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STAMFORD LIFE

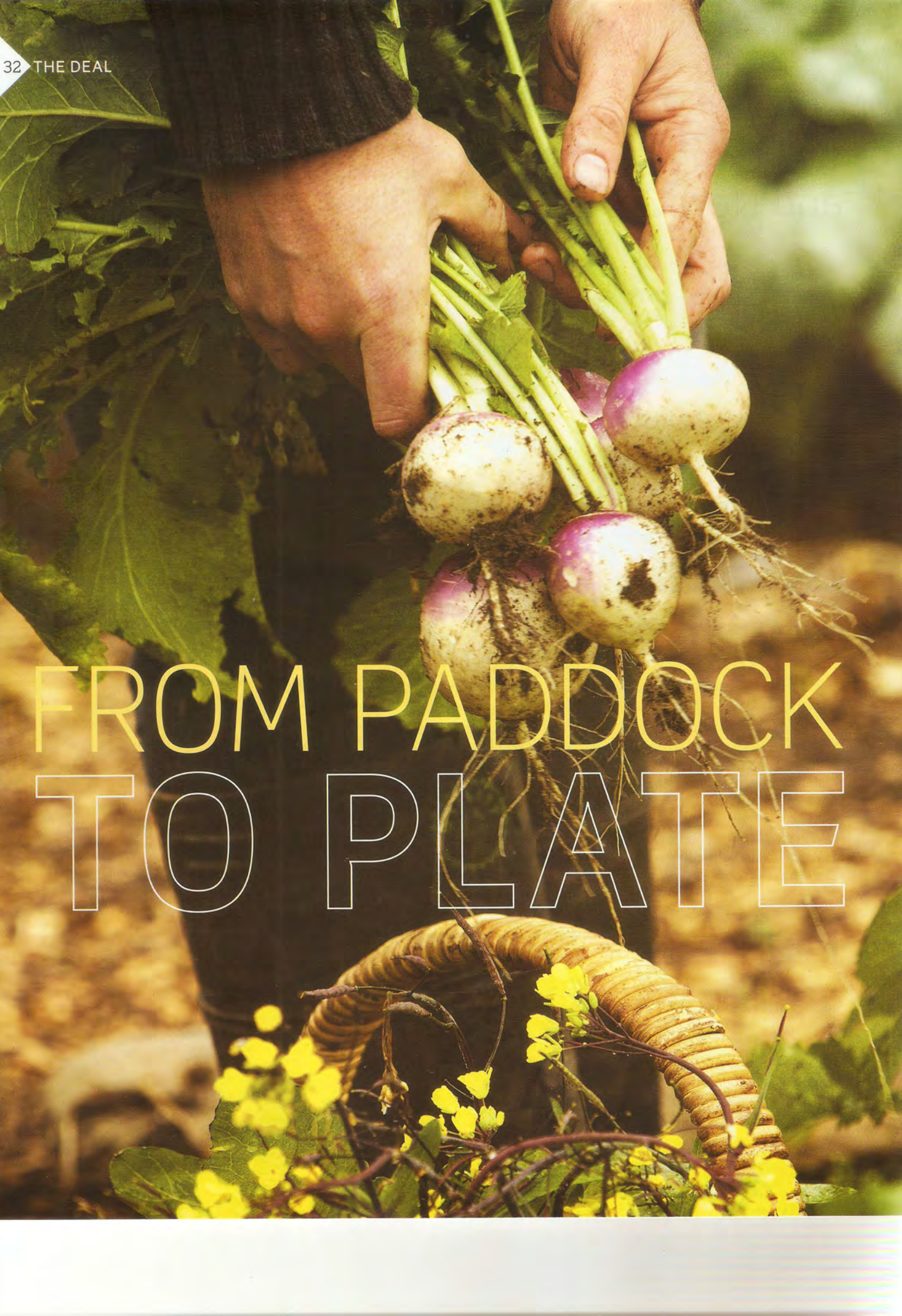
WAIHEKE ISLAND

PERFECT GETAWAY
FROM AUCKLAND

KANGAROO ISLAND'S
NATURAL WONDERS

THE BEST SEAFOOD
FESTIVALS





FROM PADDOCK TO PLATE

▶ WITH ITS FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD, FIONA HARPER REVEALS WHY THIS COOKING SCHOOL IS A CULINARY EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER.

IT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD TO DINE AT WORLD-CLASS RESTAURANTS, and savour exquisite food that's been meticulously crafted for your gastronomic pleasure. But do you know how deliciously sweet a pea can taste when freshly harvested and squeezed from its pod? And when said pea is combined with an endless array of freshly harvested produce into a hearty meal, that's when the true joy of eating is revealed.

In the small Tasmanian hamlet of Lachlan, just 40km north-west of Hobart, Rodney Dunn is giving city dwellers that very experience through his farm-based cooking school. A former apprentice of acclaimed chef Tetsuya Wakuda and ex-food editor of *Gourmet Traveller*, Dunn enlightens eager students on such simple pleasures as eating a carrot freshly pulled from its earthy moor, and imparts his knowledge of sustainable farming and its significance in the future of Australia's agricultural industry.

Seeking a rural life where he could easily connect his kitchen to the land, Dunn, with the help of his wife Severine Demanet, created The Agrarian Kitchen, which uses sustainable agricultural practices as the basis of a cooking school.

Housed in a lovingly restored 19th-century schoolhouse, shaded by deciduous trees planted by school children for Australia's Federation in 1901, The Agrarian Kitchen sits amid a 2ha plot in the agriculture-rich Derwent Valley.

Its first students arrived in 2009 for classes utilising an agrarian philosophy, in which agriculture is the primary means for livelihood and sustenance. Predating the industrial revolution, the agrarian system relies upon as little outside input as possible. It's where crops and animals complement each other to



FROM TOP: RODNEY DUNN DEMONSTRATES HOW TO STUFF AND ROLL A PORK ROAST FOR HIS STUDENTS; THE AGRARIAN KITCHEN'S FARM IS FULL OF LIFE. DUCKS, GEESE, CHICKENS AND LIVESTOCK ENJOY FREE RANGE.

FACING PAGE: FRESH RADISHES PULLED FROM THE FARM'S VEGGIE PATCH.



provide food for the farmers' families and communities. The Agrarian Kitchen now has a passionate following among supporters of sustainable farming practices in Australia.

"Back to basics" is too simplistic a term to describe the business, as – like any organic enterprise at the mercy of the seasons – flexibility is key to success. Classes mostly utilise the farm's own harvest but, as required, produce is also sourced from similarly minded neighbours.

Dunn is keen to teach future generations about sustainable farming and help them understand where their food comes from. This was one of the driving forces behind the paddock-to-plate experiences for children. The Little Agrarian classes are an opportunity for kids, aged six to 11, to see, feel, smell and taste food in its natural form. Just like the adult version of the cooking classes, the children forage for chicken eggs, fruits, vegetables and herbs, then feed the pigs and milk the goats before heading into the communal kitchen to prepare lunch.

The Birds of a Feather class is not for the faint-hearted ("despatching", then plucking a chicken is part of the curriculum). This class aims to enable students to taste "real" chicken (one that's raised in a true free-range environment) and appreciate its natural flavours – such a rare treat.

Dunn might have begun his gastronomic journey under the instruction of Tetsuya but, in 2010, it appears the disciple exceeded his master. The Agrarian Kitchen was awarded the No. 1 spot in the top 100 Greatest Australian Gourmet Experiences – Tetsuya's came in at No. 7.

To find out more about classes at The Agrarian Kitchen, visit WWW.THEAGRARIANKITCHEN.COM. SL