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## Food

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# THE NEW hunter gatherers

Move over gen X and Y – a new social group has taken over. They are what they eat, and that's OK with them.

According to consumer behaviourists Ross Honeywill and Verity Byth, about four million Australian are creating a new economic order. For that reason they've dubbed them the Neos. The Neos and their "consumption arousal" is changing society – Neos and Evolvers (those who have Neo traits but are not yet spending enough to qualify) account for 77% of discretionary spending, while in a parallel universe the Traditionals, whose numbers are greater, account for the remaining 23%.

Honeywill and Byth believe the old descriptors such as gen X or Y, baby boomers or the AB demographic no longer give the full picture. They're as different as chalk and cheese (see box). And nothing focuses a Neo's consumption lust quite like food ...

FOR TRADITIONALS, FOOD IS fuel. For Neos, you are not only what you eat, but how you eat. Eating and drinking are a celebration of the passage of the day. Their high expectations and wide experiences make them demanding customers of produce markets, grocers, delis, bakeries and butchers. Neos dominate the consumption of high-discretionary choice foods such as seafood, free-range poultry (chemical-free chickens and ducks), and hand-made sourdough breads, bagels and croissants.

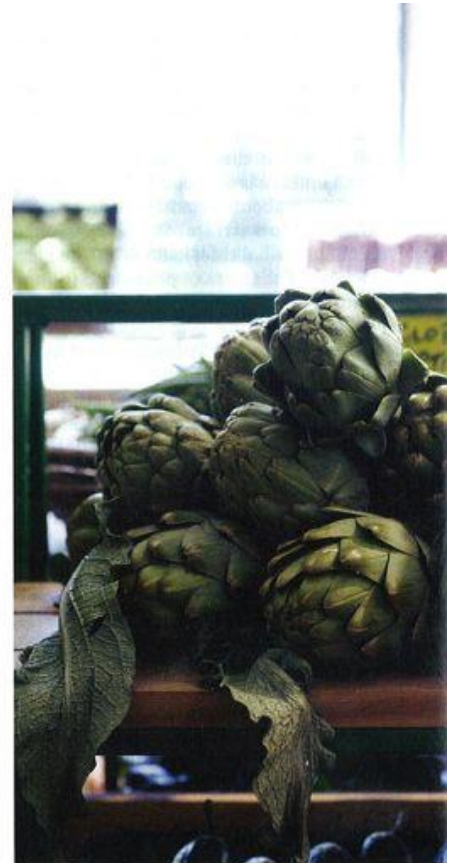
The very process of researching, planning, sourcing, and sharing food is an obsession of most Neos, regardless of whether they are confident or even competent cooks. Since authenticity is emblematic for Neos, they want to know where their produce originates so they can connect with it and, through the food, have a relationship with the producers. They want evidence that there is a philosophy and vision behind the food they eat and the merchandising. They want to see the passion that makes it stand for something. They want it handmade because it signifies individuality, the unexpected, a more intense and unpredictable flavour. They want to be challenged by design, new

flavours, new information, new combinations of food, and new philosophies like the Slow Food movement.

Good food retailers understand that food is more than just fuel or sustenance. Its innate appeal operates also on a sensual level: the way it looks on a shelf creates strong tactile responses; design and style create a level of stimulation and pleasure. Where there is strong and textural design in food retailing, it signals to Neos a richer experience than that offered by a supermarket.

Sarah Fielding [an archetypal Neo who lives in Sydney's inner-city Woolloomooloo] is not yet a confident cook. But she loves to eat well and to shop well. One of the things that most attracted her to her current home is the strip in nearby Potts Point. It has an Italian greengrocer who turns fresh produce unsold at the end of the day into juices, pasta sauces and soups. There's a Chinese noodle shop that also sells roast duck, chicken and pork. There's a cafe that bakes its own bread and cakes. There's an old-style milk bar run by a Lebanese family that has a great selection of cheese and antipasti, and basic household items to get her through the week.

