

THE GOOD LIFE

Gourmet Traveller food editor Rodney Dunn swapped the horns of city traffic for the honk of geese to set up his farm-based cooking school, The Agrarian Kitchen. Take a tour.

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Styling: **Emma Knowles** Drinks suggestions: **Max Allen**



9522 Serving dish,
black and black dish from
Mid Australia. Iittala
cutlery from Design Mode
International. All other
props stylist's own.
Stockists p177.



Whole-wheat pasta with
almonds, parsley and ricotta
(recipe p83)



Down on the farm
Rodney Dunn, his
wife Séverine and
their son Tristan

“The zucchini have gone crazy,” says Rodney Dunn.

“Which is great. The lettuce is always happening, it’s just prolific and everywhere. The corn grows a foot every day, and the raspberries are finishing, with the birds getting the last of them. We had our first tomatoes the other day, so that’s good. The pigs are getting fatter by the day, and I’m waiting for them to be old enough to go and have some fun with the boar so they can give me some little piglets. The geese are biding their time, and I’m going to fatten them over winter; the Jersey cows are

being nuisances. They’ve been to the bull, but I’m not sure if they’re pregnant.”

Welcome to a day in the life of Rodney Dunn. As a former full-time food editor here at *Gourmet Traveller*, he was more accustomed to whiling away his hours in the city in the test kitchen and photo studio, but for Dunn, it has been a matter of taking the boy out of the country, but not the country out of the boy. Raised in Griffith, in southern central New South Wales, he left home for the city to pursue his interest in cooking, cutting his teeth in restaurants such as Tetsuya’s before turning to work in magazines. For all his flair in the kitchen and his talent for preparing food for the camera, the country kept calling. “I wanted to have access to better food,” he says. “I really wanted to eat vegetables we couldn’t buy, to have the experience of having our own animals, our own milk, and to make a living out of sharing that experience with other people.”

So it was that in 2007, Dunn, his wife Séverine Demanet and their toddler Tristan left Sydney and settled in a 19th-century schoolhouse 45 minutes north of Hobart at Lachlan in the Derwent Valley. After some hard yards with shovel, sledgehammer and backhoe, they opened the doors on The Agrarian Kitchen late last year, and it’s already being hailed by local and overseas pundits as a cooking school in a class of its own. The first part of most sessions involves pulling ingredients from the garden, but despite the rustic setting, the kitchen is equipped with shiny new professional-grade equipment, augmented by a wood-burning oven designed by fire-guru Alan Scott. In addition to the heirloom fruit and veg and the Barnevelders, Wessex saddlebacks and other assorted rare-breed livestock on the farm, other topnotch Tassie produce plays a part, whether it’s black truffles, wild trout or rock lobster. Locals pitch in their skills, too; butcher and pig breeder Lee Christmas lends a hand with the Whole Hog class (yes, it means exactly what you think), for example, while Gordon Ramsay protégé and pastry chef Alistair Wise gives lessons on the sweet stuff.

The romance of the setting is undeniable. “I look at it, and think, gee, that’s not growing as well as I’d like it to, and the weeds are getting away a bit over there, but other people come here and just fall in love with the place,” says Dunn. There’s no lack of poetry in Dunn’s soul, but his mind, nonetheless, is on smokehouses and greenhouses, root cellars and milking sheds. How long will it take to get The Agrarian Kitchen to a point where he’ll be satisfied with it?

“The rest of my life,” he says. “I hope.”

The Agrarian Kitchen, 650 Lachlan Rd, Lachlan, Tas, (03) 6261 1099, theagrariankitchen.com.

Whole-wheat pasta with almonds, parsley and ricotta

I think you’ll find homemade ricotta far superior to commercial varieties. It has a creamy texture with a pleasant whole-milk flavour.

