



Two of us

ANNABEL CRABB & WENDY SHARPE

When journalist Annabel Crabb (left), 42, began hosting TV's *Kitchen Cabinet*, she turned to longtime friend Wendy Sharpe, 43, for culinary advice. The pair share a passion for food and have collaborated on a new recipe book.

WENDY: Annabel and I grew up in Two Wells on the Adelaide Plains north of the city. She has always been funny. In primary school she had a pun for whatever school project we were doing. Two Wells was a very small town and little happened, so events were anticipated by us and grabbed with both hands. At one annual street parade, Annabel marched with her own banner as the Lone Brownie of the North. She was very small as a child and I can still remember the tiny Lone Brownie of the North.

We both have quite exceptional cooking pedigrees. Her mother is one of the best and my grandmother was an excellent cook, too. We were definitely into cooking as children, and we were both bookworms, but we weren't girly girls.

One day we were checking for snakes in a woodpile when we saw this thing floating in the river. We were in Enid Blyton mode and thought it was a dead body. Using garden forks, we tore it apart and it turned out to be a horse's stomach.

We went to different secondary schools, but both in Adelaide, and we both went to uni in Adelaide. We weren't in the same city again until Annabel and I were both in London from 2004 to 2007. Then we both lived in Sydney for three years from 2009.

Anything to do with food, a birthday, or something slightly frivolous, Annabel will

never put in the "too hard" basket. She likes a folly in life and in the kitchen.

Annabel specialises in the complicated, bordering-on-impossible dish. She found a recipe for Quercyan cake, which required moving the furniture in her London flat in order to roll out a vast swathe of pastry. It took a whole day to make. A decade later I moved to near Quercy [in France] and no one had ever heard of such a cake.

Despite having a baby at the time, she put on an outrageous spread for my second baby shower. She made polenta-dusted, 20-cent-piece-sized English muffins for miniature quail-eggs benedict. Then she threw me an extravagant baby shower for my third child, at which we all wore evening dresses and ate consommé out of teacups. She's very good at throwing parties. She's very confident, witty and extroverted. She's also a very kind person.

Annabel pitched the idea of *Kitchen Cabinet* and in 2011 the ABC gave her a chance to make the first series. She kept emailing me with questions and requests so, by the end, I had pretty much been its recipe consultant. From then on my role became official. Because in *Kitchen Cabinet* the politician cooks the main course and Annabel brings the dessert, she spoke to me back then about the idea of a book of recipes for transportable food. Initially,

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I said “no”, but now I'm really pleased we have written *Special Delivery*.

Because Annabel lives in Sydney and I live in London, I don't see her anymore, and that's difficult.

ANNABEL: Wendy has always been adventurous. When we were about seven, she brought a mango to school. In 1970s Adelaide Plains, this was the equivalent of appearing with a talking monkey. I had never heard of a mango. It was so exotic.

We both grew up on farms and in households where there was lots of cooking. The shearers' smokos were epic catering events and we'd help out with the huge trays of cakes and slices.

Wendy's very emotional about food, which is one of my favourite things about her. Ever since she was a kid, the sight of a forgotten lunch or a sandwich left behind reduced her to tears.

At uni, I studied art and she did science. She's highly scientific in her approach to cooking and bombards me with chemical explanations of why things taste good.

Wendy's very thoughtful and she's an incredibly loyal friend. When my first child was born, she cooked for me for a week. Every morning she left a basket inside the downstairs door of my London flat, with something fabulous for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was incredible post-partum catering and made the first week of being a parent unbelievably perfect.

I'm very influenced by her. She's got a specific aesthetic and very good taste. She has always been obsessed with going to auction houses and as a result I have become obsessed, too. We both love old furniture and old clothes and jewellery. We used to go shopping together at uni.

She is a much better cook than I am. Some of the most imaginative recipes in *Special Delivery* are hers. She is absurdly scientific about the recipes for *Kitchen Cabinet*, which makes me sob with laughter. By the third series she had an Excel spreadsheet listing the ingredients that we had used, and was saying, “I think we've got room for something raspberry related.”

We both enjoy preposterous dishes. Wendy reminds me of the Quercyan cake, which was the stupidest cake I have ever cooked. It didn't even taste good.

She is highly ambitious in terms of the food that she attempts to transport. Both in London and Sydney we lived a couple of streets apart, and the proximity invited escalating feats of food transportation. I carried pots of soup and pavlova in prams.

It's annoying we're hardly ever together anymore. One of the most pernicious aspects of the London-Sydney time difference is that when we're both awake, usually someone is in an infant management debacle, because between us we have six lovely children. So we almost exclusively communicate by email and that's how we wrote *Special Delivery*.

When I think about the best times we have spent together, it's always when there's nothing happening, when we are sitting drinking cups of tea and discussing ingredients. ■

INTERVIEWS BY
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