

# Finding paradise in the dairy industry

When is a dip not a just a dip? When the eggplants are roasted in-house, the trout is so fresh it's practically jumping out of the tray, and you know the name of the guy who made the neufchatel. Steve Ingram from Paradise Beach Purveyors would not make dips any other way.

In 2000, Steve was at a career crossroads. An art director for an advertising agency, Steve's job satisfaction was at an all-time low and he was searching for alternatives.

"With advertising, you come to a point where you look at it as a phase," Steve said. "Unless you're right at the top of your profession and it's your absolute passion, it's not a forever job for everybody.

"Some of my contemporaries own agencies that are incredibly successful, because they stuck with it and they were

passionate about it. I like food, painting, art photography, architecture. I like all facets of design, food and lifestyle. Advertising was only a diversion for me, a necessary evil as a way to earn money. There were a lot more things I was interested in."

Food was at the front of Steve's mind from the start. As a child, growing up in the south-east of England, he would often holiday in Europe with his 'foodie' parents.

"You take a short drive to the Channel, hop on the boat and suddenly you're in France, with all the riches of Normandy right on the other side of the water, with brie, camembert, armagnac, champagne and cognac," Steve said.

"We would always end up in the local chacouterie, go to all the little restaurants. From a very young age I was exposed to all that beautiful food.

"Eventually my parents bought a farmhouse in France, and when they retired they moved down there. I'd been visiting them for years, and every time we'd go to this market or that market. It's given me a 'food culture', I suppose."

Back in Sydney, Steve and his partner **Anmarie Dabinet**, also an advertising creative, loved to entertain at their house in Paradise Beach, Pittwater.

"We both cooked a lot on the weekends and liked going out to interesting restaurants and food shops."

The next step was to turn a hobby into a business, and Paradise Beach Purveyors was born.

## Dipping into food

When the couple made the decision to start a food company, Steve did a commercial cookery course at the local TAFE, something he enjoyed enormously. An apprenticeship was not part of the plan, but when an opportunity came up to work at the Beach House Restaurant at Whale Beach, he jumped at it. The restaurant is run by **Joe Gracie**.

"Joe is a fantastic chef. He did a combination of weddings on the weekends and fine dining the rest of the week. It was a very good experience for me. I learned about food hygiene, producing large quantities of different things, preparing for the coming week. Making good food starts with a clean kitchen, so there was a lot of cleaning as well."

While Steve was learning, Anmarie was keeping the family in the black.

"My wife was fantastic. We were running on a tight budget, and I was getting a small hourly wage at the restaurant. Anmarie was pregnant with twins and trying to earn a living, pay the bills. It was a pretty thrilling time. A bit of a high wire act, but that's what we wanted to do.

"Anmarie had a very good freelance business as an art director in North Sydney. We renamed her business and changed it from advertising to food."



Steve Ingram from Paradise Beach Purveyors left the advertising industry to pursue his passion for food.

*Paradise Beach is based on the idea that Australian palates are changing and developing, with the 'foodie' culture slowly spreading beyond the traditional higher income categories.*

As a simple entertainment food, dips were a natural fit for Paradise Beach Purveyors.

"Dips are causal, they are about having friends around, about relaxing and enjoying," Steve said.

"We started with recipes that we liked to eat. We've all bought smoked trout dip, baba ganoush and pesto. I looked for the dips on the supermarket shelf that I didn't think were 'up to standard,' that I thought I could do better. It took off from there.

"There were also a few completely 'off the wall' recipes, such as orange and pomegranate hommus, and lime and lemongrass seafood dip. It was all about a bit of fun. We just looked around for the sort of flavours we liked."

### Inspired thinking

When it comes to flavours, Steve gets a lot of inspiration from his travels. One of the most recent additions to the product list is muhammara, a red pepper, pomegranate and walnut dip. Steve fell in love with the dip when he was in Iran in 1979, just before the Shah was deposed.