Prep time 30 mins, cook 15 mins

Serves 6 as an entrée (pictured p81)

- 50 gm butter
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 60 gm natural almonds, coarsely crushed in a mortar and pestle
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 cup (loosely packed) flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
- Zested rind of 1 lemon
- Finely grated parmesan, to serve
- Ricotta**
- 2.5 litres (10 cups) milk
- 30 ml white vinegar
- Whole-wheat pasta**
- 160 gm (1 cup) fine semolina
- 150 gm (1 cup) whole-wheat flour (see note)
- 1 egg, lightly whisked

1 For ricotta, heat milk in a large saucepan over low heat until temperature reaches 90-95C (5-8 minutes). Quickly stir through vinegar, remove from heat and skim curds with a slotted spoon as they rise to the surface. Transfer curds to a muslin-lined colander to drain. Refrigerate until required. Discard excess liquid. Makes about 500gm. Leftover ricotta will keep refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

2 For whole-wheat pasta, pulse semolina and flour in a food processor to combine. With motor running, add egg, then gradually add 60ml cold water, processing until dough just comes together. Turn onto a lightly floured work surface and knead lightly until smooth, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate until required. Divide dough into four pieces, then, using a pasta machine with rollers at widest setting and working with one piece of dough at a time, feed dough through rollers, folding dough and reducing settings notch by notch until you reach the second-last setting and pasta is translucent and 1mm-thick. Cut into 4-5cm rag shapes with a sharp knife, lightly dust with flour and set aside on a floured tray.

3 Cook pasta in a large saucepan of salted boiling water over high heat until al dente (1-2 minutes). Drain and keep warm.

4 Meanwhile, heat butter and olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat until foaming, add almonds and garlic and stir occasionally until golden (1-2 minutes). Stir through parsley, lemon rind and pasta and season to taste. Divide pasta among bowls, top with 200gm crumbled ricotta, scatter with parmesan and serve immediately.

Note Whole-wheat flour, available from health food stores, adds a nutty taste to pasta. You can substitute wholemeal flour.

Wine suggestion A crisp, nutty, crunchy white like a pinot grigio or arneis.>



"The zucchini have gone crazy... the geese are biding their time... the cows are being a nuisance."



Roast loin of Wessex saddleback

This recipe is all about Wessex saddleback, an old breed that is slow growing and tastes the way good pork should. If you can find properly reared Wessex, Berkshire, large black or Tamworth pork, the effort in sourcing it will be rewarded with groans of delight at the dinner table.

Prep time 10 mins, **cook** 45 mins (plus resting)

Serves 6 as a shared main course

- 1.8 kg rolled pork loin, tied at intervals with kitchen string
- 2 tbsp finely chopped rosemary
- 1 tbsp olive oil

1 Preheat oven to 250C. Score skin of pork loin at 5mm intervals with a sharp knife and place in a roasting pan. Scatter with rosemary, drizzle with olive oil, season to taste and roast until skin is golden and crackling (25-30 minutes). Reduce oven to 150C and roast until pork is just cooked through (12-15 minutes), then rest for 5 minutes. Slice thickly and serve with leaf salad with anchovy salad cream, roast red onions, silverbeet gratin and pan-fried baby potatoes (see recipes p86).

