

Powdered, Essence or Brewed?: Making and Cooking with Coffee in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s

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in the 1950s and 1960s

Donna Lee Brien

Introduction: From Trifle to Tiramisu

Tiramisu is an Italian dessert cake, usually comprising sponge finger biscuits soaked in coffee and liquor, layered with a mixture of egg yolk, mascarpone and cream, and topped with sifted cocoa. Once a gourmet dish, tiramisu, which means “pick me up” in Italian (Volpi), is today very popular in Australia where it is available for purchase not only in restaurants and cafés, but also from fast food chains and supermarkets. Recipes abound in cookery books and magazines and online. It is certainly more widely available and written about in Australia than the once ubiquitous English trifle which, comprising variations on the theme of sherry soaked sponge cake, custard and cream, it closely resembles. It could be asserted that its strong coffee taste has enabled the tiramisù to triumph over the trifle in contemporary Australia, yet coffee is also a recurrent ingredient in cakes and icings in nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian cookbooks.

Acknowledging that coffee consumption in Australia doubled during the years of the Second World War and maintained high rates of growth afterwards (Khamis; Adams), this article draws on examples of culinary writing during this period of increasing popularity to investigate the use of coffee in cookery as well as a beverage in these mid-twentieth century decades. In doing so, it engages with a lively scholarly discussion on what has driven this change—whether the American glamour and sophistication associated with coffee, post-war immigration from the Mediterranean and other parts of Europe, or the influence of the media and developments in technology (see, for discussion, Adams; Collins et al.; Khamis; Symons).

Coffee in Australian Mid-century Epicurean Writing

In Australian epicurean writing in the 1950s and 1960s, freshly brewed coffee is clearly identified as the beverage of choice for those with gourmet tastes. In 1952, *The West Australian* reported that Johnnie Walker, then president of the Sydney Gourmet Society had “sweated over an ordinary kitchen stove to give 12 Melbourne women a perfect meal” (“A Gourmet” 8). Walker prepared a menu comprising: savoury biscuits; pumpkin soup made with a beef, ham, and veal stock; duck braised with “26 ounces of dry red wine, a bottle and a half of curacao and orange juice;” Spanish fried rice; a “French lettuce salad with the Italian influence of garlic;” and, strawberries with strawberry brandy and whipped cream. He served sherry with the biscuits, red wine with the duck, champagne with the sweet, and coffee to finish. It is, however, the adjectives that matter here—that the sherry and wine were dry, not sweet, and the coffee was percolated and black, not instant and milky.

Other examples of epicurean writing suggested that fresh coffee should also be unadulterated. In 1951, American food writer William Wallace Irwin who travelled to, and published in, Australia as “The Garrulous Gourmet,” wrote scathingly of the practice of adding chicory to coffee in France and elsewhere (104). This castigation of the French for their coffee was unusual, with most articles at this time praising Gallic gastronomy. Indicative of this is Nancy Cashmore’s travel article for *Adelaides Advertiser* in 1954. Titled “In Dordogne and Burgundy the Gourmet Will Find ... A Gastronomic Paradise,” Cashmore details the purchasing, preparation, presentation, and, of course, consumption of excellent food and wine. Good coffee is an integral part of every meal and every day: “from these parts come exquisite pate de fois, truffles, delicious little cakes, conserved meats, wild mushrooms, walnuts and plums. ... The day begins with new bread and coffee ... nothing is imported, nothing is stale” (6). Memorable luncheons of “hors-d’oeuvre ... a meat course, followed by a salad, cheese and possibly a sweet” (6) always ended with black coffee and sometimes a sugar lump soaked in liqueur.

