

# **Why the Slider Stuck: How a Baby Fish Burger Captured a Nation's Palate**

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## **ABSTRACT**

If eating is an act of self-identification then what does the uptake of a new food trend by an entire country say about that nation? The slider – a baby hamburger that originated in the United States – was an unknown foodstuff in 2011 New Zealand when celebrity chef Al Brown put a fish version on the menu of his Auckland restaurant, Depot Oyster Bar and Eatery. Less than five years later the restaurant was selling an average of 285 sliders a day (Brown, 2014) and the slider had become an unlikely restaurant signature dish that, from 2013, had its position strengthened by mass media food publications which promoted slider recipes for home cooks. This study seeks to understand how and why the slider was introduced, popularised and embedded in New Zealand, via participant interviews with industry experts and content analysis of selected food media. Gastronomic theory around the rise of smart-casual restaurants (Pearlman, 2013), the marketing power of nostalgia (D. Bell & Valentine, 2013) and the role of media in taste-making (Blank, 2007; Shrum, 1996) is applied to create an understanding of the slider's popularity and, potentially, New Zealand's gastronomic identity.

The research suggests that the synonymy of the New Zealand slider with its celebrity chef initiator is considered crucial – Depot's aesthetic is the "Kiwi bach" (a colloquial term for the New Zealand holiday home) and the fish slider pays homage to the white bread fish sandwich enjoyed as part of a childhood summer meal around the kitchen table at the New Zealand bach. The original American slider has been reimagined for a nostalgia-hungry New Zealand consumer; however, its ongoing embeddedness relies on another aspect of the New Zealand's gastronomic identity – its non-identity. While New Zealand's postcolonial culinary culture has, historically, been tied to the United Kingdom immigration wave of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Burton, 2009; Simpson, 1999), this research posits the slider as proof of an ongoing appetite for the new and novel; a youthful hunger for change that has created a national gastronomic identity that is, more than ever, a work in progress.

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**ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

*"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."*

Kim Knight

**DATE: July 5, 2019**

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When a presenter at a 2016 post-graduate orientation asked if any students were unfamiliar with AUT's digital Blackboard system, I confidently raised my hand – then realised I was the only student who had. At age 46, I was attending university for the first time and I was many, many miles out of my depth. I wanted to burst into tears like it was my first day of primary school. There are so many people to acknowledge for getting me to this point. Firstly, to AUT itself, for allowing me to enrol in its new Master of Gastronomy programme with no prior undergraduate experience. My course lecturers, Christine Hall, Tracy Berno, Lindsay Neill and Katherine Ravenswood, provided invaluable support and guidance as I came to grips with academic research, writing and arguing within the brilliantly diverse student setting that is an AUT classroom. Very special thanks to Dr Tracy Berno who agreed to supervise this dissertation. She has provided superior advice and critiques without ever stifling my voice and answers emails at light speed. Her compassion on the final slog to deadline was without peer. Absolutely none of this would have been possible without Al Brown who, along with other interview participants Sean Armstrong and Ginny Grant, gave graciously of his time and expertise. My thanks to my employer, NZME, to my weekend magazine colleagues and, in particular, to my inspiring women bosses and dear friends Miriyana Alexander, Michelle Hurley and Sarah Daniell. My families have provided support from the South (Island) and the West (Auckland) and now I finally have time to plan a wedding to the person who believed I could do this when I didn't think I could. The hugest of thanks and all my love to James.

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## PROLOGUE

In 2016, as a student in the Auckland University of Technology's Principles of Gastronomy paper (GAST801), assigned readings included *The Physiology of Taste* by Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1825/1994). A class assessment required students to select a chapter from this text and critically evaluate and contextualise it against a contemporary New Zealand and/or South Pacific framework. I chose Chapter 28, "On Restaurateurs", and, in the course of researching this topic, read an argument by Beauge (2012) for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian restaurant as a driver of novel cuisine and competition between chefs. This led me to consider the idea of signature dishes and their association with particular chefs. In the final pages of Al Brown's 2014 book *Depot: Biography of a Restaurant (With Recipes)*, I found "Depot by the numbers" (p. 322-323), a double-page spread that included the claim that, on an average day, Depot restaurant in Auckland, New Zealand, served 285 of the baby fish burgers the menu called "sliders". As a journalist with the *New Zealand Herald* and, prior to that, the *Sunday Star-Times*, I had interviewed Al Brown a number of times and found the intersection between his apparent "good Kiwi bloke" persona and his business nous fascinating. I had also eaten at Depot as a regular punter and, while I had ordered the sliders, had never really understood their appeal (preferring a miniature fish taco that was also on the menu). In 2016, Michelle Hurley, my editor at the *New Zealand Herald's* weekend magazine *Canvas*, asked me to write a weekly restaurant review. This exposed me to restaurants across Auckland and I soon noticed multiple iterations of the slider. It seemed to be a new phenomenon, a food item that had, potentially, not existed in New Zealand prior to the opening of Depot. My interest in pursuing the New Zealand slider story for this dissertation was, thus, born from a combination of journalistic interest in the "new" (the slider was, literally, news) but also a burgeoning academic curiosity. Through my studies, I was beginning to think more about the "why" of what I ate – and who, or what, influenced my food choices.



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

When a newspaper reporter asked chef Al Brown to predict the best-selling dish or cocktail from the menu of his new Auckland, New Zealand restaurant Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery (Depot), his first response was “I have no idea” (Wickes, 2011, August 10, p. 28). Eventually, he told the reporter it might be the “tekina” – ice-cold tequila, a squeeze of lime and the raw tongue of a kina (the New Zealand sea urchin) swallowed as a single shot. Three years later, when Brown (2014) wrote the biography of his restaurant, it was evident his prediction was wrong:

We have a number of signature dishes, but none bigger than our turbot sliders. Nearly every single table orders them. What is a turbot slider? It is a baby fish burger with preserved lemon mayo and watercress ... Go figure!” (p. 134)

This dissertation takes Brown’s incredulity as its starting point. The slider did not exist in a New Zealand context before Brown put it on the Depot menu in 2011 but is now so commonplace it forms part of fast-food giant KFC’s offering (“KFC Slammed Over ‘Disgusting’ Sliders,” 2019) and the country’s major supermarket chains sell slider buns by the eight-pack. The item that was so novel it had to be explained by the first restaurant reviewers to critique Brown’s new venture (Wilson, 2011) now routinely appears in the recipe pages of lifestyle magazines. In 2018, when the New Zealand Rugby Foundation called on superstar players of the national game to contribute a recipe to a fundraising cookbook, All Black fullback Israel Dagg opted for a salmon teriyaki and coleslaw slider (New Zealand Rugby Foundation, 2018).

In 2019, the slider is defined a small soft white bun (measuring no more than approximately eight centimetres square) that can be split in half horizontally and packed with a variety of fillings. In less than a decade, the slider has morphed from the unknown to the familiar, moving from a celebrity chef’s restaurant menu to the domestic New Zealand bread bin. The slider’s invention is attributed to the American hamburger chain White Castle. While the history of that company has been documented (Hogan, 2009; Ozersky, 2009;

Tennyson, 1995) these accounts have only lightly touched on the slider, in favour of traversing White Castle's role as a trailblazer in the introduction of workplace systems later adopted by McDonalds and the like. To the best of this author's knowledge, the slider has not been the subject of academic research in New Zealand or elsewhere. In New Zealand, previous research on the uptake of single food items or dishes has tended to focus on those from the nostalgic and historic culinary canons – the post-Colonial influenced meat pie (Neill, Bell & Bryant, 2008), pavlova (Leach & Browne, 2008) and the Anzac biscuit (Supski, 2006), for example. New Zealand cuisine has internationalised at pace since the 1970s (Burton, 2009; Simpson, 1999; Veart, 2008). The slider's relatively recent 2011 introduction, apparently via a single celebrity chef, presents an opportunity to consider how an externally derived food trend emerges and "sticks" in a contemporary New Zealand context.

### **1.1 Research Aim**

This dissertation poses a straightforward question: Why did the slider stick? In considering the introduction of the slider and identifying the specific factors that led to its widespread adoption, it is hoped that useful insight will be gained into the creation and mobility of food trends in New Zealand. Four questions will be explored:

- How was the slider introduced, popularised and embedded within New Zealand's gastronomic culture?
- Why was the slider introduced, popularised and embedded within New Zealand's gastronomic culture?
- How can gastronomic theory be applied to understanding the slider's popularity?
- Can this understanding be further applied to explain aspects of New Zealand's gastronomic identity?

### **1.2 Dissertation overview**

Chapter 1 introduced the slider, the foodstuff that came to New Zealand in 2011 as a baby fish burger on the menu of chef Al Brown's new Auckland restaurant Depot. Chapter 2, the literature review, considers the history of the slider in its international context,

looking at its connection with hamburgers, applicable gastronomic theory that might account for its popularity, and literature relating to the development of food trends. The research methodology – including an introduction to the three research participants and the three media publications selected for content analysis – is outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 gives a brief overview of New Zealand's gastronomic heritage and the development of its food culture, providing context for the slider's arrival. The slider story is illuminated further in Chapter 5, via the findings of participant interviews and media content analysis. In Chapter 6, these findings are discussed and analysed, before a conclusion is presented in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Machi and McEvoy (2016) state that a literature review should provide context and background to the research topic. It should present a “comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study” (p. 38) and put forward a case for the eventual thesis. Accordingly, this chapter canvases what is known about the slider, both in its international and New Zealand context, and examines gastronomic theories that provide an explanation for, and understanding of, the slider’s dissemination and embeddedness in New Zealand.

### **2.1 A brief history of the slider**

In academic literature at least, the slider is a non-entity. It appears occasionally in a handful of journal articles and is never the main topic of discussion. In a study on children’s restaurant choices, for example, the slider is noted as a menu option with no further definition or discussion (Anzman-Frasca, Mueller, Lynskey, Harelick & Economos, 2015). In a study of the palatability of finely textured beef, participants are invited to consume sliders, which the researchers define as a “small hamburger” (p. 1), but no rationale is provided for their use over a regular hamburger (Depue et al., 2018). In the absence of any notable reference to sliders in the academic literature, the casual definition of sliders as a “small hamburger” was adopted. Hogan (2009), reviewing two books on the history of the hamburger, states the texts fill “a much-needed void in the scholarship” but concludes more extensive work is needed to determine the hamburger’s cultural and social standings. His critique includes the suggestion that the reader has been “offered a slider, when a whopper is really needed” (p. 108) confirming, at least, the slider’s diminutive size while also emphasising a connection between the two foodstuffs.

A. F. Smith (2008) and Ozersky (2009) detail the establishment of America’s White Castle burger chain as a forerunner to McDonald’s. The authors acknowledge the slider as a White Castle invention and describe it as a small bun containing a square meat patty and fried onions. Granger (cited in Tennyson, 1995) credits J. Walter

Anderson, from Wichita, Kansas, with the creation of what would become known as the White Castle slider, naming Anderson as the first commercial fry-cook to serve freshly baked bread buns containing a ground meat patty. Hogan (1999) supports this, reporting Anderson's most popular item was "a flattened patty smothered with onions, seared on both sides and served on a bun instead of bread slices" (p. 25). Its popularity was such that, in 1916, Anderson opened his own business and in 1920, the *Wichita Eagle* named him "King of the Hamburger" (p. 27). One year later, with investment from local businessman Billy Ingram, Anderson's creation became the main food offering at "the White Castle System of Eating Houses" (p. 30). Under Ingram's stewardship, White Castle churned out uniformly small, square meat patties on uniformly small, soft buns in uniformly clean and quick-service surroundings. Ingram and White Castle had "created the template for all the fast-food restaurants in the world" (Ozersky, 2009, p. 30).

White Castle may not have produced the world's very first hamburger (no single, credible source has been agreed on by food historians), but historians agree that it did create the hamburger industry. The hallmark of that White Castle burger was its small size. Hogan (1999) notes that, in 1951, it was dubbed "the world's tiniest hamburger" (p. 118). Visual marketing material from the 1930s shows a burger that could be held daintily between the thumb and two forefingers, while White Castle's advertising slogans played to the slider's bite-sized nature, encouraging customers to "buy 'em by the sack" (p. 27). Hogan (1999) does not, however, specifically address slider nomenclature until the final page of the final chapter of his book, where he notes the term may not have had positive connotations:

Over the years, customers coined a multitude of derisive or sarcastic terms for the company and its hamburgers, including 'porcelain palace' and 'sliders'. (After successfully dodging the term 'slider' since the 1930s, White Castle finally embraced it and featured it in advertising but changed its spelling to Slyder for copyright reasons). These commonly used nicknames in themselves are enough to keep many queasy diners at bay. Interestingly enough, White Castle aficionados use these slang terms with great affection, not deterred by criticisms of the weak stomachs. (p. 173)

In his book *The Hamburger: A History*, Ozersky (2009) describes the “limp, microscopic slider served at White Castle” (p. 43) and adds that by 1937 rival burger chains were adding second tiers of meat to their offerings. He suggests the small size of the White Castle offering may have impacted its ability to stave off competition. It is a “slider rather than a hamburger in any meaningful sense” and, in times of post-war abundance, was deemed a “sad, small object, unfit for the appetite of a growing land” (p. 87). Tennyson (1995) refers to White Castle’s “trend setting baby burgers” (p. 24) and argues for the word slider as a term of endearment by fans, stating “devotees of the two ounce, 2.5 inch square, onion soaked, hole poked burgers are notoriously obsessed with the sandwiches which they often lovingly refer to as ‘sliders’ or ‘belly bombers’” (p. 26). Myers (2015) theorises that White Castle’s baby burgers were called sliders because of the way they slid across a grill surface when cooked, or, possibly, because they slid easily out of their boxes and down the throat. An unattributed post on The Kitchen Project website suggests the phrase was popularised by American naval personnel in the 1940s or 50s and referred to a “greasy burger that slid down easily” (The Kitchen Project, *n.d.* para 7). Kington (2013) repeats the claim that sailors dubbed the White Castle mini-burgers “sliders” because of their greasiness.

The White Castle website ([www.whitecastle.com](http://www.whitecastle.com)) includes a brief history of the company that states the family-owned business began with “\$700 and an idea, selling five-cent, small, square hamburgers so easy to eat, they were dubbed Sliders and sold by the sack” (White Castle, *n.d.* para 1). This appears to be a somewhat retrospective statement. The historical timeline presented on the White Castle website was illustrated with examples of advertising campaigns and printed packaging, all of which employed the word “hamburger” not “slider”. It was 1987 before packaging with the word “slider” was depicted, when White Castle launched a frozen supermarket product labelled “the original slider” (White Castle, *n.d.* para 18).

Appadurai (1988) has described contemporary cookbooks as “revealing artefacts in the culture of making” (p. 22) claiming they “publicise particular traditions guiding the journey of food from marketplace to kitchen to table” (p. 3). It is in cookbooks and printed recipes that the slider appears to shift from a site-specific product – a square ground meat patty served on a small bun and purchased from a White Castle outlet – to a more generic baby hamburger with a multiplicity of fillings. Sobocinski (2011), for example, states “the term slider was coined by America’s oldest fast-food chain, White Castle, in 1921. Today it is ubiquitously known as any small burger than can be taken down in less than a few bites” (p. 14). As noted in the introduction to this study, Brown (2014) prefaces a recipe for turbot sliders with the descriptor “a baby fish burger” (p. 134). The data collection phase of this study, discussed in-depth in Chapter 5, determined sliders come with a diversity of fillings, from roast pork belly (White, 2013) to Thai fish cakes (Wilcox, 2014, August 4), with the unifying ingredient, in all cases, being the small slider bun, as defined in the introduction to Chapter 1. A. F. Smith (2008) observes a similar transformation of the regular-sized hamburger, “by strict definition ... a cooked ground beef patty served on a bun” (p. 46) but latterly subverted to include everything from turkey to fish to rabbit, with the addition of sauces, cheese, vegetables and pickles, to make everything from the pizza burger (p. 47) to the pineapple, cheese and no-meat “hula burger” (p. 48).

This section has determined that the origin of the word “slider” is inconclusive and possibly derogatory; however the definition of the word “slider” relies on the size of the bun (small) and its overall similarity to a hamburger. In the United States, the slider was the original mass-produced hamburger and its creator, White Castle, is credited as a precursor to the fast-food burger chains that followed. The slider’s importance to America’s food history was cemented when Begley (2014) named the White Castle slider as the most influential burger of all time, ahead of the McDonald’s burger.

## **2.2 Making taste and the cultural omnivore**

Taste is sensory: Salty, sweet, bitter and sour. It is also a matter of preference, judgement and discernment. Lane (2013) posits that both the metaphysical and gustatory definitions of taste have, at their heart, the “immediacy of pleasure or displeasure” (p. 342) and both provide a basis for the expression of preference or discrimination. Bourdieu (1979/1984) argues for a relationship between taste and social class. He determines “highbrow” culture, including an appreciation of opera, the paintings of visual art masters and the food of fine-dining restaurants, is more likely to be pursued and enjoyed by those with higher levels of education and income. Bourdieu links highbrow culture with refinement and restraint and, at the dinner table, associated the lowbrow working classes with “plain speaking, plain eating” and “elastic and abundant dishes” (p. 196) – plentiful plates of soup, potatoes and pasta that can be ladled or spooned and do not require cutting and counting. Further, Bourdieu claims the power of any particular cultural practice diminishes as more people gain access to that practice. By Bourdieu’s reckoning, the highbrow consumer requires constant feeding to retain status; they have to stay ahead of trends and create new ones before the old ones slip down the status hierarchy for consumption by the masses.