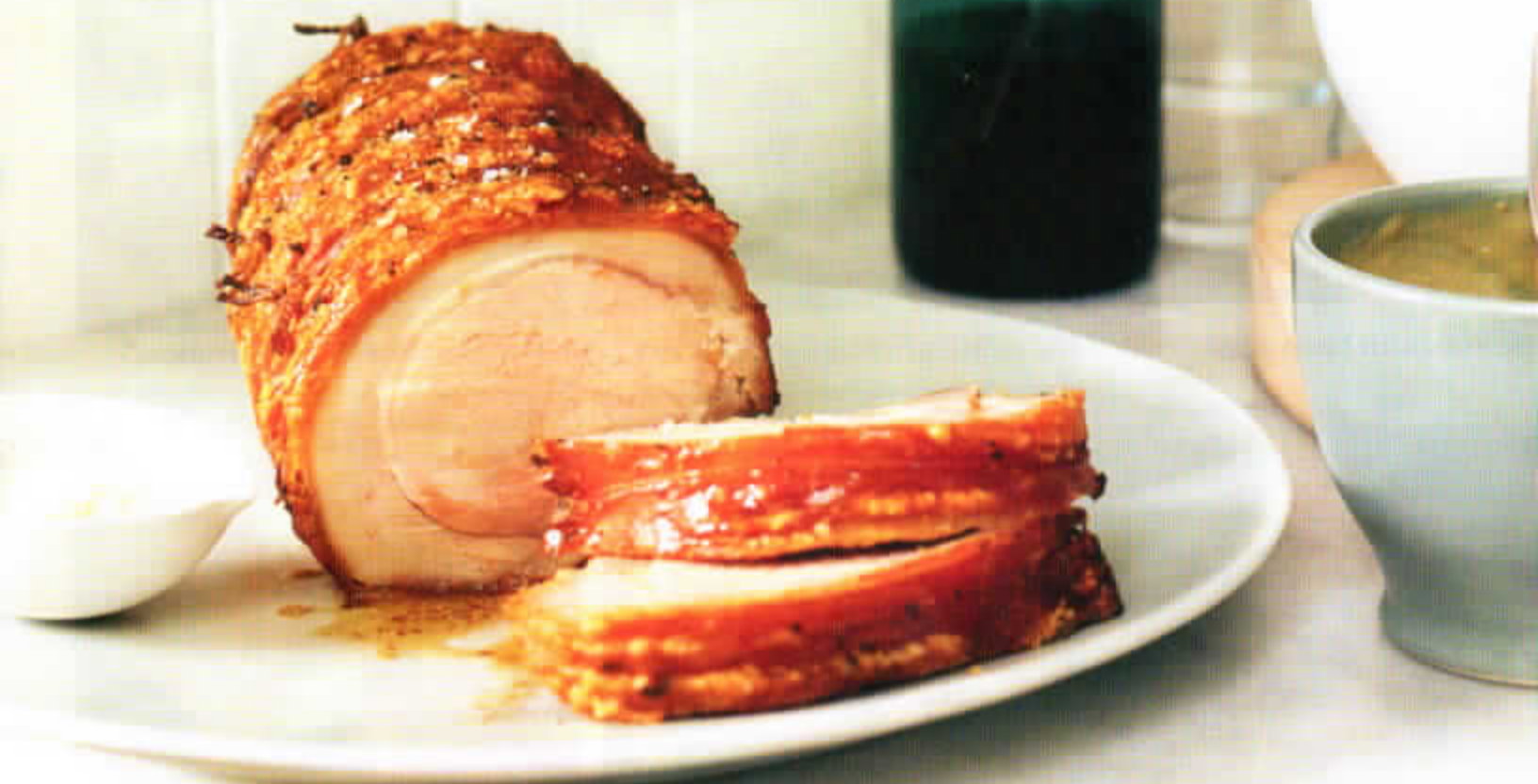
Drink suggestion Farmhouse cider if you're feeling rustic or a top-quality pinot noir if you're feeling posh.

PORK: Dinner plate and bowl (with dressing) from Bison Australia. Bowl (with salad) from Country Road. Glasses from Ikea.

ONIONS & GRATIN: Oval dish from Country Road. Large dish from Mud Australia. Little spoon from Design Mode International.

SALAD: White bowl and cutting board from Country Road. Bowl (with dressing) from Bison Australia.

MENU: Dinner plates and large pouring bowl from Bison Australia. **POTATOES:** Little plates from Design Mode International. Salt dish from Bison Australia. Glasses from Ikea. All other props stylist's own. Stockists p177.



Roast loin of Wessex saddleback

Roast red onions & silverbeet gratin (recipe p16)



Leaf salad with anchovy salad cream (recipe p16)

Grace the family dining table with tender roast pork capped by a satisfying amount of crackling.

The Agrarian Kitchen.
wholewheat pasta with almonds, parsley & homemade ricotta
Roast Wessex Saddleback loin
Silverbeet gratin + roast red onions
Pan-fried baby potatoes + green salad with anchovy salad cream
Peach & raspberry crumble

Pan-fried baby potatoes (recipe p16)





- Dutch cream, scrubbed, unpeeled
- 8 garlic cloves, unpeeled
- 6 sage leaves

1 Heat pork fat in a frying pan over low heat, add potatoes and garlic and stir occasionally until tender and golden (25-30 minutes). Add sage and cook until crisp. Season to taste and serve with roast loin of Wessex saddleback. **Note** You can substitute lard or olive oil for pork fat.