In *Australian Wines and Food (AW&F)*, a quarterly epicurean magazine that was published from 1956 to 1960, coffee was regularly featured as a gourmet kitchen staple alongside wine and cheese. Articles on the history, growing, marketing, blending roasting, purchase, and brewing of coffee during these years were accompanied with full-page advertisements for Bushell’s vacuum packed pure “roaster fresh” coffee, Robert Timms’s “Royal Special” blend for “coffee connoisseurs,” and the Masterfoods range of “superior” imported and locally produced foodstuffs, which included vacuum packed coffee alongside such items as paprika, bay leaves and canned asparagus. *AW&F* believed Australia’s growing coffee consumption the result of increased participation in quality dining experiences whether in restaurants, the “scores of colourful coffee shops opening their doors to a new generation” (“Coffee” 39) or at home. With regard to domestic coffee drinking, *AW&F* reported a revived interest in “the long neglected art of brewing good coffee in the home” (“Coffee” 39). Instructions given range from boiling in a pot to percolating and “expresso” (Bancroft 10; “Coffee” 37-9). Coffee was also mentioned in every issue as the only fitting ending to a fine meal, when port, other fortified wines or liqueurs usually accompanied a small *demi-tasse* of (strong) black coffee. Coffee was also identified as one of the locally produced speciality foods that were flown into the USA for a consulate dinner: “more than a ton of carefully selected foodstuffs was flown to New York by Qantas in three separate airlifts ... beef fillet steaks, kangaroo tails, Sydney rock oysters, King prawns, crayfish tails, tropical fruits and passion fruit, New Guinea coffee, chocolates, muscatels and almonds” (“Australian” 16). It is noteworthy that tea is not profiled in the entire run of the magazine.

A decade later, in the second half of the 1960s, the new Australian gourmet magazine *Epicurean* included a number of similar articles on coffee. In 1966 and 1969, celebrity chef and regular *Epicurean* columnist Graham Kerr also included an illustrated guide to making coffee in two of the books produced alongside his television series, *The Graham Kerr Cookbook* (125) and *The Graham Kerr Cookbook by the Galloping Gourmet* (266-67). These included advice to buy freshly roasted beans at least once a week and to invest in an electric coffee grinder. Kerr uses a glass percolator in each and makes an iced (milk) coffee based on double strength cooled brewed coffee.

Entertaining with Margaret Fulton (1971) is the first Margaret Fulton cookery book to include detailed information on making coffee from ground beans at home. In this volume, which was clearly aimed at the gourmet-inclined end of the domestic market, Fulton, then cookery editor for popular magazine *Woman’s Day*, provides a morning coffee menu and proclaims that “Good hot coffee will never taste so good as it does at this time of the day” (90). With the stress on the “good,” Fulton, like Kerr, advises that beans be purchased and ground as they are needed or that only a small amounts of freshly ground coffee be obtained at one time. For Fulton, quality is clearly linked to price—“buy the best you can afford” (90)—but while advising that “Mocha coffee, which comes from Aden and Mocha, is generally considered the best” (90), she also concedes that consumers will “find by experience” (90) which blends they prefer. She includes detailed information on storage and preparation, noting that there are also “dozens of pieces of coffee making equipment to choose from” (90). Fulton includes instructions on how to make coffee for guests at a wedding breakfast or other large event, gently heating home sewn muslin bags filled with finely ground coffee in urns of barely boiling water (64). Alongside these instructions, Fulton also provides recipes for a sophisticated selection of coffee-flavoured desserts such as an iced coffee soufflé and coffee biscuits and meringues that would be perfect accompaniments to her brewed coffees.

Cooking with Coffee

A prominent and popular advocate of Continental and Asian cookery in Melbourne in the 1950s, Maria Kozslik Donovan wrote and illustrated five cookery books and had a successful international career as a food writer in the 1960s and 1970s. Maria Kozslik was Hungarian by birth and education and was also educated in the USA before marrying Patrick Donovan, an Australian, and migrating to Sydney with him in 1950. After a brief stay there and in Adelaide, they relocated to Melbourne in 1953 where she ran a cookery school and wrote for prominent daily newspaper *The Age*, penning hundreds of her weekly “Epicure’s Corner: Continental Recipes with Maria Kozslik” column from 1954 to 1961. Her groundbreaking *Continental Cookery in Australia* (1955) collects some 140 recipes, many of which would appear in her column—predominantly featuring French, Italian, Viennese, and Hungarian dishes, as well as some from the Middle East and the Balkans—each with an informative paragraph or two regarding European cooking and dining practices that set the recipes in context.