By contrast, based on research into links between social class and music tastes, Peterson and Simkus (1992) find that for modern highbrows, the “new” was not so much the discovery of the novel, but a broadening of the palate. Elite taste is redefined in their work as “an appreciation of the aesthetics of every distinctive form” (p. 169) and status is accorded to those who know about, and participate in, all levels of an art form. The researchers adopt the term “omnivore” to describe these consumers, claiming the previously held social class spectrum of “snob to slob” (p. 169) is outmoded and “the omnivore commands status by displaying a range of tastes” (p. 170). Peterson and Kern (1996) further refine the idea of cultural omnivorism, stating that it does not signify indiscriminate taste, rather “an openness to appreciating everything” (p. 904) and they identify mass media as a key influencer because of its ability to introduce the aesthetic tastes of one sector of the population to another. It must be



noted that, more recently, Rossman and Peterson (2015) have urged “considerable caution about ‘rise of the omnivore’ triumphalism” (p. 149), after a study found an unexpected decrease in the trend. The authors suggest cultural omnivorism may have been a fad that peaked in 1992 or that changes in survey methodology may have rendered “direct comparisons unreliable” (p.139. Regardless of its empirical status, as a concept cultural omnivorism has relevance to the New Zealand slider story. It positions mass media as both message-carrier and tastemaker and it provides a means of understanding the rise of what Pearlman (2013) describes as smart-casual dining, the trend that Brown successfully traded on at his restaurant, Depot, where New Zealanders first encountered the slider.

### **2.3 The rise of smart-casual dining**

Spang (2001) refers to the restaurant as a “publicly private place” (p. 86) where food is consumed “in the view and imagination of all” (p. 177). Porter (as cited in D. Bell & Valentine, 1997) recognises this central tenet of the restaurant experience:

We don't just dine out in the nineties – we live out, marking births, deaths, marriages and every possible partnership, concord, disagreement and dissolution, all within earshot of at least half a dozen strangers. (p. 126)

Brillat-Savarin (1825/1994) said we are what we eat but Finkelstein (2013) claims restaurants add another layer to this aphorism – we are also *where* we eat. In a restaurant, others see our tastes and predilections and we do not mind this. Finkelstein notes that eating, like sleeping, is necessary to life, but only one of these activities is routinely carried out in public – dining out “puts our sensibilities on display” (p. xv). Increasingly, those sensibilities have become casual. A June 14, 2019, Google search for the phrase “death of fine dining”, for example, returned 114,000 results. The New Zealand Restaurant Association's 2017 consumer dining survey (its first since 2013) found almost 50% of New Zealanders dined out at least once a week but noted 13% indicated they were increasingly choosing less expensive restaurants (Restaurant Association of New Zealand,

2017a). The Association reported restaurant and cafe sales in the 2016-17 year of \$4.6 billion (a \$174 million increase on the previous year) but noted the greatest gains had been in the cheaper, more casual takeaway food sector, up \$321 million (Restaurant Association of New Zealand, 2017b). Simon Wright, of Auckland fine-dining restaurant The French Cafe, told Knight (2017, October 21):

No-one puts a napkin over someone's lap anymore. Twenty years ago, you couldn't get into a fine-dining restaurant with a pair of jeans on. Now, jeans cost more than some people's suits ... [But] they are the breeding ground for all the chefs who are marching forward and doing their own things. (p. 11)

Pearlman (2013) argues for restaurants with a “new formality” (p. 13) with reduced emphasis on mannered rituals; a place where “the diner shows aplomb by knowing to expect the unexpected” (p. 14). In this landscape, she claims, a food truck and an exclusive restaurant can have the same gourmet credibility – for example, in 2005, a *Michelin Guide* to New York restaurants awarded a star to a no-frills pub in Greenwich Village (The Spotted Pig) and, in 2010, taco truck chef Roy Choi was named one of the United States’ top 10 best new chefs by the magazine *Food & Wine*. In Singapore, two hawker stands (serving, respectively, chicken rice and pork noodles) now have Michelin stars (Yagoda, 2018) and in New Zealand, in 2015, the Supreme Winner of the *Metro* Restaurant of the Year Awards was that year’s Best City Bistro, Depot (home of the slider), ahead of that year’s best fine-dining category winner, The French Cafe (“Auckland’s Top 50 Restaurants”, 2015). According to Pearlman (2013), in the United States an omnivorous approach to food culture emerged in the United States between 1975-85 with the likes of California’s Chez Panisse’s informal cafe ethos, and a move by chefs away from refined ‘grande cuisine’, toward what would become known as “New American” cooking.

The predilection for regional, homespun cooking was not the New American *Cuisine*’s only omnivorous legacy, however. New American chefs also embraced the opposite, appropriating food icons of mass culture ... chefs came up with new takes on mass-produced and widespread supermarket convenience foods ... such foods quickly became pop icons. (Pearlman, 2013, p. 37)

Pearlman (2013) defines this new style of restaurant as smart-casual and claims its greatest beneficiary is the former fine-dining chef. In a hushed, white tablecloth restaurant, the *maître de* is the star, but when the kitchen walls come down (often literally) in the smart-casual establishment “it’s the chef’s labour, the chef’s creativity, that’s onstage” (p. 55). Furthermore, “their versions of commonplace dishes aren’t run-of-the mill. They represent original ingredient combinations, careful house making of even the humblest components in a dish, and top quality ingredients” (p. 59). Pearlman references the smart-casual restaurant’s elevation of the pure and authentic – chefs who draw on childhood memories, who grow their own vegetables and seek to utilise every part of the animals, fish and fowl they put on their menus – alongside the creation of the novel and creative.

It is tempting to equate the success of the smart-casual restaurant to consumer hunger for nostalgia. Mennell (1996), after all, notes that nostalgia has “always been a potent force in food advertising”, citing familial utility dishes like bubble-and-squeak that now enjoy “upward mobility” (p. 327). Myriad examples of nostalgic food marketing exist in New Zealand – in 2006, for example, Tip Top produced a limited edition version of its Joy Bar ice cream (last produced in 1966) and, in 1998, Queen Anne chocolates were returned to the market for the first time since 1975 (Harvey, 2007). In 2012, a “one woman crusade” (Eriksen, 2012) that garnered almost 15,000 Facebook votes prompted biscuit company Griffin’s to revive its 1980s Chococade biscuit.

The potential power of nostalgia as a driver of consumer behaviour is harnessed in chef Al Brown’s decision to base his restaurant aesthetic on the New Zealand holiday home or “Kiwi bach”. Interestingly, Brown’s move post-dates a similar decision by national airline Air New Zealand which had invoked Kiwi nostalgia in a 2007 rebranding of its Koru Club business traveller lounges. South (2007) reports iconic components of the bach had been incorporated into the lounge refits. For example, the communal table where corporate

travellers were expected to plug in their laptops “represents the bach kitchen table where everything from card playing to gutting fish is done” (p. B20). C. Bell (1997) refers to the commercial worth of nostalgia to New Zealanders in her work on rural mythologies and the reconstructions and restorations of historic houses (and even entire villages) as tourist attractions. While accepting the past “cannot be literally recreated”, she argues that in re-making rustic appeal “tradition becomes consumable exotica” (p. 149). In the case of food nostalgia these two apparently opposing forces – tradition and exotica – are inherently consumable. Indeed, C. Bell and Neill (2014) make a case for one nostalgic New Zealand food tradition (the pie cart) as an historically “everyday social practice” that has been reinterpreted by contemporary patrons “as a fundamental site for the identification of popularly claimed national characteristics” (p. 50). Tannock (1995) offers nostalgia as “the search for continuity” (p. 456) but is careful to establish that while nostalgia involves a degree of retreat, “it can equally function as retrieval” (p. 458).

In the new smart-casual restaurant setting, chefs like Al Brown have gone back to go forward. Pearlman (2013) states that while smart-casual restaurants trade on family values and common culture, “what’s unified the rhetoric and practices of gourmet chefs has been the promotion of individuality” (p. 135). The smart-casual restaurant might invoke nostalgia but it never seeks to simply recreate the past. It relies on the reinterpreted and the novel to attract the attention necessary to create consumer hype. According to Gilbert (2014), for almost all of these restaurants “the media sends the messages, and dramatises the menus” (p. 202). That idea is more fully examined in the following section of this chapter.

## **2.4 The role of mass media in taste-making**

Suzuki and Best (2003) outline contrasting forces identified as drivers of fashions and fads – the top-down or “directional” approach (in which the social elite establish trends that eventually filter down to the masses) and a bottom-up orientation led by individuals. Both pathways require spare time and spare money. Trendsetting has, historically, required individuals with access to both. The rise of the

influence of mainstream media has subverted this. Professional critics have the time (it is literally their job) and the money (they are paid to do their job) to create trends and make taste. A particular restaurant, or even a particular restaurant's dish, may be vouched for by a diner's friends or family but, as noted by Blank (2007), "only a credible review can persuade" (p. 50). Bourdieu (1979/1984) makes the case for taste born from social class, stating an individual's education and social experiences create cultural capital or taste but Shrum (1996) argues for a "second-order" influence, generated by the professional critic. The consumer response is mediated by the published opinion of critics, whom Shrum dubs "investment counsellors" (p.57).

Blank (2007), meanwhile, claims "reviews can make or break the balance sheet of a restaurant" (p. 1) but also acknowledges a customer's decision to act on a critic's advice is voluntary. When Barrows, Lattuca and Bosselman (1989) surveyed 420 American tertiary staff, they determined the most important factor in restaurant choice was a friend's recommendation. Titz, Lanza-Abbot and Cruz (2004) argue the critic's "trained" approach may lead to unrealistic and overly elevated expectations which are not held by the ordinary consumer, stating that "to wow a critic, restaurateurs must continually reach for the next culinary or experiential high" (p. 63). Sax (2014) reiterates the pressure on the modern celebrity chef who receives "relentless media attention" (p. 66) and, in turn, is obliged to create food that is "screaming out for media attention" (p. 68). He argues food trends travel faster than they did historically because of this increased focus on chefs and their creations via dedicated food television networks, food blogs and websites and digital social networks: "Every single minutia of our dining world is being chronicled, photographed, critiqued, and commented on in a relentless cycle that has no off switch" (p. 67).

Food critics are not always employed by traditional media companies and the influence of online reviews in New Zealand is evident. In a 2017 survey of New Zealand dining habits, 32% of respondents said they consulted online reviews for information about where to eat

(Restaurant Association of New Zealand, 2017a). However, an international study that considered 1.8 million restaurant reviews posted across six online customer review websites noted the proclivity towards the “lenient and very homogenous” (Mellet, Beauvisage, Beuscart & Trespeuch, 2014, p. 27). Goodsir, Neill, Williamson and Brown (2014) claim the online review is fraught because of its lack of accountability. They place the traditional mainstream media published restaurant critic in a superior position to the “almost anyone” (p. 131) online reviewer, situating the traditional print media critic as a portal through which diners’ personal culinary and cultural capital can be extended, and self-identity further developed.

While the restaurant critic offers a specific channel of influence around restaurant dining, Mennell (1996) suggests that media (and, in particular, lifestyle magazines targeted at a largely female readership) more broadly influence the home cook. Though this is “always difficult to assess” (p. 232), he states there is value in studying women’s magazines for messages about cooking, because they are a “likely medium for stimulating the process of opinion leadership and social emulation in matters of taste in food” (p. 233). Nestle et al. (1998) suggest that while cultural values and social influences impact on an individual’s food choices, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of media as “a principal source of information about food and nutrition for many people. In addition, the media have the capacity to persuade” (pp. S51-S52).

The media’s role in the making of food trends potentially, then, encompasses multiple phases – the emergence of a food or dish in a restaurant context where it is judged by professional critics, followed by more general news stories and reportage around new trends, through to the development and publication of versions of the restaurant dish in recipes that allow the home cook to emulate what they have read about (and may have been prompted to experience themselves) in the original restaurant critique phase of media examination.

## **2.5 Interim summary**

This chapter has determined that the slider, in its original context, was a small hamburger created by an American fry-cook around 1916 and popularised by the fast food chain White Castle (established in 1921). The slider's distinguishing feature is its diminutive size – small enough to “buy ‘em by the sack” (Hogan, 1999, p. 27). The origin of the word slider is unclear, with theories ranging from the ease in which the greasy baby burger slides down the throat, to the way in which its meat patty slides across the grill in the cooking process. Consumers appear to have adopted the word slider ahead of its creator, with no indication that White Castle used the descriptor in official advertising or packaging until the 1980s. Meanwhile, contemporary cookbooks have embraced the idea of the slider as a baby burger, with its defining characteristic the size of the bun, rather than its filling.

Concepts of taste and class have been discussed in this chapter and the shift towards ideas of cultural omnivorism (and a rejection of Bourdieu's theory that highbrow culture is consumed by those with higher education and income) is noted. Cultural omnivorism, in which the new elite claim social status by rejecting snobbery in favour of a broad range of tastes, is considered as a possible factor in the rise of smart-casual dining, a restaurant trend first noted in the United States in the mid-1970s. The power of nostalgia as a food marketing tool was discussed, and its potential role in the rise of smart-casual restaurants was also examined. Ultimately, it was determined that while smart-casual chefs draw inspiration from the past, it is their individual and novel approaches to those dishes that drive success. Mass media has been posited as a messenger of these new dishes and the importance of media food critics as tastemakers (and breakers) was argued. This chapter also reported that no academic research into the New Zealand slider could be found, setting the scene for the development of a methodological framework for a research project that might begin to address that gap. Chapter 3 of this dissertation outlines that methodological framework.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

Crotty (1998) defines “methodology” as a bridge connecting theoretical perspectives with concrete research tasks such as the gathering of data and its subsequent analysis. This methodology chapter explains the research foundation of this dissertation, including its ontological and epistemological underpinnings, the selection of the research paradigm and the methods used.

### **3.1 Research questions**

As discussed in the introduction, this research aimed to explain why the slider stuck, addressing the following questions:

- How was the slider introduced, popularised and embedded within New Zealand’s gastronomic culture?
- Why was the slider introduced, popularised and embedded within New Zealand’s gastronomic culture?
- How can gastronomic theory be applied to understanding the slider’s popularity?
- Can this understanding be further applied to explain aspects of New Zealand’s gastronomic identity?

### **3.2 Ontology, epistemology and research paradigms**

A paradigm assists a researcher to determine what will (and will not) be studied, and influences the collection of data and interpretation of results (Bryman, 2015). B. M. Grant and Giddings (2002) define a paradigm as a framework built from the theoretical and methodological beliefs that best support the resolution of a specific problem or particular question. Thus, specific paradigms are created by logical connections between corresponding ontological and epistemological beliefs and methodological choices that allow research to unfold in a systematic manner (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Ontology is the beginning; a study of the nature of being that is sometimes described as a “world-view” (Crotty, 1998). A researcher’s ontological perspective informs the way fundamental questions are answered: What is reality? Does the world exist independent to human action and thought (as per a realist ontology) or, as stated by



those with a relativist ontology, because of those actions and thoughts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)? While the realist believes a single objective truth can be discovered, the relativist acknowledges multiple versions of reality can be understood, dependent on a person's interactions, experiences and perceptions (Gray, 2013).

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It encompasses an understanding of how people know what they know and provides a basis for justifying the legitimacy and adequacy of that understanding (Gray, 2013). Lavery (2003) describes this as a critical evaluation asking: "What is the relationship between the knower and what can be known?" (p. 26). Crotty (1998) suggests a framework that links an ontological perspective to particular and specific epistemologies which are briefly discussed here:

*Objectivism* (aligned to a realist ontology) is about facts, including those still to be discovered. A researcher cannot influence these truths (Bryman, 2015).

*Constructivism* (aligned to a relativist ontology) is the idea that meaning is made, not found; the world is under construction by its inhabitants who make meaning as they interpret and engage with their surroundings (Crotty, 1998).

*Subjectivism* (aligned to a relativist ontology) also relies on the idea that meaning is constructed by humans but, in this epistemology, internal values – created by social, cultural and religious mores or dreams and the subconscious – are imposed on the external world (Gray, 2013).

A research paradigm must make sense within the context of the phenomenon that is being studied. It must link complementary ontologies, epistemologies and methodological decisions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A positivist paradigm, for example, is the logical umbrella for a realist ontology and an objectivist epistemology. Positivism is the paradigm of choice for those who seek empirical proofs. Under this paradigm, scientific experiments can be deployed

to test hypotheses; results are replicable and verifiable (B. M. Grant & Giddings, 2002). Post-positivism shifts the research paradigm to a position acknowledging that while knowledge comprises currently accepted facts, those facts might change; that more facts may be discoverable if the right search tools are deployed (B. M. Grant & Giddings, 2002). Paradigms built on a relativist ontology include interpretivism and critical theory. Gray (2013) suggests the latter is more often adopted by researchers who are considering power imbalances (class, race, gender and the like) and who may be attempting to bring about social change. Interpretivism is the paradigm most associated with qualitative research. Where positivism takes a 'just-the-facts-thank-you' approach, interpretivism allows for the multi-faceted nature of humanity, considering varied cultural, social and historical values and perspectives (Crotty, 1998). Under this paradigm, knowledge is gleaned via interactions between the research subject and the researcher; attempts to ascribe meaning and reach understandings are influenced by the researcher's own thoughts and values (B. M. Grant & Giddings, 2002).

### **3.3 Paradigm choice**

The research questions identified earlier ask why and how the slider was introduced, popularised and embedded. These types of questions explore perceptions of opinion, necessitating the selection of a relativist ontology that allows for a world view made by human interactions and experiences. Judgements of taste (why did the slider stick?) are subjective and intrinsic to the individual. A realist might state "that is a slider" but the subjective relativist builds on this fact when they consider whether they like or dislike the slider, what it reminds them of and what they think about when they eat it. The slider's stickability is influenced by consumer opinion and there may be as many opinions as there are consumers. These opinions may, in turn, be moderated or calculated against the receiver's individual experiences and values which may, in turn, have been influenced by others. Consideration of the slider's stickability creates (and requires) a multiplicity of world views.

Binding the research question to multiple human interpretations and a relativist ontology leads to the selection of a constructivist epistemology. The mere existence of the slider may not guarantee its longevity; the slider's meaning is constructed by consumers. In considering the popularisation of a phenomenon, the researcher is aligning with a constructivist epistemology and the idea that human experience and interaction have the power to make or break a trend. Considering how any ideas relating to the stickability of the slider might be applied to understanding New Zealand's developing gastronomic identity indicates further alignment with a constructivist epistemology, in the sense that the researcher accepts the world is a changing, dynamic place.

A relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology lead to the selection of an interpretivist paradigm. The nature of the research questions ("how" and "why") indicate the study will favour words over numbers; thought and opinion over indisputable fact. This paradigm also supposes interaction between the researcher and researched. It allows for the collection of multiple viewpoints before meaning is interpreted by the researcher who, in recognising the inevitable influence of her own values and human experiences, justifies an interpretive approach.

### **3.4 Qualitative research methodology**

The philosophical positioning outlined above is consistent with qualitative research studies. Bailey (2014) notes the identifying features of qualitative research include the use of "why" and "how" questions, interviews and an interpretative approach from the researcher. Miller and Deutsch (2009) suggest qualitative researchers consider human behaviour can be dynamic, fluid and "highly situational over time and place" (p.18) and that qualitative research deploys a "widely angled focus" (p. 21) requiring interaction with research subjects. The researcher, in this sense, becomes the data collection tool. A qualitative research approach is deemed useful when a researcher is attempting to understand behaviours or considering a phenomenon about which relatively little has been previously reported (Miller & Deutsch, 2009). While noting the historic

weight placed on quantitative research in certain so-called “hard” science fields (including mathematics, chemistry and physics), Guba and Lincoln (1994) make a case for the collection of qualitative data, asserting it can provide “rich insight” (p. 106) into the meanings and purposes that humans attach to their actions. Creswell (2013) suggests that to present qualitative investigation as “sophisticated study”, a specific approach must be selected (p. 69). Smythe (2012) also states that a named approach is useful because “it dictates so much about how to conduct the research” (p. 5) and also assists to manage the reader’s expectations. Complex methodologies, for example, may not be suited to the time constraints of certain academic qualifications as “there are no half measures in a named methodological approach” (p. 5).

This dissertation draws on a descriptive interpretive methodology described by Smythe (2012) as suitable “where the researcher wishes to hear the voices of people, analyse the themes and present a thoughtful overview of results” (p. 5). Smythe notes the absence of theoretical underpinnings; however, Galliers and Land (1987) locate the methodology within the traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics, in that data analysis necessitates description and researcher bias. A phenomenological approach was considered but rejected given its requirement for continuous bracketing and reduction of interview data to structures and essence (Polkinghorne, 1989). The New Zealand slider is an unexplored item of academic research and, at this point in time, there are a limited number of experts who could be consulted on this research topic. Arguably, at this time in the slider’s evolution, research may be better served by those expert voices being heard more fully, with a research methodology that allows for the use of direct quotations over “essence”. Sandelowski (2000) provides reassurance around the selection of a qualitative descriptive approach, labelling it “a method that researchers can claim unashamedly without resorting to methodological acrobatics” (p. 335).

### **3.5 Data collection, sample and analysis**

Curtis and Curtis (2011) advise that interviews are most beneficial when researchers are investigating topics about which not much is known. Semi-structured interviews with key informants allow for the “probing of views and opinions where it is desirable for respondents to expand on their answers” (Gray, 2013, p. 217). Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) suggest that choosing interview subjects with the greatest knowledge of the research topic both assists with validity and reduces the risk of having to sift through extraneous data. Given the three-pronged approach to the research question – the introduction, popularisation and embeddedness of the slider – and the relative dearth of written material relating to each of these areas, interviews with a key informant in each of these areas was sought. The slider has been posited as a relatively new item of gastronomic material culture within the New Zealand landscape and the pool of participants who could be considered to have expert knowledge of the research phenomenon was limited. Participants were selected on the basis of their food industry status and their expert knowledge of New Zealand’s gastronomic environment but, more importantly, for their direct, specific and significant personal involvement in the New Zealand slider story. The identification of these participants, as respective experts in three distinct phases of the slider’s “stickability”, was considered central to the validity of the research. Approval for the identification of participants by name was sought, and granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC) on July 19, 2018 (18/270 - Why the slider stuck: How a baby fish burger captured a nation’s palate). The participants who were approached for interview were:

- Al Brown: The chef who is widely acknowledged as having introduced the slider to New Zealand when he included it on the menu of his inaugural Auckland restaurant, Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery (Brown, 2014).
- Sean Armstrong: The Auckland-based owner of Loaf Handcrafted Breads, the commercial baker Brown approached to create a bespoke slider bun that was subsequently released for public sale (Loaf Handcrafted Breads, 2012)

- Ginny Grant: A contributing food editor and restaurant critic for *Cuisine*, New Zealand's best-read food magazine, a publication described as "one of the dominant voices in New Zealand's culinary culture" (Williamson, Tregidga, Harris & Keen, 2009, p. 57) and (as far as the research determined) the first magazine to publish a recipe for home-cooked sliders (F. Smith, 2012, November).

An interview schedule (see Appendix A) that would allow for a semi-structured, conversational approach was devised, with questions guided by a preliminary review of relevant academic literature around the development and uptake of food and restaurant trends. An initial email approach was made to participants, and all three indicated they would be willing to take part in an interview as named experts in their particular fields. Participants signed a consent form giving approval to be identified (Appendix B), and interviews were conducted between October and December 2018. Participants were given the option of a face-to-face or telephone meeting. Armstrong chose the latter, while Brown and Grant opted to meet in public cafe/restaurant spaces (Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery and Scratch Bakery, respectively). Interviews ranged between 30-90 minutes duration and were recorded as digital MP3 files before being downloaded onto the researcher's laptop and transcribed by her. Participants were asked to outline their personal experiences with the slider, and to proffer expert opinion on its appeal or otherwise, using the interview questions outlined in Appendix A as prompts. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for approval, and no changes or additions were requested. Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee approval for this research was received (see Appendix C).

Once transcribed, a qualitative thematic analysis was applied to the interviews. Gray (2013) suggests categorising interview data by three classes – common, special and theoretical. Because of the specificity of the participants' knowledge in relation to the slider, the "common" category was less applicable and direct quotations from the interview transcripts were separated into those that could be described as

“special” (a participant’s specialist knowledge) and “theoretical” (quotes that resonated with the gastronomic theories of class, taste, influence and nostalgia previously discussed in the literature review). Interview transcripts were analysed for commonalities that led to the identification of themes that all three participants had cited as potential and/or likely factors in the slider’s appeal. Once these themes had been identified, specific participant quotes were extracted to illuminate and support these themes. The use of direct quotes could be labelled “manifest analysis”, described by Bengtsson (2016) as a situation where the researcher “stays very close to the text, uses the words themselves, and describes the visible and obvious in the text” (p. 10). However, given the participant interviews were semi-structured, conversational and influenced somewhat by the themes already identified in the literature review, the analysis undertaken was latent – quotations were selected for their ability to support themes. Babbie (2015) states that latent analysis is better designed for “tapping the underlying meaning of communication” (p. 329) but notes this can come at the cost of specificity and reliability. Walters (2016) reiterates this, stating that thematic analysis can be valuable where “rich descriptive prose that paints a word picture” (p.108) is to be interpreted and the researcher wishes to unpack latent or potentially hidden meanings – but care must be taken to ensure this analysis is not at the cost of credibility and confirmability. In this case, the themes that were identified as key drivers of the slider’s success were independently supported by all three participants. While this consistency of response gives some assurance as to the reliability of the data, the participant responses are, by nature, subjective, and their meanings (as per the interpretative paradigm selected for this project) are, to a certain extent, being made in collaboration with the researcher. To that end, an additional (and more quantifiable) data source was introduced to this project in the form of a content analysis of food-related media publications.

Osborne (1990) describes descriptive interpretive research data as “descriptions of experience” (p. 82) sourced from interviews, conversations and written material. Given the absence of published

academic material on the New Zealand slider, along with the theoretical notion (ascertained in the literature review) that media was likely to have had a role in influencing public uptake of the slider beyond its original restaurant setting, this research project also included a content analysis of three New Zealand media publications. Downe-Wamboldt (2009) states that content analysis provides for the systematic and objective production of inferences from a variety of data sources – including visual, verbal and written – to explain a specific phenomenon. This analysis, however, should not be reduced to merely counting the occurrence of words or sentences: “To describe the occurrences of words, phrases, or sentences without consideration of the contextual environment of the data is inappropriate and inadequate” (p. 314).

For this research, three New Zealand media publications were selected as units of analysis to be studied across a six-year period (2010-2015). The time period chosen encompassed a pre- and post-slider New Zealand and included key dates in the slider’s evolution – the opening of Depot; the release of slider buns into high-end grocery stores; and the launch of the Depot cookbook which featured a recipe for the “original” New Zealand slider. The publications selected for analysis were:

- *Cuisine*: New Zealand’s first and longest running large-circulation magazine devoted entirely to food and wine. It has an audited readership of 256,000 (the highest of any locally produced premium magazine in the food and recipe space) that skews 65% female. Readers have an average annual household income of \$125,000 (*Cuisine: For the love of NZ food*, 2018). By comparison, in the year ended June 2018, the average annual household income for all New Zealanders was \$105,719 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018).
- *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*: Launched in 1932, it is New Zealand’s most-read newsstand magazine, with a weekly reach of 546,000 readers. Its lifestyle content spans celebrity news, gardening, beauty, cookery and more. Readers have an average household income of \$87,917. It is described as “the number one magazine news stand magazine for



reaching New Zealanders who have tried a new recipe or cooked a meal from scratch in the last seven days” (Bauer Media Advertising, 2018, p. 3).

- *Viva*: A midweek magazine inserted into the *New Zealand Herald*, Auckland’s daily newspaper. In 2018, it had a readership of 223,000-plus and was described as a “cultural barometer” of fashion, culture, travel, design, beauty and food (“About *Viva*”, 2018). No recent socio-economic demographic information for the publication could be found, but a 2014 media kit stated that 45% of *Viva* readers chose to pay more for top quality food (New Zealand Media and Entertainment, 2019).

Two of the three publications (*Cuisine* and the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*) were available for hard copy scrutiny at the Research Centre of the Auckland Library. *Viva* content was accessed via digital searches of its host newspaper, the *New Zealand Herald*.

In cautioning against content analysis as a mere counting exercise, Downe-Wamboldt (2009) suggests researchers should be concerned “with meanings, intentions, consequences, and context” (p. 314).

While the aim of the content analysis was to determine the occurrence of slider recipes for home cooks (a straightforward counting exercise), the existence of *Cuisine* and the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* as physical hard-copy magazines meant important contextual material could also be collected – headlines, photographs, and the text introductions and explanations printed alongside the quantifiable recipes for both sliders and hamburgers. The researcher read the food sections of 260 *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* magazines and the entirety of 60 *Cuisine* magazines, making detailed notes of references to sliders and hamburgers. Entries were coded according to story type (recipe/in-text reference/caption/etc) and, in the case of recipes, key component descriptors (i.e., filling type and bun/bread type) were noted. This approach allowed for the creation of Tables 1 and 2 showing the key components and temporal distribution of sliders and hamburgers across the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* and *Cuisine*, and the collation of a master list (see Appendices, Table A1) that may provide useful insight for

any future research projects on either the hamburger or slider in the New Zealand context. *Viva* magazine content was excluded from this detailed analysis as this publication was only accessible via online keyword searches of its parent newspaper website ([www.nzherald.co.nz](http://www.nzherald.co.nz)) and it was not possible, for example, to view articles or recipes that appeared alongside references to sliders. In this case, the search phrases “slider”, “Al Brown” and “Depot” were used to determine occurrences of slider recipes; however, this also picked up the slider’s appearance in lifestyle news stories and restaurant reviews, increasing the depth of understanding around the slider’s transition from the unknown to something more commonplace.

### **3.6 Ethics and study limitations**

Ethics approval for this study was sought and approved (18/270 - Why the slider stuck: How a baby fish burger captured a nation’s palate, granted July 19, 2018). As part of that application, the researcher (myself) was identified as a journalist and restaurant critic with some familiarity of the Auckland hospitality scene, albeit as an outsider. My employer (the *New Zealand Herald*) was made aware of and is supportive of this dissertation research. Ethics approval was initially granted to interview four individuals, including an additional food writer. Halfway through the study period, the wealth of material that had been garnered from interviews with three participants and the canvassing of three mainstream media publications (some 320 hard copy publications across the six-year survey period), plus associated digital newspaper searches, was deemed sufficient material for the time and word count constraints of a 60-point dissertation.

It should be noted there are other New Zealand food media and lifestyle publications (though none with the longevity of *Cuisine* and *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*) that were not analysed as part of this research project and that the participants who were interviewed were universally positive in their support of the slider – perhaps not surprisingly, given two (Brown and Armstrong) had a direct commercial interest in the success of product. This enthusiasm is

somewhat tempered by the statements from one particular restaurant reviewer collected via the content analysis. It could have been useful to have sought an interview with that individual; however, time constraints did not allow for that. The most obvious limitation of the study is that it did not canvas the opinion of the general populace on the slider as a new foodstuff. This was beyond the scope and scale of this dissertation. In addition, there have been new developments in the New Zealand slider story since the study began. In January 2019 (after key informant interviews and data collection had been completed), the researcher noticed billboard and television advertising for a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) slider and, in May, found a restaurant menu listing for a dessert slider that comprised a deep-fried bao (bun) filled with ice cream. Further consumer-based interviews may have provided insight into how the uptake of a slider by a fast-food company, or its subversion by other restaurants, might affect the future of the slider, given it first entered New Zealand's gastronomic landscape on an upmarket restaurant menu.

### **3.8 Interim summary**

Braun and Clarke (2006) note that flexibility is “one of the benefits of thematic analysis” (p. 78); however, they urge the researcher to be clear about how data is analysed and to be explicit about epistemological positioning and other such assumptions. This chapter has outlined the research foundation of a dissertation that seeks to understand why the slider stuck – how and why the slider was introduced, popularised and embedded. The answers to these questions are, potentially, multiple. They are bound in human interpretation, with the consideration of “how” and “why” questions indicating the need for a research programme that allowed for due consideration of the study participants' words and opinions and, further, allowed the researcher to interact with those participants to make and interpret meaning.

To that end, the researcher selected a relativist ontology, a constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist paradigm for this project. A descriptive interpretive methodology was selected as an appropriate mechanism for the completion of a research study within

the time and word count constraints of a 60-point master's dissertation. Ethics approval was sought and granted for the interview of named key participants who each represented a crucial stage in the introduction, popularisation and embeddedness of the slider. In addition, three major New Zealand media publications were selected for content analysis over a six-year period encompassing a pre- and post-slider gastronomic landscape.

Discussion and analysis of participant interviews and the media content analysis will be presented in Chapter 5. Ahead of this however, Chapter 4 provides context and background to the arrival of the slider in New Zealand. It includes a brief discussion of New Zealand's food heritage, making a case for an early acceptance of American foodstuffs (including the introduction of the slider's close cousin, the hamburger), an outline of chef Al Brown's transition from fine-dining aficionado at Wellington restaurant Logan Brown to purveyor of nostalgia at Auckland's Depot, and details the mechanics of the slider's arrival and the subsequent commercial production of the slider bun in New Zealand.

## **CHAPTER 4. EATING AT THE NEW ZEALAND TABLE**

Food trends do not develop in a vacuum. Woodward (2007) notes that material culture “is always contextualised within particular time and space settings” (p. 59). He states unanimous and universal readings of items of material culture may be problematic without access to the creator’s intentions, without the cultural know-how or specialist skills required to interpret the meaning of the item and without knowledge of the particular time and space, both literally and socially, in which items were constructed for use. Accordingly, in attempting to understand why the New Zealand slider stuck, it is useful to consider the gastronomic context in which this item of edible material culture developed. This chapter details the slider’s arrival in New Zealand and introduces the chef (Al Brown) and baker (Sean Armstrong) who were key to its introduction and dissemination. This chapter also provides important context for the public acceptance of the slider, highlighting the early uptake of American food traditions by New Zealanders – an aspect of the country’s food history that has, historically, been less emphasised in favour of United Kingdom immigrant-driven narratives.

### **4.1 From postcolonial “meat-and-three” to international smorgasbord**

The idea that New Zealand’s gastronomic bedrock is a meal of meat and three over-cooked vegetables is perpetuated by major writings on the country’s postcolonial food scene. Burton (2009) and Simpson (1999) do not ignore the fact that indigenous Māori settlement predates a major European influx by several centuries, but they do propose a contemporary national food identity shaped by immigrants from the United Kingdom rather than the indigenous Māori residents of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Orange (2011) notes that in 1839, permanent non-Māori settlers totalled 2000. At the same time, the country’s Māori population was estimated at anything from 90,000 to 200,000; however, by 1860, European (Pākehā) immigrants outnumbered Maori. In 1871, the Pākehā population was 256,393 and growing, and in 1874, the Māori population was 45,470 and declining (Orange, 2011). Between 1870 and 1875, more than 100,000 immigrants from England, Scotland and Wales settled in

New Zealand, leading Simpson (1999) to assert that the origins of the country's food culture "are to be found, of course, in the long tradition of European, and particularly English and Scottish, food which our forebears brought here with them" (p. 13).

