

THE AUSTRALIAN ●

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THE BEST OF EVERYTHING

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Luxury in China

Golf and polo clubs, surfing and tourism, designer brands and fine menswear ... the Chinese want it all, and they want it now

We meet The Selby,
photoblogger extraordinaire

Advance Australia fair,
our models are in demand
on the world's catwalks

Bulgari CEO Francesco Trapani
talks about the company's
'strategic alliance' with LVMH

Her kitchen rules

Top-selling cookbook author Donna Hay is full of fresh ideas, among them a new dinnerware range and a world-first packet mix

DONNA HAY is ensconced on a sofa in her Surry Hills, Sydney, office, recalling the time she and her husband Bill were househunting. Most potential buyers consider location or redevelopment potential but Bill had different criteria. “He would judge a house on how many Donna Hay cookbooks they had,” she says, stifling a laugh. “A lot of the time there was at least one and when they had it out on display, he’d really get the giggles.”

That so many Australian households have a Donna Hay cookbook in their repertoire comes as little surprise. The former magazine food editor who branched out on her own, setting up an eponymous magazine and releasing a series of stand-alone cookbooks, has become a household name over the past 15 years. With 20 books and sales in excess of four million copies, she is Australia’s top-selling cookbook author and second on the nation’s overall best-selling authors list. Her magazine, focusing on fast, simple meals for the harried home cook, notches up its 10th anniversary this year and her range of dinnerware has been selling in David Jones stores since 2005. In 2009, she opened a general store in Sydney’s Woollahra (she has plans for more) and online sales of her products are robust. But 2011 looks to be the biggest year yet for Brand Hay.

Fast, Fresh, Simple, a 13-part cookery series, is now airing on the LifeStyle Channel and Hay admits the increased profile will be a boon, particularly in markets such as the UK and Canada, which have been snapping up her books. Her reluctance to branch into television earlier – “I’d been asked for about 12 years to do a show but always refused” – was born of a need to bed down the magazine and her belief the time needed to be right.

“I don’t know if there would have been a place for my sort of show – pure cooking – before *MasterChef* or *My Kitchen Rules*,” she says. “Or if anybody was going to watch it and whether they would like my funny little mannerisms. I can look quite serious, almost a bit sad, when I’m cooking but that’s just my cooking face. It was a big deal for me to finally put myself out there and say, ‘This is the girl behind the brand.’ Terrifying, actually.”

It’s hard to imagine Hay terrified. She has something of a reputation as a perfectionist and hard taskmaster. During our interview, however, she is at pains to point out that her workplace is a happy one and that the strong team behind her has enabled her finally to loosen her grip and consider new business opportunities. She takes me on a tour of her offices, which include a huge test kitchen, in which she and her food editors work on recipes. Most of the episodes of *Fast, Fresh, Simple* were shot here. Behind the kitchen is a large props department where fabrics, paints and ribbons are colour-coded and an endless array of kitchenware is stored for use in photoshoots.

Next door, in an expansive meeting room, Hay shows me prototype pieces for her next big project: Donna Hay for Royal Doulton. Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton already has the likes of Jasper Conran, Vera Wang, Monique Lhuillier and John Rocha in its stable and now Hay has been



Donna Hay, whose range of Royal Doulton bone china dinnerware launches this month.



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02



03

signed up to create a fine bone china collection, the first stage of which is released this month. The range will include dinnerware, cake stands and decorative trays, tea sets, saucepans, chopping boards and cutlery. Hay is thrilled to be working with a company with such good pedigree: “I’ve been learning so much about something I love, designing cookware. It feels very natural to go down this path.”

The Royal Doulton project is not the only thing that’s been occupying her time lately. In June, a Donna Hay Home-Bake collection launches in supermarkets and will include a world-first packet mix. “I am usually quite humble but I am giving myself genius points this week,” Hay says. “I have created a packet macaron mixture.” Macarons are notoriously hard to perfect but Hay says her mix is foolproof. “You have to pay attention to detail when you write recipes. If I’m going to ask you to go out and buy my products and they don’t work, then you have every right to be angry with me.”

She is adamant the key to her success has been staying true to her brand. “Some people think I’m a crazy control freak but if you don’t stay active and working inside your brand you can easily become out of touch,” she says. “I never really had a [business] plan. I just had dreams of what I wanted to do. The food landscape is changing so quickly and we get some amazing opportunities. We [know] we are not solving world peace, we’re just cooking and designing homewares.”

Michelle Rowe writes *Food Detective*, which appears in *The Weekend Australian’s Travel & Indulgence* section.

01 *Whispers from a Lebanese Kitchen* by Nouha Taouk (Murdoch Books, \$59.99)

“In our culture it’s considered rude to have nothing to offer when guests come to visit,” writes Lebanese-Australian Taouk, whose book contains a wealth of recipes from the family vault to ensure nobody is ever caught short again. Delightful stories of family traditions and experiences are interwoven with recipes from three generations.

02 *Tuscany* (Phaidon, \$49.95)

That a lengthy calendar of Tuscan gastronomic festivals appears early on in this compilation, Phaidon’s latest gourmet offering, is a fair indication of how serious the central Italian region takes its food. Recipes are presented by locality – a rolled pork loin stuffed with lardo, garlic and fennel from Lucca; Pistoian-style chestnut cake; Florentine tripe – and the glorious photos (both of the food and local scenery) have one pining for the next Tuscan escape.

03 *Monday Morning Cooking Club* by Merelyn Frank Chalmers, Natanya Eskin, Lauren Fink, Lisa Goldberg, Paula Horwitz and Jacqui Israel (Hardie Grant Books, \$59.95)

These 100 recipes result from a search for the best Jewish dishes by the women who formed the Monday Morning Cooking Club, an informal gathering of friends who love to cook and talk about food. Slowly but surely, recipes from mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers trickled in, presented here with descriptions of the women who supplied them and of what the recipes meant to their families. A lovely effort.