \$2000 and \$3000 per kilogram. Stein uses Manjimup truffles in his UK restaurants.

By the time Stein returns for Truffle Kerfuffle he will have been to WA six times. While he is very much following in his father's footprints, he says Rick isn't stepping out of the limelight. "He's not handing the mantle over, he's just helping me get onto this position, which I'm very grateful for," Jack says.

Jack Stein will be at Manjimup's Truffle Kerfuffle festival, June 23-25. *Born to Cook* airs from June 28 on Food Network Australia (SBS).

## DAVID JONES

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