Burton (2009) describes the 19th century New Zealand culinary landscape as dull and unimaginative ("how the early sheep farmers must have cursed the monotony of their diet", p. 47) and notes the pre-World War 2 arrival of Greek and Italian political refugees who opened food business but were forced to cook "in the rather dull New Zealand tradition of mixed grills, chops, eggs, steak and chips, tinned spaghetti on toast, and the like" (p. 62). Not all food historians support this narrative. Keen (2012), for example, emphasises the use of fresh and seasonal produce by New Zealand home cooks:

I kept hearing that old Kiwi food consisted of little more than overcooked mutton and soggy vegetables ... in fact, New Zealand's old recipe books are full of variety, and include seasonal treats like asparagus and strawberries. Most households, even in town, had large vegetable and fruit gardens, and many kept hens. Rural families often had a house cow as well, so there was an abundance of fresh homegrown and locally produced ingredients – features we now admire in, say, Italian cooking, but have forgotten were also part of our own food. (p. 7)

Meanwhile, Rowland (2010) cautions against wholesale acceptance of the idea that New Zealand restaurants ignored international cuisine, arguing that at least one cuisine – American – did gain a foothold:

Some food writers have regretted the 'conservative tastes' of the early twentieth-century New Zealanders who did not encourage Greek and Italian immigrants to introduce their native dishes within their restaurants. But these writers did not recognise the influence that American foods had on New Zealand tastes at the time, especially the salad bars and gourmet hamburgers. (p. 4)

Leach (2010) notes that when New Zealand newspapers began to routinely publish recipes from the late 1860s, many of those recipes were sourced from the United States. She determined that, in one six-month period spanning 1874-75, some 20% of the recipes printed

in the *Otago Witness* were American in origin. Leach states “Pakeha showed an openness to American technology and American recipes that was not apparent in Britain” (p. 43). Leach surmises that in the reproduction of recipes from both America and Australia, a kind of kinship with fellow colonists to the so-called New Worlds may have been expressed and “though Britain was still ‘home’, the emigrants had left it for good reasons” (p. 48). She notes that *Brett’s’ Colonists’ Guide and Cyclopaedia* (the 1883 bible for new immigrants to New Zealand) includes recipes for Virginia cornbread, Maryland biscuits, Indian huckleberry pudding and refers to the American molasses, rather than the British treacle. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully unpick the influences of international cuisine on the history of New Zealand food, but it is clear the story is more complicated than the ‘meat-and-three-boiled-vege’ narrative of the United Kingdom immigration wave. The foods of Europe’s Mediterranean immigrants may well have been shunned, but Rowland (2010) and Leach (2010) demonstrate Pākehā New Zealanders were, nonetheless, interested in dishes from beyond the British homeland and especially those dishes from America – a potentially important point in understanding the popularisation of the slider almost a full two centuries later.

Burton (2009) does, eventually, acknowledge a kind of gastronomic coming of age in the 1980s, when New Zealand’s entertainment and dining options expanded with the opening of more nightclubs, cinemas and live music venues. Simpson (1999) concedes that any New Zealander born post-1970 would not recognise the diet of their forebears. Similarly, Veart (2008) argues there were more changes in New Zealand’s food culture in the decades after 1970 than for the entire previous century. He writes that, by the 1990s:

The development of New Zealand’s second national cuisine by a group of largely Anglo-Scottish colonists sitting at the bottom of the Polynesian triangle has evolved to the point where ingredients and recipes from throughout the world are here and being used, and the cookbooks are filled with international foods. (p. 298)

Withers (cited in Rowland, 2010) determined that, in 1981, 39% of the eateries listed in the Auckland telephone directory were linked to a specific ethnic origin. A decade later, that figure had risen to 46% and by 1997, it had increased to 56% (representing 270 outlets). No comparable data beyond this time could be found, though it is clear that, regardless of ethnic specialisation, dining out opportunities have continued to increase dramatically – in 2016, there were 6,438 cafe, restaurant, pub, tavern, bar, club and catering businesses in the Auckland region alone (Restaurant Association of New Zealand, 2017a).

C. Smith, Gray, Mainvil, Fleming and Parnell (2015) attribute the newly internationalised New Zealand diet to multiple factors, including the increased ethnic diversity of residents, increased overseas travel, the globalisation of the world's food supply and the rapidity with which information about food is now communicated. Veart (2008) describes what this looks like at street level on his daily commute along Auckland's Queen Street where, he writes, he can now buy everything from Portuguese chicken to Chinese dumplings, Turkish lahmacun to Japanese sashimi, and hamburgers from "McDonalds, Burger King or Wendy's" (p. 296). It is interesting to note that while Veart geographically locates sashimi (Japan), lahmacun (Turkey) and so on, when it comes to burgers, he simply states brand names. Hamburgers, apparently, need no country of origin introduction, perhaps because, as Ozersky (2009) notes, "nothing says American like a hamburger" (p. 2). A. F. Smith (2008), meanwhile, describes the "fakelore" (p. 10) that surrounds the invention of the hamburger, stating no single claim can be supported by primary evidence; however, he is satisfied the hamburger first appeared in the United States "as a minor street food in the late nineteenth century" (p. 9). Its first appearance in New Zealand is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

## **4.2 Hello hamburgers**

Rowland (2010) acknowledges the early uptake of American foods, and especially the hamburger, by New Zealanders. Chef Al Brown draws on this familiarity to define the item that will become his



signature dish, describing the Depot slider as “a baby fish burger” (Brown, 2014, p. 134) and, on his website refers to the slider as “the soft bite-sized cousin of the hamburger” (Al Brown & Co, 2019a, para 1). In Knight (2014), he makes a definitive link between hamburgers, sliders, and their American heritage.

I came across it 20 years ago in Boston in a sports bar and I thought these are great, a tiny little hamburger called a slider. I thought that's cute, write that down, we'll use that some time. Boom, did it here, and now, yeah, it's one of the signature dishes. And it's so ironic. You know, it's a bloody hamburger (p. 8).

The introduction of hamburgers to New Zealand is generally associated with the 1942 arrival of American troops, stationed in the Pacific after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Roger (1981) reports on the birth of The Frisco, the Auckland hamburger bar where one worker recalled making up to 100 dozen hamburgers a night to satisfy the demands of American soldiers on leave. According to Roger, The Frisco was where “Auckland discovered hamburgers” (p. 48). Aligning New Zealand’s hamburger culture to an influx of soldiers from the country where hamburgers originated makes intuitive sense, but a literature search indicates hamburgers were being sold in New Zealand prior to World War II. When Neill et al. (2008) interviewed Joyce Washer, the wife of the founder of Auckland’s oldest (and still operational) food truck The White Lady, she recalled:

Before the war, Bertie Pearce opened a hamburger shop opposite the chief post office in Queen Street. I will never forget my first hamburger there. First he toasted the bun, then buttered it, added lettuce, beetroot, tomato and the fried mince meat patty, topped with generous lashings of fried onions (Washer, as cited in Neill et al., 2008, pp. 39-40)

This pre-war positioning of the hamburger is further verified via PapersPast, a searchable digital archive of historic newspapers managed by New Zealand’s National Library. It reveals hamburger bars existed in New Zealand from at least January 1938, when the arrival of this new food phenomena was reported in the *Auckland Star*:

Young men in green sports coats and suede shoes, puffed rice and baked beans, and, of course, the universal predilection for gangster films, have long been cited as tangible evidence that New Zealand is slowly but surely succumbing to the doubtful influence of the United States. The opening of a hamburger bar in Queen Street is expected to raise an outcry from stalwarts who maintain that the Dominion should develop its own culture and eradicate outside influences. For the guidance of the less serious-minded, however, it is stated that the correct pronunciation is 'hamboiger'. (Mercutio, 1938, p. 30)

Contrary to the views of some culinary historians that the only foreign cuisine New Zealanders had fully embraced before the 1970s was that inherited from English and Scottish forebears, it is clear that American food – particularly in the form of the hamburger – had also been cooked, eaten and commented on since at least 1938. When chef Al Brown introduced his fish slider as a cousin to the hamburger, he was cashing in on both this familiarity and New Zealand's long-standing acceptance of American cuisine.

#### **4.3 Enter the slider (and meet Al Brown)**

Chef Al Brown grew up on a sheep and beef farm in the Wairarapa region of New Zealand where he learned to hunt and fish, and to kill and prepare animals for eating. Family holidays were on the Wairarapa coast at Castlepoint, first in tents and caravans, and later in the ramshackle holiday homes that New Zealanders call the bach. Brown (2014) writes that these humble buildings with tiny bathrooms and bunk room bedrooms have, at their heart, a kitchen – and, by association, food and hospitality:

Warm scones for morning tea, friends arriving with cake, tins of treats, the kettle constantly being filled and the sink full of soapy water where cups and saucers were washed, dried and recycled throughout the day. Lunches of white bread, chilled crayfish, iceberg lettuce with condensed milk mayonnaise. (p. 18)

This then, was the hospitality vision Brown poured into Depot Eatery & Oyster Bar (Depot), the restaurant he opened in Auckland in 2011. His inaugural Auckland restaurant followed a long stint at Wellington's Logan Brown where Brown and co-owner Steve Logan had also made their first foray into television and the realm of the

celebrity chef. Between 2006-2008, three seasons of the television show *Hunger for the Wild* were produced for the national broadcaster, TVNZ. In the show, Brown and Logan leave their fine-dining restaurant and drive a 1964 Holden around New Zealand, stopping to forage wild food and cook it alongside the locals they meet on the way. Rowland (2010) considers *Hunger for the Wild* one of the catalysts for a shift in aesthetic at Logan Brown which went from white tablecloths and hushed tones, to a looser, more casual dining style:

When grandness, formality and exclusivity failed to connect with diners, tapping into Kiwi traditions of 'good blokes', heading back to nature and a 'rough and tumble' sense of equality enabled Logan Brown to become emblematic of the New Zealand restaurant experience. (p. 237)

For his part, Brown (as cited in Dixon, 2014) claimed he had never really enjoyed the fine-dining scene and that Depot was where "I've sort of found myself as a cook" (p. 10). Brown further remarked:

I actually didn't like fine dining, I found I didn't like it. It felt a little bit fraudulent compared to where I am now. I thought that's what I wanted, that if I wanted to be a cook then I wanted to be the best cook. At the time fine dining was the pinnacle. So you had to be that. But once I got up there, I looked around ... and went "actually it's not what I want. It doesn't fit my character because actually my character is just this bloody happy-go-lucky, fun guy who loves doing food and service." (as cited in Dixon, 2014, p. 10).

When Brown opened Depot on August 13, 2011, the restaurant served up to 350 covers a night, with as many as 200 people on the waitlist across any given day (Brown, 2014). Dixon (2014) identifies Depot as having a smart-casual vibe. The wine is poured from bar taps and served in tumblers, cutlery is stashed in old mackerel cans, and no table bookings are allowed. The atmosphere is relaxed, but this is still a full-service restaurant where, in June 2019, a single Bluff oyster cost \$6.50 and a plate of three sliders, \$20 (Al Brown & Co, 2019b). This approach was novel enough to warrant mention in media coverage of the new restaurant's opening, but it is evident every one of these features is deliberate. Brown (2014) states that in Depot, he set out to create more than a restaurant:

Underestimate the importance of creating a brand for a product or a project, no matter how big or small, at your own peril. You can't stand next to your brand 24/7 ... it has to stand proudly on its own two feet and tell that story itself. (p. 37)

For Brown's venture to be successful, he had to create a brand, and that brand, he writes, is the Kiwi bach: "Vision: Depot = Bach" (p. 27). If the Depot aesthetic is the Kiwi bach, then its menu is built around the food Brown (2014) describes as "down and dirty", in which he takes the casual, street staples of hot dogs and tacos and elevates them to a culinary level "that no one in their right mind could bag or criticise" (p. 81). The slider is the most successful example of this practice. Depot Chef Hayden Scott (as cited in Brown, 2014) recalls that, in the test kitchen stages, "sliders were made from supermarket burger buns cut into a smaller size" (p. 82). The importance of those buns to the success of the slider is emphasised by Brown (2014):

The filling is the given – fresh fish, fresh watercress and home-made preserved lemon mayonnaise – however, the master stroke is the soft roll that has turned these humble little mini burgers into one of Depot's signature dishes. (p. 81)

#### **4.4 Taking it to the people**

Dixon (2014) states that, from the beginning, Brown's sliders were "wildly popular" (p. 8). Figures included in the appendix to Brown's 2014 book *Depot: Biography of a Restaurant (With Recipes)* support this. In a single year, some 104,025 fish sliders were served (by contrast, over the same period, the restaurant sold 20,500 fish tacos). That success prompted Loaf Handcrafted Breads (Loaf), the company that had developed the original bespoke slider bun for Depot, to make the slider available as a retail offer at high-end New Zealand grocery stores. In June 2012, Loaf owner and baker Sean Armstrong announced on his company website that the slider buns he had created in partnership with Brown would be available for public purchase. In a press release, Armstrong defined the slider as a small burger bun and traced its origins to 1920s America and the White Castle burger chain. The press release describes the slider as delicate, soft and a little sweet:

They're great as a gourmet canapé, at the beach and bach, and for quick snacks. And being square, they fit perfectly in school lunchboxes. They're easy to prepare – eat straight from the pack or grill, toast or warm before stuffing with your favourite filling. (Loaf Handcrafted Breads, 2012.)

The Loaf press release was accompanied by slider recipes devised by Brown. They ranged from “The Depot” (the same fish, preserved lemon mayo and watercress recipe employed at Brown’s restaurant) to a meatball-loaded “The Don” and a slow-cooked and shredded-pork version called “The Swine”. Meanwhile, “The White Trash” was a dessert slider stuffed with jam and sweetened whipped cream. The Loaf slider was sold in packs of eight and came with a smartphone QR code that could be scanned to access more recipe ideas. On Loaf’s website, there was a “how to” video of Brown and Armstrong preparing sliders, and consumers were invited to post slider recipe ideas on Facebook in order to go into a draw to win a Depot voucher and the chance to have their slider creation on the restaurant menu for a week. The slider had truly gone public.

#### **4.5 Interim Summary**

This chapter began by noting that food trends develop within specific geographic and temporal settings. Influences on New Zealand’s postcolonial food scene were traversed, with attention paid to the apparent early acceptance of American cuisine and, in particular, the hamburger, the food item that chef Al Brown chose to align his sliders with when he put them on the menu at his new Auckland restaurant Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery in August 2011. Brown’s rural background was canvassed, and its importance emphasised, in discussion around his move from fine-dining to smart-casual restaurant chef. Brown stated this move was all-encompassing – he had created not just a restaurant, but a brand that relied, in part, on an elevated evocation of the food consumed during childhood summers at a rustic, coastal Kiwi bach (and also – along with his other “down and dirty” creations – referenced American fast-food nostalgia, albeit in an elevated manner). The slider is, perhaps, Brown’s grown-up version of the white bread, seafood and mayo sandwiches he refers to eating as a child but, this time, it has a

bespoke bun. This chapter introduced the slider bun's creator, Loaf baker Sean Armstrong, and briefly outlined the process by which the slider bun came to be disseminated to the public as a retail offer. The "how" of the New Zealand slider story was covered. In Chapter 5, the "why" will be more closely examined, in the presentation of key themes from the participant interviews and the media content analysis.

## **CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS – INTERVIEWS AND MEDIA ANALYSIS**

Participant interviews and media content analysis were undertaken to answer the primary question posed by this dissertation: Why did the slider stick? The methodology for this research, outlined in Chapter 3, introduced the interview participants as Al Brown (chef), Sean Armstrong (baker) and Ginny Grant (food writer) and also detailed the three media publications (*New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, *Cuisine* and *Viva*) that were examined over a six-year period (from 2010 to 2015 inclusive) for direct references to sliders and contextual material relating to Al Brown, Depot restaurant and hamburgers (identified by Brown as a close cousin to his slider). This chapter relates the findings of that research, firstly by elaborating on the slider's introduction to New Zealand. Possible factors in its appeal are presented via direct quotes from the Brown, Armstrong and Grant interviews. The media content analysis shows how the slider was initially received and tracks its evolution from a single restaurant menu item to its appearance in home cooks' kitchens via the recipes published in lifestyle magazines.

### **5.1 The interviews - What the experts thought**

Brown opted to be interviewed at Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery, his restaurant in Federal Street, Auckland. He ordered a plate of sliders and a dish of cauliflower and white anchovies (new to the menu) and then, on his mobile phone, pulled up a photograph of the very first sliders created by the Depot team back in early 2011, when the restaurant's menu was still in development. The photographs show buns that are burnt black on top, and they appear larger than those now served in the restaurant. In Brown (2014), former Depot chef Kyle Street recalled the prototype dish was made from cut-down supermarket purchased rolls. For the restaurant launch however, Brown said he sought a softer dough, more akin to what he described to the researcher as a "milk bun". He said he wanted to achieve an effect similar to McDonald's trademarked filet-o-fish burger product ("that's what I say to people, the slider is really just a posh filet-of-fish. It's all about the bun") and that led to his approach to Sean Armstrong, the owner of the bakery company Loaf Handcrafted Breads, and the request for a bespoke slider bun:

I said “Look, I want to do this thing called a slider, it’s basically a baby hamburger, but it’s a really soft bun.” He started working on the recipe and he would have sent two or three or maybe four versions of it. And eventually I said, “Listen mate, just throw as many fucking [preservative] numbers as you like in it. I want a fucking slut roll” ... and hence the bread roll. This is white bread at its purest, baddest-arsest form. (Al Brown)

Armstrong, who requested to be interviewed over the telephone, remembered the Depot slider bun brief as:

Just a dirty white roll. It had to be old school, light, fluffy, slightly sweet. It had to be just the right size. I mean we started off with like a 50g roll and ended up getting it down to 20g. (Sean Armstrong)

Almost immediately, said Armstrong, he recognised the slider bun would have appeal beyond its original restaurant setting:

Probably straight away. We sat there and went “Hey, this is awesome, what else can we do with it? Oh shit, there’s so much you can do with it. We need to get this into a retail offer.” Obviously knowing how successful it was at Depot at the time and with Al and his profile and everything, everything made sense from a business point of view. (Sean Armstrong)

As outlined in Chapter 4, the Loaf-baked slider bun was launched into high-end grocery stores, including Farro Fresh and the now-defunct Nosh, in June 2012. In November 2018 (when this interview was conducted), Armstrong estimated Loaf’s daily slider bake at between 3,000 and 5,000 individual buns. He acknowledged other, larger players had since entered the market (by that time, sliders were being sold in stores operated by Foodstuffs and Woolworths NZ, the duopoly that controls the bulk of New Zealand’s supermarket sector) but claimed not to pay too much attention to those products, stating, “when they come along and put it in a standard bag with a standard bread-tie and put it on a standard bread rack, then it becomes a standard white roll”.

The introduction to this dissertation referenced Brown’s incredulity at the success of the Depot slider. The researcher opened the participant interview with Brown by inviting him to recount his very



first slider experience and Brown responded with his recollection of a visit to a sports bar in Boston, between 25 and 30 years ago, when he was living in the United States and training as a chef at the New England Culinary Institute:

They were a little cheeseburger, but they were delicious, and I just thought “Oh, that’s unique, that’s kind of cute, a tiny little baby hamburger as a sort of finger-foody thing.” But what I loved was the name ... I used to write everything down, so that’s how I wrote down sliders: “Cool little idea, little hamburger, little cheeseburger, tasted great, loved the name.” And so when I went to develop Depot I literally did just go through my journal ... so once I read that word ‘slider’ again, I was like, oh, that’s right. (Al Brown)

When asked to consider the appeal of the slider, Brown’s first response was to declare it an “approachable” foodstuff that he compared to a fritter both in terms of its physicality and the emotive power of its name.