Continental Cookery in Australia includes one recipe for Mocha Torte (162), which she translates as Coffee Cream Cake and identifies as “the favourite of the gay and party-loving Viennese ... [in] the many cafés and sweet shops of Salzburg and Vienna” (162). In this recipe, a plain sponge is cut into four thin layers and filled and covered with a rich mocha cream custard made from egg yolks, sugar and a good measure of coffee, which, when cooled, is beaten into creamed butter. In her recipe for Mocha Cream, Donovan identifies the type of coffee to be used and its strength, specifying that “strong Mocha” be used,

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and pleading, "please, no essence!" She also suggests that the cake's top can be decorated with shavings of the then quite exotic "coffee bean chocolate," which she notes can be found at "most continental confectioners" (162), but which would have been difficult to obtain outside the main urban centres. Coffee also appears in her Café Frappe, where cooled strong black coffee is poured into iced-filled glasses, and dressed with a touch of sugar and whipped cream (165). For this recipe the only other direction that Donovan gives regarding coffee is to "prepare and cool" strong black coffee (165) but it is obvious—from her eschewing of other convenience foods throughout the volume—that she means freshly brewed ground coffee.

In contrast, less adventurous cookery books paint a different picture of coffee use in the home at this time. Thus, the more concise *Selected Continental Recipes for the Australian Home* (1955) by the Australian-born Zelmear M. Deutsch—who, stating that upon marrying a Viennese husband, she became aware of "the fascinating ways of Continental Cuisine" (back cover)—includes three recipes that include coffee. Deutsch's Mocha Creams (chocolate truffles with a hint of coffee) (76-77), almond meringues filled with coffee whipped cream (89-90), and Mocha Cream Filling comprising butter beaten with chocolate, vanilla, sugar, and coffee (95), all use "powdered" instant coffee, which is, moreover, used extremely sparingly. Her Almond Coffee Torte, for example, requires only half a teaspoon of powdered coffee to a quarter of a pint (300 mls) of cream, which is also sweetened with vanilla sugar (89-90). In contrast to the examples from Fulton and Donovan above (but in common with many cookbooks before and after) Deutsch uses the term "mocha" to describe a mix of coffee and chocolate, rather than to refer to a fine-quality coffee. The term itself is also used to describe a soft, rich brown color and, therefore, at times, the resulting hue of these dishes. The word itself is of late eighteenth century origin, and comes from the eponymous name of a Red Sea port from where coffee was shipped.

While *Selected Continental Recipes* appears to be Deutsch's first and only book, Anne Mason was a prolific food, wine and travel writer. Before migrating to England in 1958, she was well known in Australia as the presenter of a live weekly television program, *Anne Mason's Home-Tested Recipes*, which aired from 1957. She also wrote a number of popular cookery books and had a long-standing weekly column in *The Age*. Her 'Home-Tested Recipes' feature published recipes contributed by readers, which she selected and tested. A number of these were collected in her *Treasury of Australian Cookery*, published in London in 1962, and included those influenced by "the country cooking of England [...] Continental influence [...] and oriental ideas" (11).

Mason includes numerous recipes featuring coffee, but (as in Deutsch above) almost all are described as mocha-flavoured and listed as such in the detailed index. In Mason's book, this mocha taste is, in fact, featured more frequently in sweet dishes than any of the other popular flavours (vanilla, honey, lemon, apple, banana, coconut, or passionfruit) except for chocolate. These mocha recipes include cakes: Chocolate-Mocha Refrigerator cake—plain sponge layered with a coffee-chocolate mousse (134), Mocha Gateau Ring—plain sponge and choux pastry puffs filled with cream or ice cream and thickly iced with mocha icing (136) and Mocha Nut Cake—a coffee and cocoa butter cake filled and iced with mocha icing and almonds (166). There are also recipes for Mocha Meringues—small coffee/cocoa-flavoured meringue rosettes joined together in pairs with whipped cream (168), a dessert Mocha Omelette featuring the addition of instant coffee and sugar to the eggs and which is filled with grated chocolate (181) and Mocha-Crunch Ice Cream—a coffee essence-scented ice cream with chocolate biscuit crumbs (144) that was also featured in an ice cream bombe layered with chocolate-rum and vanilla ice creams (152). Mason's coffee recipes are also given prominence in the accompanying illustrations. Although the book contains only nine pages in full colour, the Mocha Gateau Ring is featured on both the cover and opposite the title page of the book and the Mocha Nut Cake is given an entire coloured page.

