

off the shelf **good living**

Chop chop ... Grant Hilliard and wife Laura Dalrymple source cuts of meat reared with care for Feather and Bone; (right) Toulouse sausages. Photo: Steven Siewert



FEATHER AND BONE

Factory 1, 2-8 Parsons Street, Rozelle, 9818 2717.

Open Thurs and Fri, 7am-4.30pm; Sat, 9am-noon.

Best buys

Dry aged chuck \$23/kg.
Lamb "long things" sausages \$19/500g.
Biodynamic liver \$18.50/kg.

The ethics of eating

When it comes to finding good food, animal welfare counts for these dedicated entrepreneurs.



HELEN GREENWOOD

Laura Dalrymple likes to joke that she's a butcher's wife. "How else do you describe what we do?" she says about the boutique providore business that her husband, Grant Hilliard, began six years ago.

She has a point. How do you define the biodiversity drive behind his tracking down of rare breeds or his strict sourcing of ethically-grown animals which he then carefully processes by hand for restaurants and retail?

The politics of eating, meat in particular, triggered Hilliard's transition from avant-garde filmmaker to unconventional meat filleter. He was deep in film studies when he started bolstering his finances as a waiter. His restaurant CV is impressive, with short stints at Tony Bilson's Fine Bouche and Dietmar Sawyere's GeKKo, and copious amounts of time at The Wharf and Sean's Panaroma.

Hilliard worked on and off with Sean Moran for nine years until 2009 and, during that time, the filmmaker grew more and more curious about the path from paddock to plate.

That journey, Hilliard concluded, began with genetic diversity. When his film project finished, he set off to track down Southdown sheep he heard about on ABC radio. This old, rare breed is considered good eating because of its fine textured

meat but has since been replaced by faster-growing sheep.

Hilliard found some at a Bathurst hobby farm and Jeremy Strode, from Bistrot, was his first customer, followed by Matthew Kemp from Balzac. For several months he worked from his bedroom office delivering cuts of Southdown sheep and butchering them in the corner of a wholesale butchery. Then he was offered access to organic free-range English large white and large black pigs and suddenly he was a fully-fledged providore.

He continued to work from home, adding pasture-fed beef, veal, poultry and eggs to his portfolio and supported by a range of top-end restaurants such as Billy Kwong, Longrain and Red Lantern.

He stuck to his guns and focused on growers who believed in good soil health, animal welfare, rare

breeds, best practices and minimal intervention with chemical fertilisers. To be absolutely sure, he visits every shed and every paddock on every farm.

Dalrymple gave up her full-time work as a design project manager and came into Feather and Bone in 2009 about the time Hilliard leased the cavernous industrial premises in Rozelle that used to house Manetta's fish processing.

He deals with 30 suppliers, including a Victorian grower of Chianina beef, a rare Italian breed, and the NSW Gundooee organic wagyu beef farmer. He has selected sustainable fish species and a few weeks ago welcomed a new muscovy duck grower into the fold.

More importantly, Dalrymple has used her considerable graphic skills and set up a newsletter that reaches 2000 subscribers by email. She has beefed up retail sales to the

general public to a not-too-shabby 50 per cent of the business.

Just as well, because these days the cost-conscious restaurants still buy Hilliard's poultry and pigs but they don't buy as much of Hilliard's grass-finished beef and lamb as they used to.

Instead, people come to the factory or phone ahead to buy cuts of Rose Angus Veal from Wildes Meadow and free-range pork from Melanda Park and whole and portioned chooks from Burrawong and Bega Valley.

Side supplies include a chicken and duck liver parfait made by long-time supporter Paul McGrath from Bistro Ortolan; organic garlic, in season; Toulouse sausages; what he calls "long things" - spicy, kofte-style sausages without skins; and chicken and veal stocks.

Veal, by the way, is something of a manifesto at Feather and Bone. Some weeks ago, they put out a call to arms to protest an alleged proposal to deny veal calves liquid food for 30 hours prior to slaughter.

Hundreds responded, including some who said they would stop eating veal. Hilliard and Dalrymple ruefully acknowledge it may not be good for business but it's great for the ethical veal suppliers.