And even the word conjures up a very similar thing. It’s small, it’s approachable, it makes everybody smile, it’s memorable. There are certain words, words are lovely things to lots of people, and you say to kids “sliders” and it’s like a happy word. (Al Brown)

The arrival of the word “slider” into the New Zealand gastronomic lexicon does appear to have confounded New Zealand food experts. In 2018, when food writer Lauraine Jacobs published a compendium of recipes from her column in the weekly, national magazine the *New Zealand Listener*, she included a recipe for venison sliders. Jacobs prefaced the recipe by stating she was not certain when burgers became sliders: “There really is not a lot of difference – maybe sliders are just a tad smaller than burgers, or maybe it’s just a reinvention of a name to find appeal with those who associate burgers with fast food” (Jacobs, 2018, p. 154). Jacobs might not have been clear on the nomenclature but she had, previously, acknowledged the slider’s synonymy with Al Brown and Depot. In a 2014 blog post, she referred to the restaurant’s “obligatory sliders that are just two or three bites of perfectly cooked fish, mayo and sweet little buns that kick start the meal” (Jacobs, 2014, para. 1) and

she concluded her post by writing “if you’re lucky like we were, Al Brown, the man himself, may even wait on your table” (para 7).

This description of Brown (“the man himself”) highlights another potential factor in the slider’s stickability. Brown had hosted television shows and authored several cookbooks before he opened Depot. In New Zealand, he was famous: a “celebrity chef” (Hewitson, 2011, para. 1). In his interview, Sean Armstrong said he believed Brown’s fame – and the public perception of Brown’s personality – had almost certainly helped sell the slider:

Oh, loads. Loads. I mean the guy is such a likeable character, he appeals to New Zealand, from the way he is passionate about the country; he’s passionate about our food. My personal view is he just makes it about the food. It’s not about making it wanky, it is about the food and it’s awesome and he has this knack of just being able to take a good piece of product that people have forgotten about and make it magic and very simple. (Sean Armstrong)

Brown (“the man himself”) appears a somewhat reluctant celebrity but he too acknowledged his so-called “fame” probably garnered early media coverage for Depot – though, he argued in his interview, Depot’s food had to stand (or fall) on its own merit:

Look, it helped. I hate celebrity. Celebrity is [musical performers] Mick Jagger or Elton John. We’re just people that are more known in a small country. But of course, it helps. Al Brown’s opening a restaurant in Auckland and he’s from Wellington? In food circles, there’s going to be whisper, whisper, whisper. But once they got in the door, they didn’t know what was going to be on the menu ... a lot of people get it all wrong ... or they get too complicated. We’re [New Zealanders] an informal bunch, we don’t like to feel that we can’t pronounce something, or we wouldn’t be able to explain it. When you say ‘slider’ and it’s a baby hamburger on a really soft bun and it’s fish ... it’s kind of something you can own and talk about. (Al Brown)

As discussed earlier, Brown’s vision for Depot was “the bach” (sometimes referred to as a “crib” in the South Island). Brown claimed he never felt comfortable in a fine-dining setting (“the jacket never fit”) and that when he considered his best food memories, he kept coming back to childhood holidays at the bach. He told the

researcher that this, in turn, influenced his decision to put sliders on the Depot menu.

When are we at our best when we're eating? And it was always the bach, the campground, the crib, you know? And it was always impromptu, and it was informality and anonymity and people ... the lesson I learned was you reap what you sow and so this was always going to be a fun, raucous, kind, hospitable, friendly place. That's why it was fritters. That's why it was sliders. It was all about approachability and generosity and not being complicated. It was taking away formality in every aspect we possibly could, from wine out of a tap and served in tumblers to mismatched cutlery. Maybe there was something that made people feel safe in this environment, or that they belonged to something? (Al Brown).

Depot's informal ethos is personally important to Brown, but he also recognises the broad appeal of this style of dining to his New Zealand customers, adding "the informality of this sort of eating is what suits us a nation ... fine-dining places are amazing, but casual is king in this country, because that's actually our personality". Throughout his interview, Brown returned to themes of informality and nostalgia, saying, for example, that while "the real foodies love the crazy, far-out Heston-esque style food, and quite rightly they should, for most of us, the enjoyment is just that I'm using my hands and we're sharing this, and this is delicious". Baker Sean Armstrong also discussed the role of nostalgia and childhood food memories in the slider's success:

Because it's a soft, white roll and as kids we all loved soft, white bread. But we've had rammed down our throats for the last 15 years 'wholegrain, wholemeal this, wholemeal that' and then suddenly I can go to an awesome restaurant in the centre of Auckland and get this soft white roll that tastes fantastic and not get told off for it? It's a little bit of nostalgia, a hint of being naughty. It's got a beautiful piece of turbot in it, it's got watercress and the aioli dressing. It's got all these components, but at the end of the day, she's a dirty white roll and I'm allowed to eat it and I'm not going to get told off. (Sean Armstrong)

Armstrong elaborated on the idea of the slider as a naughty but acceptable treat, noting this gave it broad demographic appeal. He claimed the bun's small size appealed to health-conscious consumers.

People who are more ‘whole grains and sour dough, darling’ ... they will all quite happily eat it because it’s only little and they don’t feel like they’re cheating themselves [out of a treat] or are going to give themselves bowel cancer from eating white bread. (Sean Armstrong)

He said that in food service circles it was sometimes claimed that in New Zealand’s South Island, where the customer base is more provincial, “you could sell truckloads of white bread, you just couldn’t sell a loaf of Vogel’s [higher-end, grain bread]”. While that claim might be apocryphal, the point Armstrong appears to emphasise is that the slider appeals to multiple, and even opposing, positions on the consumer spectrum.

It ticks that box of soft, white bread, but it also fits for your Remuera [an affluent Auckland suburb] ... the people that want to be seen to be trendy . . . they like to think they’re in the upper threshold of society, but they can have this beautiful little fish burger and not get food all over the place and enjoy it as well. The broadness of its application and appeal to many different ... people groups is probably the most important thing about it. (Sean Armstrong)

Brown, meanwhile, told the researcher he had recently attended a high-school ball pre-function at a private home in Remuera “and sure enough, they had sliders”, but said that he was also routinely approached by strangers in supermarkets who would tell him their children will “eat anything” if it was served inside a slider.

And so essentially I feel like I’m the filter on a cigarette or something. I’m the gateway to getting kids to eat food. Because if mum makes them an eggplant slider, then next week, they can say “Hey Johnny, you eat eggplant, remember you had it in the slider?” I think there’s a silver lining in this dirty little roll. (Al Brown)

Food writer Ginny Grant was interviewed at Scratch Bakery cafe, in Auckland. The food editor for *Cuisine* magazine (and former cook at London’s River Cafe) noted that, in Scotland, the slider was an ice cream and wafer biscuit sandwich – a reference the researcher had not previously encountered (a subsequent June, 2019 Google search for “ice cream sandwich” and “slider” returned 519,000 results, compared to 137 million for “hamburger” and “slider”). Grant recalled that when she had included an ice cream wafer biscuit sandwich

“slider” recipe in a 2008 *Cuisine* spread, she had to explain to colleagues what the word meant in the Scottish context. She confirmed her first experience of the mini-hamburger version of the slider was at Depot – a fact that did not surprise her.

He’s [Al Brown] always had that slight American leaning in his food, so that didn’t surprise me at all. And with the kind of place it was, the small bite-sized food ... Al is really clever at picking up on that idea of making really, really good food, but in a casual, relaxed environment ... I think it needed someone like him [to introduce the slider] ... that whole casualisation of dining thing ... it’s non-threatening to lots and lots of people, the food is consistent, and you’ve got wine in tumblers. (Ginny Grant)

Brown’s business nous was referenced again by Grant, when she reiterated:

I think it [the slider] needed someone like him, but also he’s the kind of guy that gets the recipe right – he employed someone outside the restaurant, a baker, to make it for him. So that’s a really interesting process in itself. (Ginny Grant)

She said the Depot slider was “flavour forward – the preserved lemon mayo” but, ultimately, it was a recognisable food, “people aren’t threatened by it”. Grant agreed with Brown and Armstrong that the small, soft white bun was integral to the slider’s success. She said white, sliced sandwich bread might have achieved the same textural result, but:

There is something so cutesy about the bun ... I think it is the size of it that is appealing, and it goes across all age groups. Kids love it. It’s not too crunchy, it’s soft, slightly sweet. It’s white bread, it’s kind of easy, so I think it gets picked up in that respect really quickly – and I think it’s dainty enough for people to have at functions. I think that’s part of its appeal. (Ginny Grant)

Chapter 2 considered the potential role mainstream media could have in the development of food trends. As a recipe writer for New Zealand’s dominant food magazine, *Cuisine*, Grant’s opinion on this topic was sought. She said that, by 2018, the slider had become “part of the mainstream” featuring in many lifestyle and food magazines. Grant concurred with Brown’s comments around the appeal of the word slider (“it rolls off the tongue”) and said it was both easy to say

and write and, “I think that’s why it’s been picked up maybe by mainstream media as well, to mean that little bite-sized, sandwichy thing.” However, she added:

I’m not sure you would have seen a slider recipe in *Cuisine* without Depot. You’d have to have made the bun, so that would have always been the problem ... I think it was the buns, and the buns were delicious. That was incredibly smart. They were going into high-end grocery stores, but then they were everywhere, you know? (Ginny Grant)

The ubiquitous nature of the slider was observed in Chapter 1 – fast-food chain KFC now offers a slider. In May 2019, the researcher (in her role as a restaurant reviewer for the *New Zealand Herald*) observed a deep-fried bao bun “ice cream slider” dessert at a newly opened Asian fusion restaurant in Howick, Auckland (Knight, 2019). In their embeddedness, sliders have evolved well beyond the original mini fish burger conceived by Brown who said he made a point of ordering sliders whenever he saw them on other New Zealand restaurant menus.

Just to compare them of course, and you can see people slightly squirming. Because there is the original, of course. Ours was, I’m pretty sure, the first slider in the country ... without sounding too arrogant, I think what helped the slider spread was the Depot offering. As the vehicle serving it, it was such a phenomenal success. The restaurant struck a chord. It sounds blasphemy, but I was trying to commercialise the bach, which is all about informality. Black, white, gay, straight, fat, skinny, rich and poor – you know, there’s an anonymity in the place (Al Brown).

Post-interview, Brown supplied statistics relating to the sale of sliders since Depot’s opening. They showed that in the 2012 financial year, customers ordered 21,243 portions of sliders. By comparison, in 2018, some 55,420 portions were ordered – representing a 160% increase on 2012. Total slider orders from Depot’s 2011 opening until the end of the 2018 financial year were reported at 323,682. Brown noted that with three sliders to every standard plate order, that figure equated to almost one million individual buns, a statistic he said, “makes me a little sick just to think about!”

Research participant interviews have considered ideas around the popularisation of the slider, which came to New Zealand via a single chef's vision for an informal (but not low-end) restaurant that evoked memories of holiday eating at the Kiwi bach and was introduced to a wider audience of home cooks via the release of the bespoke bun into the retail sector. Participants mentioned the slider's approachability and broad demographic appeal, its nostalgic association with soft, white bread sandwiches and the potential influence of Al Brown's celebrity on the slider's uptake. Importantly, food writer Ginny Grant explained that, without the availability of the Loaf-baked store-bought bun, it was unlikely a prominent food magazine such as *Cuisine* would have ever published a slider recipe (notwithstanding the one-off Scottish ice cream wafer sandwich that appeared in 2008). In Chapter 2 of this dissertation the role of mass media in taste making was discussed and, in the next section of this chapter, the slider's evolution is tracked via close examination of three mass media publications.

## **5.2 Media analysis: How reporters, reviewers and food writers sold the slider**

In this section of Chapter 5, the role of three New Zealand media publications in the embeddedness of the slider is considered via a six-year analysis of recipes for sliders (and, for contextual comparison, hamburgers), restaurant critiques and general reportage. Data from the three publications chosen for analysis – *Cuisine*, *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, and *Viva* – is presented by calendar year. Additional contextual detail is provided via Table 1 and Table 2, which summarise the key components of slider and hamburger recipes published in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* and *Cuisine* over the study period. *Viva* content was excluded from these tables as hard-copy magazines were not available for analysis, and the data referenced in this section came from digital searches of the keywords "slider", "Al Brown" and "Depot". This allowed for the collection of useful information on the slider's movement within the Auckland restaurant scene but did not capture comparable hamburger recipe data.

### 5.2.1 Close, but no slider – 2010

In 2010, the year before Al Brown opened Depot, the slider was not referenced in *Viva*, *Cuisine* or the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* (hereafter in this section referred to as *NZWW*). By contrast in 2010, *NZWW* published eight recipes for hamburgers, and *Cuisine* published one. A Regal Salmon advertising feature that referenced mini-bagels perhaps foreshadowed an appetite for miniaturised food among *Cuisine*'s higher socio-economic demographic readership ("Regal Salmon", 2010). Brown, who in 2010 was a regular columnist for *Cuisine*, promoted beach and bach holiday nostalgia in a summer recipe spread for grilled seafood. Luxe ingredients including chilled crayfish and Cloudy Bay tuatua (an endemic New Zealand clam) starred but, true to the relaxed persona he would later trade on at Depot, Brown (2010) wrote, "I would think most of us have early memories of munching on a filled roll beachside while also taking in the recommended daily amount of roughage in the form of half a teaspoon or so of fine golden sand" (p. 71).

### 5.2.2 Depot debuts and the slider is defined – 2011

In 2011, the year that Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery opened, *NZWW* featured 11 burger recipes and *Cuisine* one (in an extract from Al Brown's cookbook, *Stoked*). No slider recipes were published in either magazine. Commentary around the opening of Depot emerged in *Viva* (in which Brown made the tekina cocktail signature dish prediction referenced in Chapter 1) and *Cuisine*. For the latter, Wall (2011, September) wrote:

As we went to print Al Brown's Depot was just days away from opening ... Depot features a dedicated raw bar with oysters shucked to order while the rest of the menu focuses on dishes over charcoal or wood. "It's a very informal place to drop in and refuel," says Al, although with the likes of smoked 12-hour beef brisket, cumin battered snapper tortillas and sugar pie on the menu you might be tempted to stay awhile. (p. 33)

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the first appearance of the word "slider" in the period 2010-2015, in any of the three magazines analysed, was in December 2011. In a *Viva* article that sought top Christmas food tips from Auckland chefs, Sid Sahrawat of



the fine-dining restaurant Sidart commented “leftover meat makes great sliders for lunch the next day” (“Chefs Smooth the Way”, 2011, p. C12). At the time, it was an uncommon term and the *Viva* article did not offer any further definition. The researcher surmises this may have been a simple oversight but could also be indicative of an assumption by *Viva*’s editor that its trendsetting readers may have personally experienced (or at least heard of) the Depot slider by December 2011, four months after Depot’s opening.

Given 2011 was Depot’s opening year, and considering the potential role of restaurant critics in the creation of food trends, an effort was made to find critical reviews of the restaurant (and references to sliders) beyond the three publications studied in-depth. Writing for *Metro* that year, Wilson (2011) awarded Depot a highest possible score of five “spoons” and specifically defined the term “slider” for readers:

Brown has performed a brilliant conjuring trick: he’s taken our memories of the best meals ever – not the ones in smart restaurants, but when we’ve been on the beach with fish and chips, at the neighbourhood barbie with mussels and bangers, at the bach with mismatched crockery and fresh flounder – and re-invented them as a sit-down, inside experience ... And you eat – ah, the things you eat. A choice of oyster varieties and other shellfish, all shucked to order and presented on the half shell ... snapper sliders (mini burgers) with preserved lemon and watercress. (p. 91).

At least two other Auckland food critics visited Depot in 2011, but neither Calder (2011, August 28) for the *Herald on Sunday*, nor Wickes (2011, August 24) for *Viva*, specifically referenced sliders. Wickes did, however, report that “dining at Depot is like falling in love. With New Zealand ... you feel like you’re in someone’s backyard shed or maybe an old shed. Either way, it feels like you’re home” (p. C27). Perhaps unsurprisingly (given its focus on family cooking for the home), the *NZWW* did not reference the restaurant-only slider in 2011, but on December 2, 2011, its Kitchen Notebook section did feature a new Burger King range that showed the miniaturisation trend earlier observed in *Cuisine*’s salmon bagel advertising spread, had filtered down to a fast-food chain restaurant:

Last year Burger King created the King's Collection using the best premium ingredients. Now, they've managed to include all that good stuff into a more ladylike size. And they've called them, wait for it, Smaller. Not an original name, but one heck of a burger range. ("Kitchen Notebook", 2011, p. 47).

### **5.2.3 The slider goes properly public – 2012**

If the slider had a proverbial "moment" it was 2012. *Cuisine* referenced the slider in its first edition of the year when F. Smith (2012, January), reporting on the so-called "dude food" scene in Sydney, Australia, wrote "forget painstakingly placed microgreens and light as air foams and instead think sliders, tacos, hot dogs, plenty of deep-fried goodness and lashings of cheese and mayonnaise" (p. 32). The article determined that while "dude food" encompassed dishes more commonly found in fast-food joints, this was "a hybrid created by classically trained young chefs at the top of their game. They use top quality ingredients and clever techniques but package their food in very recognisable parcels" (p. 32).

