

# INNER WEST

## Speaker Series – Egg of the Universe with Bryony and Harry Lancaster

Interviewer: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Inner West Library speaker series. We would like to start by acknowledging the Gadigal and the Wangal people of the Eora nation on which this podcast is produced and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. Today, I am joined by Harry and Bryony Lancaster, owners of much loved Inner West Yoga Studio and Café Egg of the Universe, and now authors of a new cookbook, Egg of the Universe: recipes for life from the wholefoods café and yoga studio. Harry and Bryony have run Egg of the Universe, Sydney's only integrated yoga studio and wholefoods cafe at Rozelle for the last decade and more recently have opened a new yoga studio and café at South Eveleigh. They are passionate about creating spaces that inspire and celebrate vibrant communities. Their new cookbook, Egg of the Universe, features over 100 of the most popular recipes from their café and embraces their philosophy of better living through nutritious wholefoods and mindful movement. Welcome, Harry and Bryony.

Bryony Lancaster: [00:01:04] Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you for having us.



Interviewer: [00:01:07] Firstly, congratulations on the book. It's a beautiful looking cookbook, and it features some very inspiring recipes that people can easily recreate at home. You've been running the yoga studio and cafe for a long time now, was publishing a cookbook something you always wanted to do? and did it seem like a natural progression of your way of life?

Bryony Lancaster: [00:01:29] Yes. So we have been running the businesses now for quite a long time, and they've never been static, so they've constantly evolved as our practices have evolved. And so in the beginning, we started with one particular style of yoga and then, we, over time integrated more yin style and then meditation as our practices deepened. And then, of course, we opened the café a couple of years thereafter to really allow Harry's passion of food to manifest in as part of the business. With the cookbook, we had always had it in the back of our mind as something we would love to do, and a lot of our customers and clients and students would always ask, when's the book coming out? But with two small kids, and at that stage we were looking to open a second site so we had so much on and we really just didn't know how we would find the time. And then one of our students, who is also a writer and publisher for Murdoch Books, said, Oh, I'd love to invite you guys to write a book and we'd absolutely love to publish it for you. So we jumped at the chance knowing that with Murdoch Books, they would get the absolute best possible



outcome from us. And we just thought we were in such good hands with these guys as publishers. And it really has been fantastic from the absolute beginning to to now. And so it was, was a natural progression and we're absolutely thrilled to have it now out there in the world as an extension of what we offer to our bricks and mortar community.

Harry Lancaster: [00:03:08] Yes, we also we also really wanted to in the early days are part of the vision behind the café was to see if we could help in whatever way we could influence the culture of the Western world towards healthier living and in particularly in relation to their diet. And in the early days when we had that as part of our vision as a small, you know, burgeoning small cafe in in Rozelle, we thought, it was that that vision was very unlikely to actually come to fruition. But we had this burning sense that somehow along the way, we'd be able to spread the word about healthy eating a little bit further afield. And when so when Murdoch offered us the chance to have a globally published book, it was really, you know, a goal and the dream come true.

Interviewer: [00:03:48] Oh, that's great. So the book is obviously named after your yoga studio Egg of the Universe. It's a great name and quite unusual. Can you tell me where that name came from?

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Harry Lancaster: [00:03:59] I'm absolutely so. It is quite a unique name. We'd been running our yoga studio since 2006 under a couple of different names when it came time to launch the cafe and combine the two sides of the business under the one name it was, that search was underway for how can we come up with a great name that fits both sides? And one day I was in a yoga posture called the Cosmic Egg or or Egg of the Universe, which is a beautiful posture at the end of class when you're all curled up and it kind of represents completion and death and rebirth. And I've always loved, always loved the posture and I suddenly thought, hang on a second, can we use this name Egg of the Universe? And so I started exploring the meaning behind the yoga posture and the name, and I realized that the Cosmic Egg or Egg of the Universe was part of creation myths from across so many different cultures across the planet. And so I had this sort of deep rich philosophy behind it, and so I thought, right, well, certainly it fits in terms of depth of meaning. I started trying it on a few different friends and family and Bryony, of course, first and the initial reaction was always either a giggle or a laugh, but then a moment's, momentary pause beyond that. And then a sort of sense of that actually kind of works. And we realized it fits a lot of our, the name actually fits our value system because the way we like to approach our offering to the general public is to try and make it as easily accessible as possible without dumbing down the deep rich potential that transform these transformational practices of yoga and healthy eating can offer any individual, so kind of fitted perfectly with our



values, was a really fun name, and also being so unique meant that we had no issues kind of registering business names and, and URLs, which is very helpful with anyone who's ever tried to come up with a business name knows it helps a lot. So the name was born.