The coffee component of Mason's recipes is almost always sourced from either instant coffee (granules or powdered) or liquid coffee essence, however, while the cake for the Mocha Nut Cake uses instant coffee, its mocha icing and filling calls for "3 dessertspoons [of] hot black coffee" (167). The recipe does not, however, describe if this is made from instant, essence, or ground beans. The two other mocha icings both use instant coffee mixed with cocoa, icing sugar and hot water, while one also includes margarine for softness. The recipe for Mocha Cup (202) in the chapter for Children's Party Fare (198-203), listed alongside clown-shaped biscuits and directions to decorate cakes with sweets, plastic spaceships and dolls, surprisingly comprises a sophisticated mix of grated dark chocolate melted in a pint of "hot black coffee" lightened with milk, sugar and vanilla essence, and topped with cream. There are no instructions for brewing or otherwise making fresh coffee in the volume.

The Australian culinary masterwork of the 1960s, *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook*, which was published in 1968 and sold out its first (record) print run of 100,000 copies in record time, is still in print, with a revised 2004 edition bringing the number of copies sold to over 1.5 million (Brien). The first edition's cake section of the book includes a Coffee Sponge sandwich using coffee essence in both the cake and its creamy filling and topping (166) and Iced Coffee Cakes that also use coffee essence in the cupcakes and instant coffee powder in the glacé icing (166). A Hazelnut Swiss Roll is filled with a coffee butter cream called Coffee Creme au Beurre, with instant coffee flavouring an egg custard which is beaten into creamed butter (167)—similar to Koszlik's Mocha Cream but a little lighter, using milk instead of cream and fewer eggs. Fulton also includes an Austrian Chocolate Cake in her Continental Cakes section that uses "black coffee" in a mocha ganache that is used as a frosting (175), and her sweet hot coffee soufflé calls for "1/2 cup strong coffee" (36). Fulton also features a recipe for Irish Coffee—sweetened hot black coffee with (Irish) whiskey added, and cream floated on top (205). Nowhere is fresh or brewed coffee specified, and on the page dedicated to weights, measures, and oven temperatures, instant coffee powder appears on the list of commonly used ingredients alongside flour, sugar, icing sugar, golden syrup, and butter (242).

American Influence

While the influence of American habits such as supermarket shopping and fast food on Australian foodways is reported in many venues, recognition of its influence on Australian coffee culture is more muted (see, for exceptions, Khamis; Adams). Yet American modes of making and utilising coffee also influenced the Australian use of coffee, whether drunk as beverage or employed as a flavouring agent. In 1956, the *Australian Women's Weekly* published a full colour Wade's Cornflour advertorial of biscuit recipes under the banner, "Dione Lucas's Manhattan Mochas: The New Coffee Cookie All America Loves, and Now It's Here" (56). The use of the American "cookie" instead of the Australian "biscuit" is telling here, the popularity of all things American sure to ensure, the advert suggested, that the Mochas (coffee biscuits topped with chocolate icing) would be so popular as to be "More than a recipe—a craze" (56).

This American influence can also be seen in cakes and other baked goods made specifically to serve with coffee, but not necessarily containing it. The recipe for Zulu Boys published in *The Argus* in 1945, a small chocolate and cinnamon cake with peanuts and cornflakes added, is a good example. Reported to "keep moist for some time," these were "not too sweet, and are especially useful to serve with a glass of wine or a cup of black coffee" (Vesta Junior 9), the recipe a precursor to many in the 1950s and 1960s. Margaret Fulton includes a Spicy Coffee Cake in *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook*. This is similar to her Cinnamon Tea Cake in being an easy to mix cake topped with cinnamon sugar, but is more robust in flavour and texture with the addition of whole bran cereal, raisins and spices (163). Her "Morning Coffee" section in *Entertaining with Margaret Fulton* similarly includes a selection of quite strongly flavoured and substantially textured cakes and biscuits (90-92), while her recipes for Afternoon Tea are lighter and more delicate in taste and appearance (85-89).