*Cuisine's* championing of the slider continued throughout 2012. In July, when readers were advised that Loaf Handcrafted Breads would be selling slider buns in high-end grocery stores, Wall (2012, July) defined sliders as "aka mini burgers", confirmed their link to celebrity with a reminder "they're the buns Al Brown uses at Depot", and emphasised their on-trend nature when she told readers to "DIY the so-hot-right-now snacks at home" (p. 53). In September, when Depot restaurant (by now the recognised home of the slider) was named runner-up in the Best New Restaurant category of *Cuisine's* New Zealand Restaurant of the Year awards, head judge Kerry Tyack dubbed its vibe as "bach meets bistro" and said selecting a food highlight was a tough call but "the sliders really are exceptionally good – a slightly sweet white bread bun, golden, tender fresh-as-can-be fish, a scattering of peppery watercress and a lick of zesty mayo" (Tyack, 2012, p. 21).

In November 2012, *Cuisine* published what is, in all likelihood given the magazine's status as a food leader, New Zealand's first slider

recipe for home cooks. Its annual Christmas edition touted “sausage rolls, sliders and sangria” on the cover and, inside, as part of a spread on finger food for parties, featured a recipe for “crayfish and tarragon mayonnaise sliders” (F. Smith, 2012, November, p. 98). The slider recipe called for one crayfish tail, two tablespoons of melted butter and 20 Loaf-branded slider buns.

2012 was also the year the Depot slider was widely copied by other Auckland restaurants. While some attempted to create a point of difference, inventing new names for their creations, restaurant critics kept reminding readers of the original. One example of this occurred in reviews of the Ponsonby Rd eatery Tin Soldier. Its so-called “jammer” was defined by *Cuisine* as a take “on Auckland snack *du jour*, the slider” (Wall, 2012, November, p. 170) and, in *Viva*, Wickes (2012, July 18) opened her Tin Soldier review with a pointed comparison:

‘Ooh, those jammers were good last night,’ said one friend.  
‘What’s a jammer?’ came the response from another.  
‘Like a slider,’ we chimed.  
‘What are sliders?’  
‘Soft, mini hamburger buns filled with yummy stuff,’ I explained.  
‘Why don’t they just call them that then?’  
Silence. (p. C17)

*Viva* was an early proponent of the home-cooked slider. In June 2012, it had proclaimed “we love, love, love the snapper sliders at Al Brown’s The Depot; now we love, love, love that you can make your own at home with these Al Brown sliders from Loaf” (“The Dish”, 2012, p. 24). A month later, Loaf sliders featured in another *New Zealand Herald* publication, the entertainment-focussed *Time Out*, with a trio of serving suggestions – pulled pork, shellfish fritters or miniature burger patties (“Three Ways With ...”, 2012). Sliders were now appearing all over Auckland, as evidenced by a comment from Wickes (2012, October 3) in a review of the restaurant Kazuya, “where the food is truly remarkable, the service is slick yet comfortable and the surroundings are non-formulaic. Best of all, there’s not a damn slider in sight” (p. C18).

#### **5.2.4 New Zealand Woman's Weekly readers meet the slider – 2013**

Wickes (2013, March 20) continued to note the omnipresent nature of the restaurant slider when she reviewed Auckland's Citizen Park, stating "it appears that Citizen Park is all the trends at once – casual eats, Americanised cuisine but with a twist of Mexican, plates to share, grills to hog, sliders of course" (p. C28) and, later, Waiheke Island's Oyster Inn (Wickes, 2013, May 8), when she wrote "first a word about what we didn't order ... the sliders (neither pork nor the tarakihi) because we're a bit jaded about these in general" (p. C29). The Depot slider's success was such that, in 2013, Auckland restaurants continued to try and out-slider the slider, coming up with their own luxe takes on fast foods. Wall (2013) reported, "if all those sliders around town aren't enough to fill you up, consider dropping into Auckland's Imperial Lane for a Sean Marshall devised 'haute-dog' – the chorizo based El Matador and a Bahn mi with a chicken sausage" (p. 24).

By 2013, sliders were old news for *Cuisine* and *Viva* readers, but the *NZWW* was just getting started. In the *NZWW*'s first slider recipe (featuring a roast pork belly filling), White (2013) subtly reinforced its original restaurant positioning with the subheading "special occasion" before advising readers they could use "small soft rolls, baps or slider buns" (p. 46) – recognising the possibility *NZWW*'s home cooks may not yet have become familiar with the slider bun per se. Wilcox (2013) emphasised the possibility of the slider's novelty when she prefaced the *NZWW*'s second slider recipe (using leftover pork and an apple coleslaw in the filling) in August 2013, with a definitive description:

A slider is a small sandwich, typically about 7.6cm across, served in a bun ... these cute mini burgers are great for entertaining a crowd. You can buy the buns from gourmet food stores or substitute with the smallest burger you can find. (p. 66)

#### **5.2.5 The mass appeal of the slider – 2014**

The slider gates had opened and, in 2014, *NZWW* published three further slider recipes. Van de Elzen (2014) called for slider buns in

his “mini-me lamb burgers” (p. 56) and Wilcox (2014, August 4) included a Thai fish cake slider in a feature titled “Roll On Up” (p. 36). It had been more than 12 months since *NZWW* readers had been introduced to the slider, but Wilcox was still careful to offer a definition, writing “sliders are really just mini burgers, but they make a perfect bite or two for parties and gatherings or little mouths” (p. 37). By Christmas, Wilcox (2014, December 22) appeared more confident that her readers would know what a slider was. Her party menu hot ham sliders with pineapple compote simply included the comment, “sliders are loved by little and big kids alike. I keep a couple of packets of buns in the freezer at all times” (p. 39).

In 2014, *Viva* referenced sliders as a useful way of using up leftover roast lamb cooked for a Father’s Day feast (Casley, 2014) while Wickes (2014) continued her anti-slider stance in a review of the restaurant Meadow, stating, “name a recent food trend of the past decade and they’ve got it – tacos and sliders, pizza and wagyu gourmet burger - and although that’s not a bad thing in itself, it lacks imagination” (p. 26).

### **5.2.6 The slider subverted – 2015**

In 2014, the *NZWW* had earlier name-checked the slider as a child-appropriate snack, but in early 2015, in a feature on back-to-school food, a recipe for mini-hamburgers with a beef and sausage patty filling, simply called for “little buns” (Wilcox, 2015, p. 36). Later that year, Wickes (2015), who had moved from her restaurant reviewing role at *Viva* to take a food editor position at the *NZWW*, published a recipe for buttery mussel and sake buns and also used the descriptor “buns” in the title but called for sliders in the ingredients list. Arguably, the interchangeability of the words was an indicator that *NZWW* reader familiarity with the slider was now entrenched.

In *Viva* in 2015, Casley (2015) stated “sliders are a great way to feed a crowd of people young and old” (p. 22) and featured them in a piece on food for children’s sleepovers, but the magazine was also reporting on more novel interpretations of the slider. Beresford (2015) wrote that a highlight of the 2015 restaurant festival Taste Auckland

would be foods cooked in the traditional Māori earth oven, the hāngī, and that “Chef Tu Fearn is making pork sliders with Maori bread” (p. 23). No visual record of the latter could be found, but “Maori bread” is likely to refer to rēwena parāoa, traditionally made with a fermented cooked potato starter and, historically, cooked in large loaves in a camp oven. Browne, Leach and Tichborne (1996) describe it as having a distinctive, slightly acid flavour akin to sourdough – at odds with the softer, sweeter bun first deployed at Depot. That the slider was open to interpretation (and subversion) in 2015 had also been noted in *Viva’s* parent publication, the *New Zealand Herald*. McIntyre (2015) reported Auckland restaurant Tribeca had created the “All Black slider” featuring slow-cooked pork, miso and wasabi on a bun stained black in honour of the national rugby team’s upcoming World Cup bid in Japan. Meanwhile, *Cuisine*, having been first to print with a recipe for homemade sliders in 2012, did not reference them again until 2015 when venison sliders appeared in a “Quick Smart” column (G. Grant, 2015).

### **5.2.7 Hamburger versus slider – *NZWW* and *Cuisine***

This dissertation seeks to understand how the slider, a once-novel foodstuff, became mainstream. The methodological approach outlined in Chapter 3 suggested a content analysis should be more than a mere counting exercise and, accordingly, the preceding chronology has provided detailed context of the slider’s appearance in mainstream media. This section presents the frequencies via two tables. It gives insight into where the slider sat in relation to what Brown called its “close cousin” (the hamburger) and how the slider was positioned by recipe writers, according to their choice of fillings for the newly available slider bun. Table 1 shows the emergence of the slider bun as the bread (or “edible casing”) component in recipes published in the *NZWW* and *Cuisine* between 2010-2015 and Table 2 shows the main filling ingredients over the same period.

Table 1  
*Edible casings types listed in hamburger and slider recipes, New Zealand Woman's Weekly and Cuisine, 2010-2015*

	SLIDERS		BUNS, BAPS, ROLLS		OTHER/UNSPECIFIED	
	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE
2010	0	0	5	0	3	1
2011	0	0	4	1	7	0
2012	0	1	4	0	7	0
2013	2	0	6	5	3	1
2014	3	0	4	1	1	1
2015	1	1	3	1	3	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>

*Note.* Other/Unspecified includes tortilla, Turkish loaf, panini, English muffins, bagels, wraps and pita breads (*NZWW* only), pide (*Cuisine* only) and flatbreads and “bunless” burgers (*NZWW* and *Cuisine*).

Sliders make a minority appearance, with eight references across the six-year study period, representing 11.3% of the casing component in a total of 70 burger and slider recipes. While the more familiar buns, baps and rolls represent the majority of casing types, the inventive (and rule-breaking) nature of New Zealand recipe writers is evident in that 40% of recipes employ non-traditional bread types, or even no bread at all, as a casing.

Meanwhile, Table 2 (see below) shows that, across all sliders and burgers, fish is the most popular filling, appearing on 13 occasions. When combined with seafood (two recipes including *Cuisine's* inaugural crayfish slider), ocean-sourced protein easily outranks the next most commonly mentioned fillings of beef and lamb (referenced 12 and 11 times, respectively), taking a 21.43% share. *NZWW* was far more likely to publish a recipe for either burgers or sliders than *Cuisine*; however, the former is a weekly publication compared to the latter's monthly publication status. A full list of the hamburger and slider recipes referenced in *NZWW* and *Cuisine* over the study period can be viewed in the Appendices (Table A1).

Table 2  
*Main filling referenced in hamburger and slider recipes published in New Zealand Woman's Weekly and Cuisine, 2010-2015*

	FISH		BEEF		LAMB		VEGETABLE		CHICKEN		PORK		MIXED		SEAFOOD		VENISON	
	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE	NZWW	CUISINE
2010	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
2011	3	0	1	0	3	1	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2012	3	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
2013	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	3	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014	2	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
2015	1	0	2	2	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

*Note.* "Mixed" refers to recipes where the filling includes a meat patty but the recipe title includes a second hero ingredient, eg "blue cheese burger".



### 5.3 Interim summary

Chapter 5 included findings from the three research participants – chef Al Brown, baker Sean Armstrong and food writer Ginny Grant – who were interviewed for their expertise and knowledge in distinct and separate phases of the slider’s introduction, popularisation and embeddedness within New Zealand. When these interviews were considered as a collective, common themes around the slider’s “stickability” emerged. These can be summarised as the slider’s approachability (Brown claims the slider is “easy to understand”), the slider’s positioning within an informal, casual and non-threatening setting (Depot is a full-service restaurant, but its aesthetic is “the bach”), the slider’s ability to invoke feelings of nostalgia (the white-bread sandwiches of New Zealand childhood) and the celebrity appeal of the New Zealand slider’s initiator, Al Brown.

These factors alone might have been enough to popularise the slider within the Depot restaurant context, but the slider has become embedded to the point where it is now (as stated by Grant) “mainstream”. This chapter tracked the emergence of the slider in the broader New Zealand food landscape via an analysis of three mainstream media lifestyle publications that, between them, represent a broad spectrum of New Zealand consumers. The publications were the *NZWW* (home cooks preparing family meals), *Cuisine* (highly engaged and higher-end food consumers and restaurant patrons) and *Viva* (novelty-seeking trendsetters). Analysis showed that, when Depot opened in 2011, reportage and reviews tended to include definitions of the word “slider”, indicating its relative novelty. No slider recipes for home cooks were published until the slider bun became commercially available in 2012, and there is evidence, via restaurant reviews printed in *Viva*, that this move enabled other restaurants to copy Depot and offer their own version of the slider (albeit under different names). *NZWW* did not reference the slider until 2013. It was the last of the three publications to do so, but the slider’s introduction (and continued presence) in the family-focussed magazine indicates its widespread acceptance within New Zealand. These findings will be analysed and discussed further in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter brings together the discussion of gastronomic theory from Chapter 2, the history of New Zealand food (and associated slider references) from Chapter 4 and the findings from the participant interviews and media analysis presented in Chapter 5. As outlined in Chapter 3, the researcher has worked within an interpretivist paradigm. Meaning has been made in collaboration with the interview participants, and further informed by a contextual analysis of selected media texts and relevant academic literature. This chapter represents the consolidation of that process, presenting possible arguments for resolving the question at the heart of this dissertation: Why did the slider stick?

### **6.1 Smart-casual and the power of nostalgia**

Floor plans for Depot Oyster Bar & Eatery show a room shaped like an upside-down letter L (Brown, 2014). The kitchen proper, with its large wood-fired oven, runs along the far end, separated only by a counter where customers can sit and watch chefs at work. This, however, is not where the Depot slider is made. At the front of the restaurant, running along the long left-hand side of the reversed L, is a drinks bar, raw shellfish bar and a small hot grill plate. Depot's signature dish – the bespoke soft, small, white bread bun filled with sustainable line-caught fish, a house-made lemon mayonnaise and fresh watercress – is constructed here, up front and in full view, as customers enter the restaurant. Inside that restaurant, as outlined in Chapter 5, the customer finds wine served in tumblers, cutlery stashed in repurposed tinned food cans and, perhaps, as Wickes (2011, August 24) commented, a sense of home, because "Depot feels and tastes like New Zealand. It's 'us'" (p. C27). This is precisely the emotional response chef Al Brown set out to invoke. In his interview for this research project, he used words like "fun", "raucous", "kind" and "friendly" to describe the Depot ethos and stated that he wanted people to feel like they "belonged". He sought to provide food in a place that his customers might recognise from the best times of their life (and certainly the best times in his own life) – summer holidays at the Kiwi bach, with shared plates and casual meals caught between two slices of white bread. Ultimately, Brown

said, he wanted to “commercialise the New Zealand bach”. Viewed in the light of this commentary, the slider’s success is both miraculous and obvious. As has been shown, the slider is not “New Zealand”. It is not even restaurant food. Its origin is firmly North American and fast. Nonetheless, it has appealed to Depot customers to the point where, since 2011, almost one million individual slider buns have been served. In unpicking its appeal, interviews with participants converged around four distinct themes outlined here:

*Approachability* – the slider is viewed as a non-threatening food that is easy to say, easy to write and easy for the customer to understand because, as Brown repeatedly states, the slider is just a baby fish burger.

*Nostalgia* – the slider reminds consumers of the commensality of summer holidays at the bach, where meals were shared affairs of buttered, soft white bread wrapped around the day’s freshly fried fish catch.

*Informality* – the slider is served in a smart-casual restaurant setting owned by a man whose “Kiwi bloke” persona is familiar to the public via his appearance on food-related television shows, his own cookbooks and media coverage.

*Celebrity* – the slider was introduced to New Zealand by a chef who had gained national recognition via television appearances.

Pearlman (2013) recognises these factors in her treatise on the rise of smart-casual dining. From the open kitchen to the nostalgic pull of “bad” childhood foods remade luxe, to the chef with fine-dining credentials who has opted for an apparently simpler style of service and a television show to boot – chef Al Brown, Depot restaurant and the signature fish slider tick all of Pearlman’s smart-casual boxes. The slider, for example, is based on white bread (bad) but its ingredients are luxe (sustainably caught fish, bespoke bun, homemade mayonnaise). This kind of subversion is what Pearlman describes as “the most pervasive omnivorous trend in cuisine: chefs

creating gourmet versions of commonplace dishes” (p. 68). It might be argued that Brown just jumped on the international smart-casual bandwagon; however, it is apparent he had been sowing the seeds for this shift for some time. Brown himself stated that despite the success of his first Wellington restaurant Logan Brown, he never felt entirely comfortable in a fine-dining environment. Rowland (2010) noted that when Logan Brown was opened in 1997, the inaugural fit-out was “New York businessman’s club” (p. 235) with dark green leather seating, a huge live fish tank and an enormous chandelier. Dishes included fillet of hare with porcini oil, shiitake mushrooms and raspberry sauce. By 2000, however, the neckties had loosened. Brown and co-owner Steve Logan were travelling the country in a 1964 Holden for the television show *Hunger for the Wild*, “tapping into Kiwi traditions of good blokes heading back to nature” (p. 237). This too, could be seen as calculated; however, in Brown’s case the “casual” component of smart-casual appears to be in his DNA. Brown (2014) describes his childhood in rural New Zealand, where he grew up on a farm, learned to hunt and fish, and formed his favourite food memories during holidays at the bach:

Old electric stoves, worn benches and sticking drawers full of hand-me-down, often obsolete cooking utensils ... The old wooden or Formica kitchen table with mismatched stools, benches and chairs is probably the most evocative and meaningful piece of furniture in a bach. These tables bring everyone together. (p. 18)

This is the vision Brown brings to Depot. He admits there is “a very real fear of designing something that is try-hard or too faux” (Brown, 2014, p. 27) and this is a valid concern because critics are known to slam those businesses they perceive as cashing in on nostalgia. Stock (2017) for example, challenges the barbers who charge \$50 for a hipster beard trim in their salons that are “heavy on faux-nostalgia” (p. 21). Clark-Memler (2012) writes that “faux-nostalgia is a cultural black hole. It stops us from progressing and keeps us in a sepia-toned Instagram post” (p. 32). As previously discussed, other corporates – including the national airline Air New Zealand – had also traded in on the marketing power of “Kiwi nostalgia” prior to Brown opening Depot. Tannock (1995) comments that nostalgia is

not just about retreat, it also involves retrieval; that in going back, something will be brought forward. Brown does exactly this. He does not, for example, simply put a white bread fish sandwich on his menu (potentially, he could have – in her interview, Grant contends that, texturally, the result would have been comparable to a slider). Pearlman (2013) identifies family values and common culture as touchstones for the rise of smart-casual restaurants but says their unifying factor is the elevation of a gourmet chef's creativity. This is a notion embraced by Brown when he subverts both the slider (from the original small cheeseburger he ate in Boston) and the fish sandwich (swapping sliced bread for a bespoke bun). In the Depot slider, the past is not recreated but elevated, and consumers buy into this because of the evocation of nostalgia, and also because the slider is similar enough to a hamburger (an American foodstuff long embraced by New Zealanders) that it is not a scary leap into the culinary unknown.