"I've done a bit of travelling and I've tasted food in all these different places – Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Morocco, Turkey, all over Europe. I would love to go to Lebanon and Israel – just got to buy myself a bulletproof jacket first," he laughed.

"I've been to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bali, Nepal. I flew Korean Air to London one time, with a few hours'

stopover in Seoul. The flight landed at 7am. I rushed into the city, to the only restaurant that was open at that hour, and had a noodle soup with kimchi, Korean pickled spicy cabbage. Then I got the taxi straight back to the airport."

Unlike Steve's inspiration, the produce used in Paradise Beach dips does not travel far.

"We use simple ingredients, fresh and Australian whenever possible – superb Tasmanian salmon, Murrumbidgee Dairy cheese, Pura sour cream, Riverina natural yogurt. I use fresh vegetables and garlic – I try to make the dips as much like you've made it at home as I can. I do get onions peeled before I get them delivered, and I get fish taken off the bone, because I

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*A taste of 'Paradise' – the Paradise Beach Purveyors range of dips and pita bits on the eponymous beach. The pita bits are the latest addition the company's range.*



*“Australian cuisine is a combination of food from all over the world, and that’s the direction I’ve taken with my dips.” – Steve Ingram*

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simply don’t have enough staff here to get that done. I get others to do things that simplify production here, but the quality of what I use is the best that you can get.”

Paradise Beach employs five staff and produces about 1,000-1,500 kg of dips a week at a small warehouse facility in Manly Vale, in Sydney’s north.

“That’s not huge by manufacturing standards,” Steve said, “but having done a lot of car advertising, I know they don’t sell nearly as many Mercedes as they do Hyundai, but the margins are a bit better.”

“We ship out our entire week’s production every week. We use a distributor in every state except Tasmania, because the cost of getting it over the water is beyond us at the moment. We sell a little bit to foodservice, and I think that’s going to grow, because people want premium products. The rest goes to retail.”

*Steve, his partner Anmarie Dabinet and their children celebrate Paradise Beach’s latest success in the Sydney Royal Cheese and Dairy Produce Show.*

### Trust the taste buds

Steve’s vision for Paradise Beach is based on the idea that Australian palates are changing and developing, with the ‘foodie’ culture slowly spreading beyond the traditional higher income categories.

“The reason we grow has nothing to do with advertising, it has to do with tasting. People come back to us because they’ve tasted our product and they’ve come back on their own accord with no encouragement from us other than making the right kind of product,” he said.

“I know that Australians’ expectations of quality are getting higher every day. The more you taste better things, the less you want to go back to lower quality food. It’s not about being too fancy, just being more educated about what good food is.

“In France or Italy people spend a much higher proportion of their income on food

than a typical Australian, and that’s just because they’ve been eating good food longer. Australians’ palates are turning around. That’s part of a food revolution, and I believe people like us are helping that happen. That’s part of my advertising thinking, I guess.

“I believe that Australian cuisine is no longer European based or Middle Eastern based or South-East Asian based. It’s a combination of food from all over the world, and that’s the direction I’ve taken with my dips.

“Most dip manufacturers in Australia started as ethnic food companies – doing traditional Greek or Italian or Middle Eastern dips. We are ModOz, and we take a world view of food.”

The strategy is paying off – Paradise Beach dips have won dozens of awards over the past three years, including being named Most Successful Dip Exhibitor in the Sydney Royal Cheese and Dairy Produce Show three years running.

Dips have been good to Paradise Beach, but they are just the beginning.

“I absolutely love cooking all sorts of food. Dips were a good place to enter the market. We’ve earned our respect for food quality through manufacturing dips, which can give us some credibility to go and make some other nice foods.”

Paradise Beach already makes ‘pita bits’, baked crackers designed to accompany dips, and Steve has hinted a cook book might be in the works.

“We just love making food that we are proud of, that we love to eat. Our food is about sitting down and having a nice time with your friends. I think we’ve got a good story to tell.” ■

