

Visit zuji.com.au to book your next holiday.



Helping Holidays Happen

theage.com.au

THE AGE

[Print this article](#) | [Close this window](#)

Comfort food on call

November 10, 2009

Canny cooks are delivering quality meals to frazzled clients, writes Kath Dolan.

IN THE 1950s it was known as the Arsenic Hour (though it often dragged on much longer): that frenzied period before dinner when children went mad, fathers returned home from work - and immediately wished they hadn't - and mothers self-medicated with sweet sherry.

The roles have changed but for many modern families the lead-up to dinner remains stressful and chaotic. It's a situation that's inspiring clever cooks to fill the breach, home-delivering batches of hearty, wholesome fare selected from a rotating seasonal menu that usually includes soups, salads, mains, sides and desserts.

Clients typically place orders via the internet, email or SMS. Cooking takes place once or twice a week in modified home kitchens (often around the cooks' own family commitments) or in commercial kitchens rented for the purpose. Food is delivered fresh or frozen once a week, sometimes by courier but usually in person to save on costs and maintain the personal touch that's central to the concept.

Some companies require a minimum order (typically \$50), although that's easily met, with most clients ordering multiple dishes - perhaps a beef rendang and a Thai chicken stir-fry for a weeknight and a serve or two of slow-cooked lamb shanks or Mediterranean white bean soup for the freezer.

Families are their bread and butter but many also target empty nesters, new mums and the elderly. Most are one-person operations or small family affairs turning out between 50 and 150 meals a week for a couple of hundred clients (mostly in the inner-city, though some use couriers to distribute further afield).

After 13 years in the business, Sydney pioneer Gourmet Dinner Service now cooks 150,000 meals a year for 7000 clients in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra, with help from 15 staff - including a chef who trained under Gordon Ramsay. With 700 clients in Melbourne alone amassed since 2005, founder Janel Horton plans to open an office here next year, possibly with a retail shopfront.

Like many others in the now burgeoning home-style food-delivery business, Horton started cooking for herself and friends before realising plenty outside her social circle would willingly pay for her services.

Food stylist and interior designer Fiona Rigg is more typical of the smaller operators carving niches for themselves in Melbourne. She launched her gourmet service, FIONALouise, three years ago with 12 customers garnered mainly from parents at the Emerald Hill Childcare Centre in South Melbourne, where she cooked part-time. Through word of mouth and a beautifully styled website, she's now producing about 150 meals a week for private clients, plus more to delis and cafes.

Rigg road-tests recipes, including Portuguese-style boned quail and Asian-style goat hotpot, on her own fussy teenagers and

Advertisement

Advertisement for Westpac Bank Manager. The ad features the Westpac logo (a stylized 'W') at the top left. Below it, the text reads "Enter your postcode." followed by a form with four input fields. Underneath the form, it says "Find your local Westpac Bank Manager." and a "Go" button with a right-pointing arrow.

constantly expands her inventive seasonal menu to keep things fresh. Two part-time staff help with cooking and Rigg is keen to expand the business.

Albert Park father of two Nino Servedio began his business, Servedio is Serving, two years ago in similar style, cooking for friends from his children's kinder and school. He now cooks 40-plus meals each week for 300-odd clients throughout bayside Melbourne, the city and Southbank and is expanding the business on several fronts - including farmers' markets and catering assignments. Servedio specialises in slow-cooked peasant food from the Puglia region of Italy on the Adriatic, using recipes his mother taught him.

Newcomer Kim Berkers began her Fairfield-based business, Toddler Tucker, just two months ago on the urging of friends. Through the internet and word of mouth, she has already expanded her menu to 18 dishes and has attracted clients across Melbourne. In a former life, Berkers was a catering manager at the Australian Open Tennis, responsible for the production of 14,000 meals a day.

Consider these

Name: FIONALouise

Website: www.fionalouise.com.au

Cuisine: Hugely varied gourmet fare, with Asian, European and Middle Eastern influences.

Price: Mains about \$7 single serve; \$13 double; \$18 family. Delivery (fresh) \$6 or free for orders over \$50 within 15 kilometres of the CBD.

Name: Servedio is Serving

Email: servedio.is.serving@hotmail.com

Cuisine [Classic slow-cooked Italian.](#)

Price: [Mains about \\$15 for large single serve, which includes side dish and delivery \(fresh\).](#)

Name: [Toddler Tucker](#)

Website: www.toddlertucker.com.au

Cuisine: Good mix of soups, pasta dishes and hearty casseroles.

Price: Mains \$5 single serve. Delivery (frozen) \$9.95 (minimum order \$50).

Name: L&S Take Home Meals (based in Richmond)

Website: lizeandsammys.com.au

Cuisine: Soups, salads, pies, tarts, pasta, casseroles and curries cooked by fine-dining chef Eliza Gavin.:

Price: Mains \$15 for single serve (which includes side dish for curries and casseroles). Delivery (fresh) included within 15 kilometres of CBD.

Name: Eat@home (based in Dromana)

Website: www.eatathome.com.au

Cuisine: Varied fare with Asian, European and Middle Eastern influences (meals can be delivered uncooked and ready to assemble; licensed to deliver alcohol).

Prices: Mains about \$12 single serve; \$18 double; \$28 family. Delivery (fresh) \$15 to southern and bayside suburbs, as far as the CBD.

Name: Gourmet Dinner Service (based in Sydney)

Website: www.gourmetdinner.com.au

Cuisine: Vast range (including small servings).

Price: Mains about \$5.50-\$12.90 single serve. Delivery (frozen to Melbourne) \$18.50.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/11/09/1257614995514.html>