Once a month, Fielding makes a visit to the

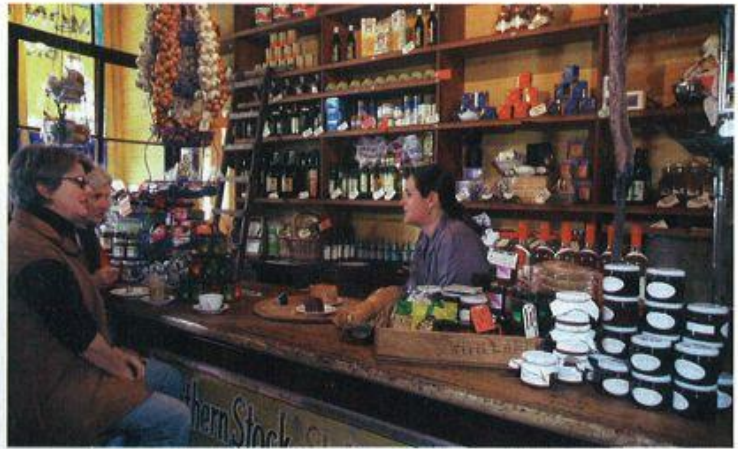


COOL FUEL Artichokes, above, rosemary and garlic olive oil, centre, and queso de cabra cheese, right

supermarket in a sprawling concrete shopping centre. She calls it "guerilla shopping": she just wants to get in and out as fast as possible. When she does make time to cook for friends or family, she plans a trip to a specialty providore, such as Simon Johnson. She'll take time to explore the store, stopping to taste, having a coffee and browsing through a cookbook, immersing herself in all the possibilities. She'll ask the foodie shop assistants to help select the ingredients and accessories she needs to turn her inspiration into a celebration.

Neos love to know as much as they can about what they eat. They collect stories about ingredients, local producers, specialist sellers, and the different ways that each culture approaches preparation and presentation. Rich information helps this demographic make informed choices about what they eat and how, and where and when they eat it. The better the information, the more intense the consumption arousal.

Cliffy's Food Store at Daylesford in Victoria demonstrates how many of these characteristics can be expressed to attract custom. Cliffy's was developed by Mary Ellis and Geoffrey Gray, who created an atmosphere of eccentric



**CORNUCOPIA** Cliffy's Food Store in Daylesford



It is everything modern food retailing for the masses isn't. It assumes that everyone is interested in good food and good living. There are no boundaries between kitchen and shop, or shop and cafe. It's democratic – staff are called helpers because “we're all equal and we're all having a good time” – and customers explore the offerings for themselves rather than wait for “permission”. It is unapologetic that things may be hard to find, that tomatoes are not in season, that they don't believe in soy milk, that they didn't get a delivery of bread because their baker has taken the day off to go to her niece's wedding. It's eccentric – you can't avoid the large personalities that merge bossiness with caring. All in all, it is unforgettably Neo. ●

An edited extract from *Neo Power: How the new economic order is changing the way we live, work and play*, by Ross Honeywill and Verity Byth, published this week by Scribe

“THE PROCESS OF PLANNING, SOURCING, AND SHARING FOOD IS A NEO OBSESSION”

intimacy that evokes a time when food and eating were more central to our daily culture. Housed in one of the town's original stores with period counters and display shelves down each side of a long, high-ceilinged room, taste temptations spill out at every step. In a side room, there is a cafe to enjoy the store's produce made into simple, original meals. Gray envisioned retail “theatre” with layer-on-layer of honest, eclectic, riotous, complex, abundant finishes and textures, and Ellis brought to the enterprise a powerful commitment to local, regional, seasonal, rare, and scarce produce. She sought out, nurtured, and valued local individuals who could grow and produce with passion, patience, heritage and culture.



**CHALK AND CHEESE THE GENERATION MAP**

**NEOs**

Big spenders ● economically conservative ● hungry for information and memorable experiences ● quick to accept change and new technology ● well read, well educated ● vote for the Coalition but prefer the Greens' social policies ● like football, love the arts ● devour the internet ● regard food as the celebration of the day, prefer fresh Italian white truffle pasta at a top restaurant to a takeaway sandwich ● drink wine but love a beer ● prefer “hip strips” and urban villages to shopping malls ● favour individual over institutionalised power ● more likely to fly a plane or run marathons or triathlons ● invest more money and research in regular travel.

**TRADITIONALS**

Define themselves by their job ● see leisure as a way of filling in time until returning to job ● place a high value on certainty ● will stick with a job rather than risk change ● surrender decision-making to others, leave much to chance ● love shopping malls ● like a bargain, are more interested in a deal than quality ● like status and established brands ● more likely to play lawn bowls, go fishing, hunt game ● value for money in a holiday is a priority.