## **6.2 Class, cultural omnivorism and celebrity**

Brown (2014) credits multiple players with the creation of Depot, citing industrial designers, brand experts, winemakers, waitstaff and more. Brown has vision, but he also appears to have the nous to commission expert assistance when needed. This is particularly evident in the slider story and is a large factor in its embeddedness. Brown was a chef, not a baker, and bringing Sean Armstrong and Loaf Handcrafted Breads into the picture was key to creating the soft, white, slightly sweet slider that customers loved and a bun that could be sold externally. In the simplest sense, the slider stuck because it could – because it was, quite literally, there. In her interview, food writer Ginny Grant emphasised this when she said that without the availability of the Loaf slider buns, it is unlikely *Cuisine* would have carried its slider recipes. It also seems certain the *NZWW* would never have recognised the slider without the Loaf retail proposition, given that its earliest slider recipes were prefaced with notes advising readers they could “buy the buns from gourmet food stores” (Wilcox, 2013, p. 66). While Brown devolved responsibility for the actual baking of the slider, he kept control of its contents and size (Armstrong notes that the final Depot product is 30g lighter than the

one his company initially produced). For Brown, the slider's approachability – soft, slightly sweet and small – was consistently at the forefront of product development.

The view of class distinction espoused by Bourdieu (1979/1984) might place the Depot restaurant offering at the lowbrow end of his class scale, thanks to its “elastic and abundant” (p. 196) dishes, shared plates and the idea that items like the slider would be eaten with the hands. In Bourdieu's world, such food is a signifier of a working-class meal, with no sign of refinement, restraint or exclusivity. But Bourdieu's view that the cachet of a cultural offering (from music to food to fashion) diminishes as more people gain access to it is challenged by the concept of cultural omnivorism, first defined by Peterson and Simkus (1992) in their studies of musical taste and, in the restaurant environment, championed by Pearlman (2013). Key to this thinking is the idea that the “omnivore commands status by displaying a range of tastes” (Peterson & Simkus, 1992, p. 170). Depot epitomises this idea. In a world of artisan sourdough and wholegrain breads, its sliders are, as Brown put it, no more than “white bread at its purest, baddest-arrest form”. The idea of democracy in a bun is appealing, but that is not all that is happening here. At Depot, the slider (a food for the masses in its original American White Castle form) is subverted. It retains the appearance of the everyman or everywoman food celebrated by the so-called cultural omnivore, but it has been reimagined and remade luxe. The continued importance of the slider's physicality was evident in the participant interviews. Armstrong described his brief as “old school” and a “dirty white roll”; Grant said it was “white bread – it's kind of easy” and Brown admitted he sometimes referred to it as a “posh filet-of-fish”. The use of the word “dirty” is interesting in the context of food where cleanliness is, from a health perspective, crucial, but Brown (2014) has explained his desire to take the “down and dirty” (including tacos and hotdogs) and elevate it to a level “no-one in their right mind could bag or criticise” (p. 81). This is a practice Pearlman (2013) dubs “haute-pop” cuisine, building on the restaurant sub-trend of “serious-fun” food she claims was introduced by New York critic Ron Rosenbaum in 1985 (p. 39) and is now a hallmark of the

informality promoted by smart-casual dining. In Sax (2014), Los Angeles-based Peruvian chef Ricardo Zarate describes this route to taste making as “creating something new but not extreme. Something familiar, but you don’t see it right away” (p. 59).

The “haute-pop” label applies to the Depot slider and appeals to the cultural omnivore, but this dissertation contends that the slider’s ability to invoke place and time – a New Zealand childhood at a coastal bach – is of greater importance to the consumer. One restaurant critic referred to Brown’s “brilliant conjuring trick” (Wilson, 2011, p. 91) writing that Depot’s food reminded him of fresh flounder with mismatched crockery, sausages and mussels at a neighbourhood barbecue, and fish and chips at the beach. The dichotomy of the slider is that while it successfully invokes childhood nostalgia and, perhaps, a sense naughtiness in adult eaters (particularly for those who might have fond memories of McDonald’s filet-o-fish burgers) its small size also makes it palatable to the health conscious (as noted by Armstrong in his participant interview). In addition, as per comments from all three interview subjects, the slider’s association with Brown’s celebrity appeals to trendsetters and influencers.

### **6.3 Self-identity and the slider**

Research participants did not discuss the Depot slider’s filling in detail (Grant, in her interview, noted it was probably a cost-effective menu item because its small size might have allowed the restaurant to utilise fish trimmings). This research has recognised that it is the bun that defines a slider. However, in its original Depot form, the slider’s filling (fish, mayonnaise and watercress) was arguably part of its appeal and deserves some attention in this final analysis.

New Zealand is a coastal nation. It has been reported that 75% of the country’s population live within 10 kilometres of the coast (Statistics NZ, 2006). Burton (2013) states that while kaimoana (seafood) was of major importance to the Māori diet, Anglo-Celtic immigrants were slower on the uptake, shunning fish for the red meat meals they had not been able to afford in their homeland. In the 1930s, New

Zealand's annual fish consumption was estimated at 10 kilogrammes per capita, but by the 2000s, that rate had increased to 27 kilogrammes per capita (Burton, 2013). The rising popularity of fish and seafood in the New Zealand diet was borne out in this study's analysis of hamburger and slider recipes (Chapter 5), which showed a clear preference for seafood fillings. The main component of the Depot slider is fish, an on-trend protein, and it is supplemented by "preserved lemon mayo and watercress" (Brown, 2014). This menu descriptor cleverly and subtly reinforces ideas of nostalgia (the mayonnaise contains a "preserved" element) and, in the selection of watercress over any other green, further references the "Kiwi" identity of this reimagined slider, because in New Zealand, watercress is associated with foraging. Burton (2009), for example, writes that "extreme care should be taken when collecting cress that it is not picked from stagnant water or rivers flowing near sewerage outlets" (p. 23). While Brown did not specifically recall foraging for watercress as part of the Kiwi bach experience that informed the creation of Depot or the slider, he does reference the practice in the first chapter of the book that accompanied his break-out television show *Hunger for the Wild*:

Bev had joined Al back at the bach ... after cleaning the mussels Bev took Al to a classic West Coast roadside deli, a ditch by the side of the road. It was on prime waterfront, spring-fed real estate – the perfect place to find salad ingredients to go with the crayfish. (Brown & Logan, 2007, p. 20)

The literature review section of this dissertation considered the casualisation of dining and the rise of "smart-casual" restaurants (Pearlman, 2013). It is this trend that has allowed Brown to connect an urban restaurant experience with the (either perceived or experienced) provincial and rural childhood food memories of his customers – the catching (and cooking) of fish, the preservation of a seasonal fruit and vegetable glut, and the foraging of plants from the wild. The consumption of this vision is a route to self-identification (Fischler, 1988) in a world where we are not just what we eat, but also where we eat (Finkelstein, 2013). In Depot and the slider, Brown creates a romantic, nostalgic and personal narrative which, in lesser hands, could be considered clichéd or stereotypical. Brown is able to



avoid this because his own repeatedly-publicised rural man-of-the-land heritage provides credibility. In addition, his deployment of white bread (the “down and dirty” slider bun) is no mere sop to a smart-casual trend. Brown’s love of white bread appears sincere and long-held. In his book *Stoked*, Brown (2011) champions cooking by flame, noting the pleasures of a driftwood-fuelled campfire cookout, “a cast-iron saucepan warming up a hearty chicken stew, enamel plates, a ladle for serving, a pile of buttered white bread and you’re all set” (p. 10). Later in the book, he features a recipe for karengo seaweed crumbed crayfish tails “with white bread & mayo” (p. 59). More recently, in the book *Eat Up New Zealand*, Brown (2017) elaborates on this further:

I’m a bit of a fan of basic white bread. There was no Vogel’s or wholegrain when I was growing up; bread was soft, white and delicious, as it still is today. I’m glad that there’s a whole bunch of bread choices out there, and although I don’t eat a lot of white bread anymore I still love to use it in my cooking. Other than it being texturally perfect, it also reinforces the nostalgia of the past, which is important to me. (p. 37)

When Jacobs (2014, February 2) blogged about her visit to Depot (which began with a plate of sliders), she stated “I have no idea why more people haven’t copied Al’s concept of serving up food that everyone wants to eat” (para. 2). The reality is that other chefs tried. As observed in Chapter 5, slider variants appeared on menus around Auckland. Tin Soldier’s “jammer” was one such cited example and Mulligan (2016) found a slider-burger hybrid, dubbed a “slurger”, on the menu at Auckland’s Rockefeller Champagne and Oyster Bar (now closed), writing that the name “unfortunately tends to evoke something you’d clear from your throat at the end of a long distance run” (para. 9). Brown’s smartest move, perhaps, was to play it straight. He did not give the slider a new name and he always credited its working-class American provenance. Importantly, however, this dissertation bears out Brown’s belief (expressed in his participant interview) that he was first to the New Zealand market with this foodstuff. As described in Chapter 4, New Zealand’s gastronomic scene underwent significant change from the 1970s onwards as international cuisines gained traction. C. Smith et al.

(2015) attribute this to several factors – a more ethnically diverse population, increased overseas travel, the globalisation of the world's food supply and the rapidity with which food trends are communicated. Brown (2017) has stated that he doubts New Zealand will ever have a definitive national cuisine, and this is something he embraces: “being a New World country, and not bound by tradition, gives us a real sense of freedom with our cooking. We can essentially ‘magpie’ from everywhere” (p. 10), a situation he has exploited in the successful introduction of the slider.

It is possible that the slider was a moment waiting to happen. The media content analysis showed miniaturised food had appeared in print ahead of Depot's opening. *Cuisine* featured mini-bagels in a Regal salmon advertising feature in May 2010 and, in the December immediately following Depot's debut, Burger King had introduced its “smaller” range, citing its “ladylike” qualities (“Kitchen Notebook”, 2011). This miniaturisation is part of the approachability aspect of the slider, referenced in participant interviews. Armstrong, for example, commented on the “whole grains and sour dough” health-conscious consumer who, nevertheless, will eat a white bread slider because of its diminutive size. The slider's size is quite possibly a factor in its popularity, but if it was the sole reason for its success, then similar items – the Tin Soldier's jammer or Rockefeller's slurger, for example – might also have stuck.

Fischler (1988) describes the “incorporation” (or consumption) of food as the basis of human self-identity, encapsulating the Brillat-Savarin (1825/1994) aphorism that humans are what they eat. When consumers eat Depot sliders, they are ingesting bespoke carbohydrates and sustainably caught proteins, but, as this research proposes, they are also aligning themselves with Al Brown – the celebrity chef who loves white bread, who thinks restaurants should be more fun than starched tablecloths and stemmed wine-glasses, and who promotes and idealises a nostalgic Kiwi experience and identity. Rousseau (2013) suggests the modern celebrity chef is a marketer and maker of commodities with the “ability to influence the mundane and necessary of daily tasks” (p. 58), pointing to the likes

of British chef Jamie Oliver who, reportedly, caused a spike in supermarket nutmeg sales in the United Kingdom after he appeared on television using the spice in a spaghetti bolognese. Meanwhile, Caraher, Lange and Dixon (2000) argue that as chefs become brands they become capable of selling product beyond a restaurant meal and Brown (2014) recognises this when he states restaurateurs “underestimate the importance of a creating a brand ... at [their] own peril” (p. 37). Appadurai (1988) notes the role of cookbooks in shaping national appetites and, again, Brown (2014) comes to the party. When he published his original fish slider recipe in a cookbook (*Depot: Biography of a Restaurant (With Recipes)*), Brown was literally inviting consumers to partake in a piece of him. In discussing the slider’s unlikely elevation to signature dish, he continues to cement his connection to both the slider and its association with an exceptional hospitality experience:

Signature dishes are funny old things. At first you love them because the reason they become a signature of the restaurant is that they taste bloody great and everyone loves them. Then you go through a phase of boredom, followed soon after by an absolute loathing. But you have to remember it is not how *you* feel about the dish; it’s all about the customer ... we are in the ‘yes’ game not the ‘no’ game. (Brown, 2014, p. 134).

#### **6.4 The media as messenger**

This study also considered the role of media in the embeddedness of the slider. Jacobs (2014) typifies reviewer’s comments when she states that, on a visit to Depot, the sliders are “obligatory” (para. 2). Without this kind of ongoing media interest via published interviews with Brown, critiques of Depot restaurant and ongoing coverage of its activities (including its presence in major restaurant awards), it is possible the slider might have been no more than a short-lived novelty item on a celebrity chef’s menu (à la “tekina” cocktail referenced in Chapter 1, for example). Blank (2006) argues food reviews give the audience a “frame” to understand a product and this certainly appears to be the case with the slider. While Brown posits the slider as approachable and easy to understand in its own right, it is the ongoing media coverage that has linked the slider to Depot and Brown, thus ensuring its continued cachet. Spang (2001) writes that

restaurants rely on legend and that fame is “the first of the restaurant’s household gods” (p. 234). In contemporary times, it is the media – print and broadcast – that makes fame and taste. A taste-maker has the power to nurture or negate a trend and, in Brown’s case, it nurtured with headlines, awards and top restaurant review scores. *Viva’s* Nici Wickes (whose reviews formed part of the media analysis of Chapter 5) set the tone when she wrote that Depot felt like home but, in its first few months of operation, Depot was also described as “pretty much the perfect restaurant” (Murray, 2011, para. 4) and “cool, hot, fabulous” (Marriner, 2011, para. 12). When Al Brown was named *Cuisine’s* 2013 Restaurant Personality of the Year, editor Sarah Nicholson said in a press release “Al Brown has a knack for gauging exactly what we want to eat and drink right now ... Depot has set many of the most recent dining trends in New Zealand, including the joys of wine on tap, sliders, lamb ribs and freshly shucked clams” (*Cuisine*, 2013). It is, perhaps, a chicken-and-egg argument. The media (in particular television) made Al Brown famous, but Al Brown’s fame continued to bring in the media, and its subsequent reportage and positive reviews brought in the public whose consumption ensured what was once a novelty menu item at Depot became copied and mainstream.

Finkelstein (2013) has described food as a “social marker” claiming that food preferences and habits can reflect an individual’s status. If the slider is integral to Depot and if Depot is an extension of Al Brown, then it is, perhaps, no surprise that when given the opportunity to align themselves with Brown’s celebrity and success outside of the restaurant context, consumers jumped onboard. Sliders were Depot’s surprise signature dish and remain one of its most popular menu items. That, in turn, gave Armstrong the confidence to take the slider bun public as soon as he possibly could. In 2018, when interviewed for this research project, Armstrong reported that Loaf was baking an estimated 3,000-5,000 sliders daily. He noted other bakers had joined the market place, supplying slider buns to New Zealand’s large supermarket chains. Barlow (2015), for example, reported brioche-style sliders were part of Tip Top Bakery’s 2015 deluxe range and, a year later, when Nature’s Fresh Bakery

announced a national Sunday Fun-day, it advised sliders would be a key ingredient in festivities (“Nature’s Fresh”, 2016). This twin positioning of the slider by major corporate food vendors – “deluxe” but also “fun” – appears to mirror Brown’s initial vision for Depot. It is a high-quality restaurant capable of winning national awards, but it is also, as Brown said in his interview, “fun” and “raucous”. The supermarket slider is sold as a piece of consumable deluxe fun but this is a marketing strategy that might have fallen flat had the slider’s introduction to New Zealand been the bread aisle of a major supermarket and not an Al Brown-owned restaurant.

### **6.5 Taking the slider home**

The slider’s shift from restaurant to home was, this research contends, cemented when food and lifestyle magazines introduced the slider bun to the ingredients lists of recipes aimed at home cooks. *Cuisine*, perhaps unsurprisingly given its dominant position in the New Zealand food media landscape, was the first to do this. Its crayfish and tarragon mayonnaise slider (F. Smith, 2012, November) was a luxury proposition, in keeping with the magazine’s higher socio-economic readership demographic, but also appropriate to Brown’s own celebrity status (as noted earlier, a year before he opened Depot, Brown had actually produced a luxury beachside barbecue recipe spread for *Cuisine*, starring crayfish – and bread rolls). Interview participants indicated that the slider’s broad-spectrum consumer appeal, its ability to be both highbrow and lowbrow, might have been one reason for its success and this is evident in the media analysis of home recipes for the slider.

The first *Cuisine* recipe relies on an expensive seafood filling, but at the family end of the food media market, the *NZWW* is content to use the slider as a vehicle for leftover roast meat (Wilcox, 2013). Schrader (2014) establishes that when the *NZWW* was launched in 1932, its intention was to become “a national family journal in the truest and fullest sense of the word” (para. 1). Its readership is known to be relatively conservative. One former editor recalled typical reader outrage when she featured international celebrity gossip: “Paris Hilton sticking her tongue down the throat of Val Kilmer was

totally unacceptable, thank you very much” (Kitchin, 2007, para. 6). As might be expected, the *NZWW*’s food offering has remained family focused. It provides regular weekly meal planners, tips for school lunch box fillings, and the like. Readers turn to its food pages for the tried and true. Trends are not ignored but they are made simple and accessible. Consider, for example, the delivery mechanism for a chicken liver pate – it is not an artisan bread or a homemade cracker, but “triangles of Vogel’s toast” (Jackson, 2010, June 28, p. 36). Of the three magazines analysed, the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* was the slowest to introduce readers to the slider, and, when it did, took great care to demystify it (as previously mentioned, its definition extended to a precise measurement of slider bun), but that the slider even appeared in the *NZWW* at all is the best evidence of embeddedness well beyond its original restaurant setting.