Roast red onions

Prep time 10 mins, cook 2 hrs

Serves 6 as a side (pictured p85)

- 6 Spanish onions, unpeeled
- 6 thin speck slices (see note)
- 3 thyme sprigs, leaves removed
- 30 ml extra-virgin olive oil

1 Preheat oven to 180C. Trim onion bases with a sharp knife, then cut a cross about two-thirds of the way into top of each onion. Place speck slice in each, transfer to a small roasting pan, season to taste, scatter with thyme leaves, drizzle with olive oil and roast until very tender (1 hour 45 minutes-2 hours). Serve onions in skins with roast loin of Wessex saddleback. **Note** Speck is salt-cured, smoked boned pork leg. You can substitute prosciutto or flat pancetta.

Ripe fruit, a shower of sugar and a splash of liqueur make for a wonderfully peachy dessert.

Silverbeet gratin

Silverbeet's depth of flavour makes it the ultimate comfort food when teamed with a creamy sauce.

Prep time 20 mins, cook 20 mins

Serves 6 as a side (pictured p85)

- 700 gm (1 bunch) silverbeet
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 100 gm butter
- 35 gm (¼ cup) plain flour
- 300 ml warm milk
- Finely grated nutmeg, to taste
- 40 gm Gruyère, finely grated

1 Finely chop silverbeet stalks. Heat olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat, add stalks and onion, reduce heat to low-medium, stir frequently until tender (8-10 minutes).
2 Meanwhile, blanch leaves (1-2 minutes), then refresh (see cook's notes p178). Squeeze out excess liquid, coarsely tear, set aside.
3 Preheat grill to high. Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat until foamy. Add flour, stirring rapidly until golden (1-2 minutes), then gradually whisk in warm milk. Season to taste with nutmeg, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Stir in onion mixture and silverbeet leaves, cook until tender (4-5 minutes). Spoon into a shallow 2 litre-capacity ovenproof dish, scatter with Gruyère and grill until golden (1-2 minutes). Serve with roast loin of Wessex saddleback.

Leaf salad with anchovy salad cream

Prep time 10 mins

Serves 6 as a side (pictured p85)

- 100 gm mixed salad leaves
- 1 radicchio, washed, dried and coarsely torn
- 1 frisée, washed, dried and coarsely chopped
- ½ bunch chives, cut into 2cm lengths
- Anchovy salad cream**
- 6 anchovy fillets
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp double cream
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard

1 For anchovy salad cream, pound anchovies to a smooth paste in a mortar and pestle. Stir in remaining ingredients, season with freshly ground black pepper, set aside.
2 Combine all ingredients in a bowl, drizzle with salad cream, toss to evenly coat leaves. Serve with roast loin of Wessex saddleback.

Pan-fried baby potatoes

Strain the fat from the roast pork for this recipe.

Prep time 10 mins, cook 30 mins

Serves 6 as a side (pictured p85)

- 125 ml (½ cup) strained pork fat (see note)
- 1 kg baby potatoes, such as pinkeye or

Peach, raspberry and almond crumble

The harmony created by these two fruits is beautiful and the crumble topping is one to keep handy for all kinds of fruit.

Prep time 15 mins, cook 40 mins

Serves 6

- 1.8 kg peaches (about 12)
- 200 gm raspberries
- 100 gm demerara sugar
- 2 tsp amaretto
- Double cream or ice-cream, to serve
- Almond crumble**
- 250 gm plain flour
- 180 gm chilled butter, cut into 1cm pieces
- 100 gm demerara sugar
- 30 gm flaked almonds

1 For almond crumble, preheat oven to 200C. Combine flour and butter in a large bowl and rub with your fingertips until fine crumbs form. Add sugar and almonds, mix to combine and set aside.
2 Cut peaches into wedges and combine with remaining ingredients in a large bowl. Spoon into a 3 litre-capacity baking dish, top with almond crumble and bake until golden brown (35-40 minutes). Serve immediately with double cream or ice-cream.
Wine suggestion The best Sauternes or botrytis semillon you can get your hands on.*
For more recipes go to gourmettraveller.com.au

CRUMBLE: Large serving dish and small bowls from Mud Australia. Blue jug from Robert Burton. Iittala cutlery from Design Mode International. All other props stylist's own. Stockists p177.

Peach, raspberry
and almond crumble

ONLINE VIDEO EXCLUSIVE

Come on a behind-the-scenes tour of The Agrarian Kitchen's garden and cooking school with Rodney Dunn at gourmettraveller.com.au.
