



Lisa at home with her books



WORDS Lindy Schneider | PHOTOGRAPHY Mark Fergus

In Conversation with Lisa Joy Davis

WRITER, FOODIE, FARMER, MUMMA

In our winter issue we met Lisa Joy Davis and her husband Oliver Shorthouse at their Dandenong Ranges home, Ramarro Farm. In this issue we reconnect with Lisa to talk about her writing practice, finding her way, and the slow living ethos that has helped this self-confessed city girl find contentedness in the country.

Described as a story that captures when 'The Devil Wears Prada' met 'Anthony Bourdain's Kitchen Confidential', Lisa Joy Davis' debut novel *Yes, Chef!* (Penguin 2015) is an entertaining and gritty insight into the stories behind life in a high-end restaurant kitchen. Lisa wrote her 'foodie fiction' after participating in a creative writing course seven years ago. "I had other ideas to develop, but when I shared some of the stories from my own life working as a Personal Assistant for top restaurant groups in both London and Melbourne, everyone said 'write that story!', and it evolved from there."

Blessed with a work ethic instilled in her as a child, Lisa had her first draft written in six months, and when she approached a publishing contact she had made in the writing course, her manuscript was quickly picked up and launched as an eBook. "A writerly friend describes it as a 'unicorn book'. It was so enjoyable to write, and the pathway to publishing opened like magic. I know it's not like that for many authors," says Lisa. "I felt incredibly lucky and just seemed to have the timing right. Who doesn't love a 'behind the scenes'?" With the success of the eBook, a print version of *Yes, Chef!* soon followed.

"I grew up with a love for reading and writing but in my family writing was not considered a real job, so I never truly pursued my passion. I'd had a sheltered upbringing in all the ways that count so when I entered my 20s I knew I needed to get out and explore." Lisa moved to London and pursued her other love – performing – doing theatre and extra work for TV and film, and working in the production office of *Midsomer Murders*. "I travelled and lived life, and when I needed steady employment, I worked for the restaurant group and used my passion for writing in that context. It was all lived research."

Relocating to Melbourne – Lisa loved that the city had a similar cultural vibe to London – and then to the 9.5 acre Ramarro Farm in The Patch seven years ago, created peace and space for Lisa to pursue her writing, and proud of her discipline in getting words on the page, she has had several projects in the works since then. With a love for magical realism and mythology, there's much creative musing about her next book, a project that will form out of her recent return to study to complete an Associate Degree in Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT. "I am appreciating the opportunity to learn and to find different ways to write. Being among other writers makes me challenge myself in new ways."

"I am appreciating the opportunity to learn and to find different ways to write. Being among other writers makes me challenge myself in new ways."



Fragrant, just-picked sage



Radishes, ready for the kitchen

Fresh organic zucchini



"I drafted a follow up book in the Romantic Comedy/ Foodie Fiction genre, but when I reviewed it, it just didn't speak to me, so I've shelved it for now. I fell pregnant and had a beautiful baby boy and my writing took another angle as I journalled my way through post-natal depression and anxiety."