The theoretical role of mass media as a driver of food trends discussed in Chapter 2 is proven in the media analysis presented in Chapter 5. Depot was universally feted by restaurant reviewers who frequently remarked on its New Zealand bach aesthetic and its informality – an ethos encapsulated by its sliders, which the critics defined as mini-burgers served on shared plates and designed to be eaten with the hands. Blank (2007) commented that “only a credible review can persuade” (p. 50) and the slider was made credible by the biggest food masthead in the business when Depot won *Cuisine* magazine’s Restaurant of the Year award and the slider was singled out for mention by the head judge. It was the subject of frequent reportage in the trend-setting *Viva*, a magazine inserted into the *New Zealand Herald*, the country’s most viewed daily newspaper with a readership of 453,000 (“NZ Herald Bucks the Trend”, 2019) and it was given an ultimate stamp of approval when, just three years after its arrival, *NZWW* readers were encouraged to add sliders to their home entertaining menus.

The *NZWW* has never pursued the slider’s luxe capacity in the same way that *Cuisine*, *Viva*, or even the restaurants who sought to copy Brown’s original product have. One of its very first iterations

contained leftover roast meat and its first seafood slider had a Thai fish cake filling (Wilcox, 2014, August 4) that consisted of minced white fish and cheap surimi – worlds away from *Cuisine*'s crayfish or even the whole fish pieces of the Depot restaurant original. Notwithstanding this, the *NZWW* has embraced the slider more comprehensively than *Cuisine*, producing a total of six recipes over the six-year study period, compared to *Cuisine*'s two. The latter's lack of continued uptake is likely to relate to the slider's diminishing status as both a novel and luxurious food. In her participant interview, for example, Grant explained the relative absence of hamburger recipes in *Cuisine* (12, against the 50 observed in *NZWW*) by stating that *Cuisine*'s recipes aimed to be "a bit more higher end". However, *Cuisine*'s 2015 placement of a venison slider in its Quick Smart column (G. Grant, 2015) is further indication of the slider's embeddedness. The Quick Smart column differs from the magazine's main recipe features in that it does not explicitly list ingredients and/or methods. The slider's appearance in a column that relies on readers to apply their own cooking knowledge to create complete dishes from only general prompts less than five years after its introduction at Depot further emphasises the slider's ubiquity. By 2015, the slider was in major supermarkets throughout New Zealand and being copied in restaurants in Auckland (and possibly further afield – such research was outside the scope of this study). Mennell (1996) suggests that women's magazines were likely motivators and makers of food trends. In 2015, the slider was being touted by the likes of *Viva* as great for crowds "young and old" (Casley, 2015, p. 22) and was as likely to contain ham and pineapple in the *NZWW* (Wilcox, 2014, December 22) as it was venison in *Cuisine* (G. Grant, 2015). Brown (2017) recognises the gastronomic freedom New Zealanders enjoy because of a lack of a defined national cuisine but, as has been extensively shown in this and preceding chapters, Brown also recognises the value in paying a degree of homage to tradition, and the importance of bringing in experts to progress his vision to the point where it attracted the attention of tastemakers who, in turn, influenced a broader societal trend. It is the combination of these factors that has been critical to the slider's stickability.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This dissertation asked why the slider stuck. In seeking to answer this question, this research considered how and why this item of gastronomic material culture was introduced, popularised and embedded within New Zealand, drawing on theories of class distinction, cultural omnivorism, the pull of nostalgia, the rise of smart-casual dining and the role of mass media in taste-making. Why did the slider stick? A simple answer might be – because Al Brown told it to. Brown's business nous put the slider on the menu at his Auckland restaurant Depot and created the brief that resulted in the product baker Sean Armstrong was able to take to a wider market under the Loaf brand. The slider was novel and that attracted media attention which, in turn, drove consumer demand. It was also, quite literally, there; in packets of eight, at high-end grocery stores, waiting to be purchased by the home cooks who would follow *Cuisine's* instructions to stuff it with crayfish and the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly's* instructions to fill it with leftovers. The slider was revealed as a democratic little bun, as at-home on a high school ball pre-function menu in a wealthy suburb as it was on a menu at KFC or in a recipe book contribution from a member of the national rugby team.

The research identified various factors that led to the slider's embeddedness in New Zealand's culinary culture. These included its approachability, informality, association with a celebrity chef and its invocation of nostalgia. The data analysis suggested one theme was dominant. The slider's connection to the food consumed at the Kiwi bach that Brown unashamedly sought to commercialise when he opened Depot was emphasised by interview participants and media reportage and, as a concept, particularly supported by the gastronomic theory that sought to explain the rise of smart-casual dining. The Depot slider might not have looked like the white bread sandwich that contained the summer holiday seafood catch of the day but, to the consumer, it *felt* like it. It was soft and hand-held childhood comfort food reimagined for an adult audience by a chef who was known and trusted. The slider, however, did not stop there. It outgrew its creator's vision to become anything to anyone, assuring its longevity and, ultimately, its *stickability*.



The New Zealand diet had steadily internationalised since the 1970s. Had this research attempted to pin down the country's very first sushi or pizza or (as discussed earlier) hamburger restaurant, the task might have proved more difficult. The slider was a unique research proposition in that it was a widely available contemporary food item of international derivation that, in its New Zealand context, had a specific and traceable origin story courtesy of the media-driven fame of its sponsor, Al Brown. Brown, for his part, had subverted the meat patty American original and given it a Kiwi twist. He had personally vouched for the slider and that celebrity endorsement helped but, crucially, he gave it an authentic New Zealand identity. The slider became an aspect of Kiwi character – the bach-dwelling, beach-living hunter and gatherer – manifest through the material culture of cuisine.

The temptation was to align the slider wholly to the “Kiwi bloke” persona cultivated by Brown himself and emphasised in the Kiwi bach aesthetic of Depot but the slider transcended that categorisation. Such pigeon-holing would have been inescapable if Brown had literally recreated a white bread sandwich or, indeed, a full-sized fish burger. The slider's diminutive size allowed it to shift from man-food to everyman (and woman and child) food, as reflected in the media reportage of the slider as suitable for big and small mouths alike and in its further subversion and uptake by the mainstream media recipe writers who went on to fill those slider buns with everything from leftover roast meat to surimi. Nostalgia and celebrity marketing got the customer through the door but, arguably, the slider's uptake powerfully revealed the New Zealand tendency to, as Brown put it, “magpie” food trends and make them their own. The making of New Zealand's postcolonial gastronomic identity was – and is – still a work in progress.

At the conclusion of this research, the slider's future seemed assured. Sales data from Depot placed total slider sales at almost one million individual units and new sliders were being observed on restaurant and fast-food outlet menus around Auckland. This

research did not, however, seek consumer perception of the slider. The chicken sliders that emerged at KFC, and the deep fried bao buns filled with iced cream noted at one Auckland restaurant during the writing of this dissertation, did not bear any resemblance to the Depot original. While that emphasised this research project's argument for the slider's adaptability as a factor in its stickability, it has yet to be seen what that degree of subversion might have done to the slider's ongoing credibility and appeal.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A. Indicative questions prepared for participant interviews.**

What was your first understanding of a “slider”?

When did you personally first encounter the slider concept?

How did you view the slider (positively/negatively/neutrally) and why?

Did the slider remind you of any other food item? Was it suggestive of any particularly culinary genealogy?

What specifically made you think the slider would work in a New Zealand context? What aspects of the slider do you think have specifically appealed to New Zealanders?

Considering various aspects of the slider, what are your thoughts on the impact of the following on the slider’s introduction and uptake:

- The celebrity chef status of chef Al Brown
- Its aesthetic (small, attractive on social media, etc)
- Its physical content (bread, fish, etc)
- Its place in the New Zealand culinary canon (the evolution of the burger)?

Why do you think the slider has “stuck” in the New Zealand context?

What do you think uptake of the slider says about New Zealand’s food identity?

Is the slider a “kiwi” food, or does it retain its association with the United States? What makes a food “kiwi”?

What is the slider’s status compared to a traditional burger – higher/lower/the same?

In your experience/opinion what factors contribute to New Zealanders embracing new foods?

Does the slider have a future in New Zealand?

Has the slider’s status changed since its initial introduction?

Is the slider associated with any particular social/cultural/socio-economic sector of New Zealand society?

Can you think of any other introduced foodstuffs that compare to the slider?

Do you consider the slider a trend, or a permanent fixture? Could it become a cultural icon as per fish and chips or meat pies – why/why not?

## Appendix B. Participant consent form.

### Consent Form

*Project title: **Why the slider stuck: How a baby fish burger captured a nation's palate.***

*Project Supervisor: **Dr Tracy Berno***

*Researcher: **Kim Knight***

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated August 1, 2018.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that in the research findings I will be identified by name and job title and in relation to my professional expertise and/or direct involvement in the research topic.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on  
[type the date on which the final approval was granted] AUTEK Reference  
number [type the AUTEK reference number]***

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

**Appendix C.**  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**  
**approval**

9 July 2018

Tracy Berno

Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Tracy

**Ethics Application:18/270 Why the slider stuck: How a baby fish burger captured a nation's palate.**

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. I am pleased to advise that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application, subject to the following conditions:

1. Provision of the authorising signature for section O.3 of the application;
2. The committee understands that because of the purposive nature of interviewee selection, and the fact that these persons are well known in their field of expertise, no confidentiality is being offered. This needs to be explained in the Information Sheet, and an explicit statement in the Consent Form should state that participants understand that they will be identified by name in any report of the research.

Please provide me with a response to the points raised in these conditions, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTEC also requires copies of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. You are not required to resubmit the application form again. Any changes to responses in the form required by the committee in their conditions may be included in a supporting memorandum.

Please note that the Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

Once your response is received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any

enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at  
[ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kate O'Connor

Executive Manager

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

**Table A1.**  
**Recipe titles and bread components for hamburgers and sliders, published**  
**in New Zealand Woman's Weekly and Cuisine, 2010-2015**

YEAR	RECIPE TITLE	BREAD TYPE	SOURCE
2010	Summer fish burger on pita bread with tartare sauce	Pita	Jackson, H. (2010, January 11). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 43.
	Gourmet fish burgers	Ciabatta loaf	Jackson, H. (2010, June 21). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 40.
	Pork and sage burgers with apple rings	Ciabatta rolls	Jackson, H. (2010, September 10). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 45.
	Lamb burgers with beetroot relish	Soft buns	Jackson, H. (2010, November 8). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 43.
	Beef muffin burgers	English muffins	Jackson, H. (2010, November 22). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 45.
	Mini blue cheese burger	Bread rolls	Jackson, H. (2010, December 6). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 47.
	Classic Kiwi burgers	Hamburger buns	Summer entertaining with Maggi. (2010, December 13). <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 50.
	Minty lamb burgers	Bread rolls	Jackson, H. (2010, December 20). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 45.
	Burgers with roasted eggplant, red capsicum and minted yoghurt	Grilled flatbread	Snowball, A. (2010, January). <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 119.
2011	Melting middle lamb burgers	Ciabatta rolls	Jackson, H. (2011, January 10). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 47.
	Turkish lamb burger	Turkish bread	Jackson, H. (2011, January 24). Hot stuff. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 39.
	Vegetarian lamb burger	Panini	Jackson, H. (2011, May 23). The flipside. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-38.
	Thai fish burger	English muffins	Jackson, H. (2011, May 23). The flipside. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-38.
	Turkish lamb burger	Pita bread	Jackson, H. (2011, May

			23). The flipside. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-38.
	Chicken, bacon, cranberry and brie burger	Bagels	Jackson, H. (2011, May 23). The flipside. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-38.
	Pork burger with pineapple salsa	Turkish bread	Jackson, H. (2011, May 23). The flipside. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-38.
	Zingy salmon burgers	Ciabatta rolls	Jackson, H. (2011, September 19). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 41.
	Fast fish burger	Rolls	White, A. (2011, October 24). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 37.
	A rather good herby burger	Flat bread	White, A. (2011, November 21). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 35.
	Falafel burgers with tzatziki	Burger buns	White, A. (2011, December 5). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 48.
	The Indian burger	Burger buns	Brown, A. (2011, November). All fired up. <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 97.
2012	Summer fish burger on Turkish bread	Turkish bread	White, A. (2012, January 9). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> ,
	Vegetarian chickpea burgers	Burger buns	White, A. (2012, January 9). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> ,
	Vietnamese fish burgers	Small bread rolls	White, A. (2012, January 9). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> ,
	Falafel burgers	Pita bread	White, A. (2012, May 14). Bag a bargain. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 47.
	Inside-out cheeseburgers	Unspecified	White, A. (2012, August 27). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 58.
	Beef and bean burger wraps	Wholegrain tortillas	White, A. (2012, September 10). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 52.
	Lamb burgers with feta	Baps or burger buns	White, A. (2012, September 17). Ka pai kai. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 47.
	Chicken cordon blue burger	Slices of	White, A. (2012,



		wholemeal bread	September 17). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 58.
	Posh chicken burger with sundried tomato mayo	Unspecified	Oliver, J. (2012, September 24). Fast food improved. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 52.
	Wasabi salmon burgers	Unspecified (photograph shows lettuce leaves)	White, A. (2012, December 3). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 59.
	Budget lamb and feta burgers	Burger buns	White, A. (2012, December 31). Party pieces. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 48.
	Crayfish and tarragon mayonnaise sliders	Loaf slider buns	Snowball, K. (2012, November). Saturday bite fever. <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 98.
2013	Blue cheese portobello burgers	Hamburger buns	White, A. (2013, January 7). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 58.
	Pulled pork slider	Hamburger buns	White, A. (2013, February 4). Get grilling. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 46-51.
	Easy beef and chilli burgers	Unspecified	White, A. (2013, February 4). Get grilling. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 46-51.
	Roast pork belly sliders	Small soft rolls, baps or slider buns	White, A. (2013, March 11). Moveable feast. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 46.
	Falafel burgers	Pita bread	White, A. (2013, May 27). What's for dinner. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 57.
	Thai fish burger	English muffins	What's for dinner. (2013, June 17). <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 53.
	Chicken burgers	Wholemeal buns	Van de Elzen, M. (2013, June 24). Super-sized servings. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 56.
	Pork sliders and apple coleslaw	Slider buns	Wilcox, J. (2013, August 5). The holy roast. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 66.
	Chicken burgers with avocado spread	Burger buns	Wilcox, J. (2013, November 11). Moreish for less. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 46.
	Coronation chicken on squashy poppy buns	Buns	Macaller, N. (2013, December 2). Middle Ma'am. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 54.
	Steak burgers with herb coleslaw	Ciabatta loaf or buns	Wilcox, J. (2013, December 9). Steak a

			claim. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 53.
	The ultimate beef burger	Burger buns	Smith, F. (2013, March). Burger kings. <i>Cuisine</i> , pp. 80-88.
	Gurnard burgers with fennel and hazelnut slaw	Soft burger buns	Smith, F. (2013, March). Burger kings. <i>Cuisine</i> , pp. 80-88.
	Steamed pork burgers with kimchi mayonnaise	Steamed buns or small soft white buns	Smith, F. (2013, March). Burger kings. <i>Cuisine</i> , pp. 80-88.
	Stuffed mushroom burgers with eggplant pickle and garlic	Turkish pide	Smith, F. (2013, March). Burger kings. <i>Cuisine</i> , pp. 80-88.
	Chicken Caesar burgers with parmesan mayonnaise and fries	Ciabatta or sourdough buns	Smith, F. (2013, March). Burger kings. <i>Cuisine</i> , pp. 80-88.
	Asian pork belly burgers	Hamburger buns	McVinnie, R. (2013, November). <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 35.
2014	Sticky pork burgers with rice noodle salad	Unspecified	Hamilton, J. (2014, February 17). Spice up your summer. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 53.
	Mini-me lamb burgers	Slider buns or small burger buns	Van de Elzen, M. (2014, March 10). Slide away. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 56.
	Lemon pepper fish burgers	Sourdough buns	Wilcox, J. (2014, March 31). Fabulous fish. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 35.
	Seared chicken burgers	Sourdough buns	Wilcox, J. (2014, June 23). The bird is the word. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 44.
	Thai fish cake sliders	Sliders	Wilcox, J. (2014, August 4). Roll on up. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-40.
	Venison and blue cheese burgers with cranberry relish	Sourdough buns or baps	Wilcox, J. (2014, August 4). Roll on up. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 36-40.
	Lamb burgers with grilled vegetables	Sourdough buns or similar	Wilcox, J. (2014, November 17). Hey grill-friend. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , pp. 32-33.
	Hot ham sliders with pineapple compote	Slider buns	Wilcox, J. (2014, December 22). The night before Christmas. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 39.
	Moroccan spiced lamb burger with tomato chilli jam	Floury white baps	Merrett, P. (2014, January). Kind of the zing. <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 110.
	Beef burgers with grilled baby	Toasted buns	McVinnie, R. (2014,

	leeks		September). Quick smart. <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 56.
2015	Mini hamburgers	Little buns	Wilcox, J. (2015, February 2). Top of the class. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 36
	Beef and mozzarella burgers	Burger buns	Wilcox, J. (2015, February 9). It's tucker time. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 39.
	Cajun fish burgers	Bread rolls	Catch of the day. (2015, June 8). <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 43.
	Black bean beetroot burger	Unspecified	Kitchen calendar. (2015, June 8). <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 45.
	Buttery mussel and sake buns	Sliders or small soft white rolls	Wickes, N. (2015, November 9). Nippon tuck in. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 39.
	Mexican chicken and zucchini burgers	Unspecified	Langbein, A. (2015, November 9). Muy Delicioso. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 42.
	Eggplant "burgers"	Eggplant slices	Wickes, N. (2015, December 21). Feed a crowd. <i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i> , p. 36.
	Bulgogi burgers with quick kimchi	Soft sesame buns	Smith, F. (2015, March). Fine brining. <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 86.
	Beef and beetroot burgers	Unspecified	McVinnie, R. (2015, May). Quick smart. <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 48.
	Venison sliders	Slider buns	Grant, G. (2015, September). <i>Cuisine</i> , p. 54.