Concluding Remarks: Integration and Evolution, Not Revolution

Trusted Tasmanian writer on all matters domestic, Marjorie Bligh, published six books on cookery, craft, home economics, and gardening, and produced four editions of her much-loved household manual under all three of her married names: Blackwell, Cooper and Bligh (Wood). The second edition of *At Home with Marjorie Bligh: A Household Manual* (published c.1965-71) provides more evidence of how, rather than jettisoning one form in favour of another, Australian housewives were adept at integrating both ground and other more instant forms of coffee into their culinary repertoires. She thus includes instructions on both how to efficiently clean a coffee percolator (percolating with a detergent and borax solution) (312) as well as how to make coffee essence at home by simmering one cup of ground coffee with three cups of water and one cup of sugar for one hour, straining and bottling (281). She also includes recipes for cakes, icings, and drinks that use both brewed and instant coffee as well as coffee essence. In *Entertaining with Margaret Fulton*, Fulton similarly allows consumer choice, urging that "If you like your coffee with a strong flavour, choose one to which a little chicory has been added" (90).

Bligh's volume similarly reveals how the path from trifle to tiramisu was meandering and one which added recipes to Australian foodways, rather than deleted them. Her recipe for Coffee Trifle has strong similarities to tiramisu, with sponge cake soaked in strong milk coffee and sherry layered with a rich custard made from butter, sugar, egg yolks, and black coffee, and then decorated with whipped cream, glace cherries, and walnuts (169). This recipe precedes published references to tiramisu as, although the origins of tiramisu are debated (Black), references to the dessert only began to appear in the 1980s, and there is no mention of the dish in such authoritative sources as Elizabeth David's 1954 *Italian Food*, which features a number of traditional Italian coffee-based desserts including granita, ice cream and those made with cream cheese and rice.

By the 1990s, however, respected Australian chef and food researcher, the late Mietta O'Donnell, wrote that if pizza was "the most travelled of Italian dishes, then tiramisu is the country's most famous dessert" and, today, Australian home cooks are

using the dish as a basis for a series of variations that even include replacing the coffee with fruit juices and other flavouring agents. Long-lived Australian coffee recipes are similarly being re-made in line with current taste and habits, with celebrated chef Neil Perry's recent Simple Coffee and Cream Sponge Cake comprising a classic cream-filled vanilla sponge topped with an icing made with "strong espresso". To "glam up" the cake, Perry suggests sprinkling the top with chocolate-covered roasted coffee beans—cycling back to Maria Kozslik's "coffee bean chocolate" (162) and showing just how resilient good taste can be.

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The 1960s also saw a dramatic rise in the number and spread of Indian restaurants in Britain, especially in London and the South East. During rationing it had been very difficult if not near impossible, to obtain the spices required for Indian cooking but with the rise in immigration from the Indian subcontinent and the end of rationing, this was no longer a problem and the restaurants flourished. So much so that in the late 1960s, the first Indian and Chinese 'convenience foods' became available: the famous Vesta curries and Vesta Chow Mein, the first taste for many Britons of 'foreign food'. Before the 1960s wine was only drunk by the upper classes, everyone else drank beer, stout, pale ale and port and lemon. Now Blue Nun, Chianti and Mateus Rose were the wines of choice.

AND COOKING. Choose the most suitable word or phrase. a) Waiter, could you bring me the account/bill/addition, please? b) It's a very popular restaurant - we should apply. for/book/keep a table. c) If you're hungry, why not ask for a large dish/plate/portion? d) Please help/serve/wait yourself to salads from the salad bar. e) Waiter, can I see the catalogue/directory/menu, please? f) This fish is not what I called/commanded/ordered. g) This dish/plate/serving is a specialty of our restaurant. h). Have you tried the crude/raw/undercooked fish at the new. Japanese restaurant? i) Paul n Her cooking now seems plain, but unlike many people in the world at that time, she had access to quality ingredients, many of which were gathered from our Adelaide backyard. Back then the choice in milk was simply the number of pints ladled by the milkman into our billy early each morning. Bread was delivered by cart, too, and the greengrocer would fill an order from a large green van. An Australian invention, the flat white has been embraced across the world as the perfect balance of crema and coffee. (Photo credit; Asim Ihsan/flickr.com). Today, Australian meals are more diverse than ever, influenced by aisles of inexpensive ingredients, a platter of cultures and a menu of resurgent interest in food.