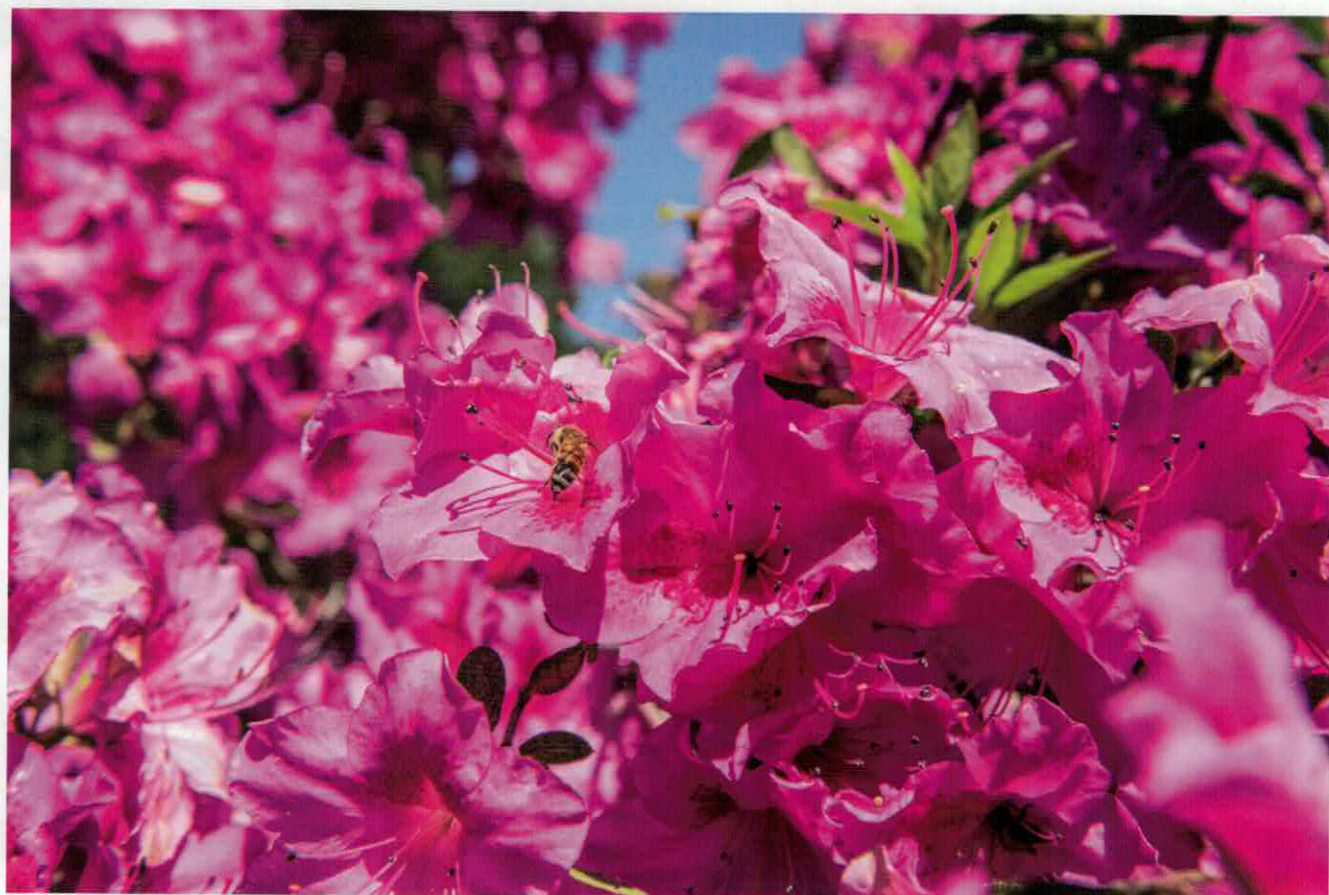
When Lisa's son was two, she started volunteer work for PANDA supporting other mums and dads going through what she had. "I learnt so much and I committed that to the page in the form of a memoir/self-help book. It was a cathartic process, and the book is informative and hopeful, but it still felt sad for me. I needed to move forward and acknowledge it was the writing that was needed. Not everything has to be published."

Lisa has also been journaling about farm life and copywriting for their growing 'direct-to chef' vegetable supply service to high-end restaurants, a business both Lisa and her husband Oliver can bring significant personal experience. "We started growing tomatoes and when we had too many, we shared them with some restaurant friends who loved them. We know when to pick for optimal flavour and could also deliver super fresh from the veggie patch direct to the kitchen. Demand grew quickly and we have been experimenting with unusual and hard-to-get vegetables that chefs get excited about, and in particular Japanese and Italian varieties." In the past two years, their home kitchen garden has become a viable business venture and while Ramarro Farm has had to pivot to community veggie boxes while restaurant demand is dampened by lockdowns, the future is promising.



Lisa and Leo love reading together





"I've learnt the importance of self-investment, of carving out time for your interests and giving yourself permission to explore."

Living on the farm brings everything together for Lisa and Oliver. A 'slow living' lifestyle that brings years of experience into the now to create a unique way of thriving as a family, while supporting personal endeavours. Even the name of their farm is a marker of their history. "Ramarro is the name of a green lizard found in Italy. They were everywhere when Oliver was working on Italian farms and honing his agricultural craft. We love the sense of connection that word brings."

"Writing brings about a certain humility. I'm a recovering perfectionist. I don't like putting things into the world unless they are faultless, but I'm working on that. I've learnt the importance of self-investment, of carving out time for your interests and giving yourself permission to explore. And, of course, when it comes to writing to practice a lot, and read, read, read." ■

For more information:

www.lisajoyauthor.com

www.panda.org.au

(Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia)

www.ramarrofarm.com.au