

What June means to me...

SARAH WILSON, former magazine editor and new host of 'MasterChef Australia', talks to *Notebook*: about what's cooking in her life this month.

Why do you think cooking shows have become so popular recently?

When times get financially tough, we bunker down and seek comfort from the basic things in life, such as food, family and... re-tiling the bathroom; we seek domestic-based entertainment. It's all about cocooning.

'MasterChef Australia' is based on the successful British show. What sets it apart from the other cooking shows?

Cooking shows to date haven't captured the emotional connection we have to food; 'MasterChef' does. Unlike a lot of reality TV, 'MasterChef' is not catty; it's positive. And it features contestants who span a diverse range of demographics; they're not all bum-dancing extroverts who want their mug on telly! Australians will follow the stories of a submariner, an ex pro-golfer, a 22-year-old food nerd and a Greek grandmother. This is very visceral and real television... finally!

The contestants face a number of different challenges. Which do you think is the toughest? The first mystery box challenge – where the contestants had to make a dish from a pork chop, cabbage and dark chocolate – was particularly gruelling.

What, for you, is the essence of June?

My mum's chicken soup simmering on the stove with bay leaves and lots of root vegetables. Pumpkin, turnips, swedes... they bring us nicely down to earth.

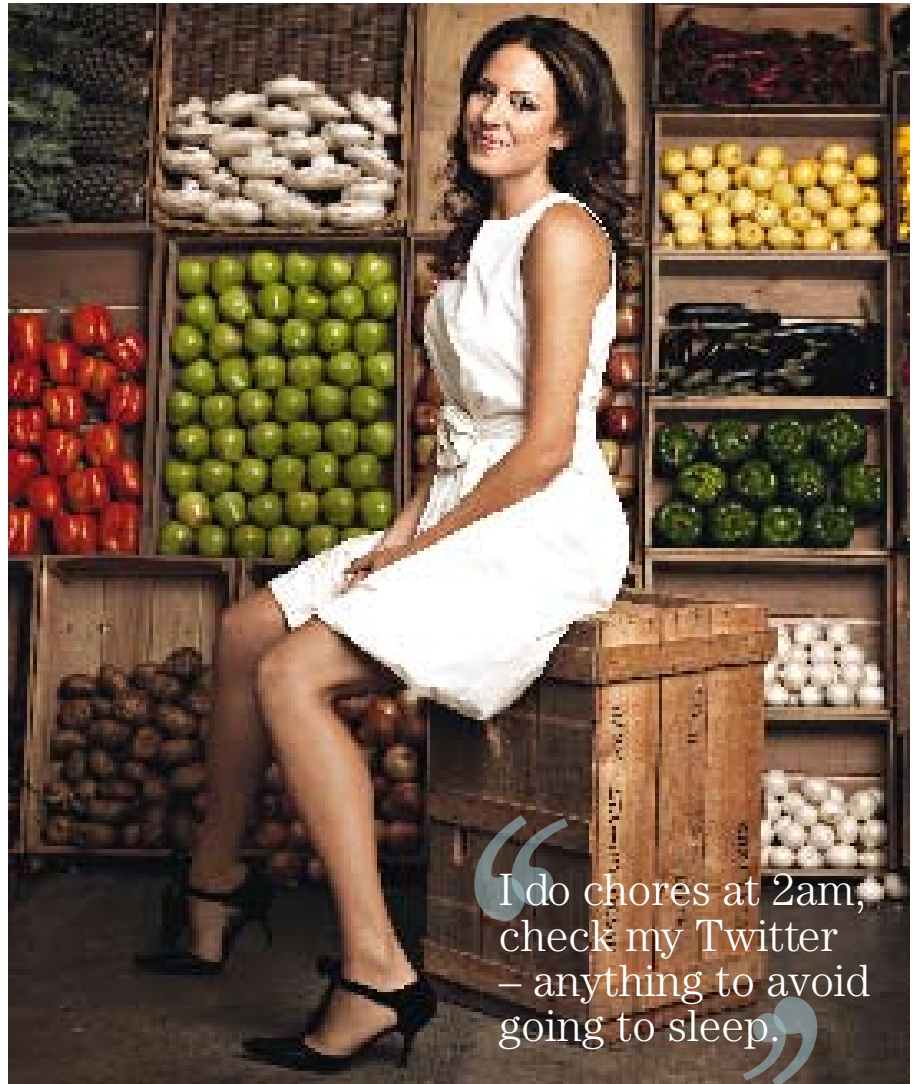
When was the most memorable June you've ever had?

I once rode my bike from Brisbane to Cairns on my own, to escape winter. Riding through pineapple plantations on my own in the crisp early morning light was just magic.

How will you spend your leisure time in June?

Filming 'MasterChef' and heading away for weekends to the Hawkesbury [north of Sydney] with friends – walks in Ku-Ring-Gai National Park, egg boots and long, bombastic dinners. A perfect trifecta. Followed by a trip to France to climb Mont Blanc.

What will you cook in June? Stifados, goulashes and other one-pot wonders.



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I love spices and root vegetables.

According to Ayurvedic philosophy, they're grounding and warming for the spirit.

When are you happiest? When I'm riding down a mountain on my bike, feeling like I'm in perfect flow. This feeling of ease and agility sums up all I seek from life.

When are you saddest? When I can sense loneliness in the people around me. It might be a look from an old man on a bus, or seeing a child that's been bullied. I connect with my own sense of aloneness and it cuts deeply.

Your most annoying habit?

I do chores at 2am, check my Twitter – anything to avoid going to sleep.

Your personal motto? Where your mind goes, the energy flows. If you approach life stridently and vibrantly, then everyone and everything will move in step. I believe this, although I have to consciously try to live this way. It takes courage to do so.

'MasterChef Australia' premieres April 27. It screens on Sunday nights at 6.30pm, and weeknights at 7pm on Network Ten.