Interviewer: [00:06:02] Yeah, so it's a great name and it does tie in beautifully with what you're trying to offer people. And so with the book, it's not simply a cookbook really, is it? Because it does have a wide variety of recipes in there, from energizing breakfasts and salads to wholesome, slow cooked braises, and you've even got recipes for pickling and fermenting. But then you've also included a seasonal program of yoga, meditation and wellness practices. Can you elaborate on how these elements all relate to your yoga of eating philosophy?

Bryony Lancaster: [00:06:35] Sure. So what we offer at Egg of the Universe has always been a genuine extension of what Harry and I practice at home, and so that's been made what we offer the world feel very simple and easy because it's genuinely what we do and prescribe to at home. So I guess when we wanted to offer seasonal recipes for life, for us that incorporates yoga, meditation, wellness practices and of course, the food that you eat as well. And when we look at the different wisdom traditions that we love being inspired by, whether it's traditional Chinese medicine or



Ayurveda, we like to lean into the signposts that are laid out by these wisdom traditions to live a life that is more aligned with the seasons that you know, 10 or so years ago, Harry and I started to feel into and research more and just think, my goodness, this is, this feels so genuine to us. So, I guess we wanted to offer recipes for life, for leading a more connected and energized way of being, leaning into these different elements of what it feels like to us, to be well. And do you want to add a little bit more about the yoga of eating?

Harry Lancaster: [00:07:52] Sure. In following the idea, within yoga, there is a seasonal flow, and through meditation practice and yoga practice, you connect more in with what your body's needs are, and this relates to, how you go about your daily life, but also, of course, how you eat. And the yoga of eating philosophy, which I was originally introduced to by Charles Eisenstein's book of the same name, which is really amazing. It's just that deepening practice into just noticing how foods make you feel, and then recalibrating the compass of your desires towards food that actually make you feel better. And over time, that practice can bear rich fruit as you, as you develop your relationship, a new relationship with food.

Interviewer: [00:08:37] So my next question probably really ties in with that as well. In the book you mention the word *patheya*, a Sanskrit word that

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means provisions for a journey. So how does this meaning of the word relate to your work and the recipes in the book?

Bryony Lancaster: [00:08:51] So yes that word is really a beautiful word and meaning behind it. And for us, many years ago when we started running our one day retreats at the beginning of each season. So, I really feel like we wanted to give our students as many things for their metaphorical backpack for the journey ahead. So, whether it's the journey of a day when you set out at the beginning of a day and maybe you put into your backpack, you know, some meditation, some mindfulness, some really good food, some time in nature, those sort of elements for me make up a provisions for a journey ahead of a really beautiful day that feels also grounded and connected. And it's the same way really heading into a new season. It's kind of, to represent the changes that we see around us within the way that we lead our lives and live, in a way where we have tools and skills to navigate the challenges of life. And let's face it, there are many to help us deal with both the challenges, but also the good times, so that we can be present enough to enjoy them, this journey of the day, or this journey of a season or the journey of life. And we have provisions of these wisdom, ancient wisdom practices, but delivered in a modern and sort of lighthearted, accessible way so that we can get the most out of each day, each season and ultimately our life.

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Interviewer: [00:10:24] That's a great explanation of the word there, and I really like the way that you referred to it as the metaphorical backpack. It's a great image there, but you also talk about the challenges that we face in the everyday. And my next question probably really ties in with this as well. So when you wrote the book, you wrote it during lockdown last year, and now Sydney is in its second, much longer lockdown. How do you think the current climate of COVID restrictions and lockdown will impact how people interact and engage with your book?

Harry Lancaster: [00:10:58] Well, it's a really interesting one, actually, because one of the challenges for us as a business that offers wellness practices, yoga and wholefoods during this time of a pandemic, when really we want to be helping to maximise the health of our communities so that they can withstand the potential of, of getting sick has been really quite frustrating because people haven't been able to directly access our services. So what we've been trying to do over the last two years from the first pandemic into the second one, is work out a new way of offering our community ways of accessing both yoga and wholefoods and the teachings that we would normally offer. So in the first pandemic, sorry, the first lockdown, we went online fairly swiftly and we've developed that beautifully. And I think one of the things we've done really well there is





maintain that sense of community connection. Even though we're online, it's never going to be exactly the same as being in the beautiful yoga studio surrounded by people with a with a live teacher. And it's not going to be the same as eating great food, sitting in a café surrounded by your friends and that sort of thing. But, we think we've done a reasonably good job of keeping that sense of community alive, even though it's online. And I think the book coming out is obviously just going to be another way of our community community and a wider, newer group of people being able to access some basic practices at home, that's going to help them maintain a strong immune system, maintain a great sense of well-being and speaking into the concept of tools and skills to put in your backpack and maintain ways of of keeping a level head and a sense of mental wellbeing when the world out there really does seem to be going a little bit nuts at different times. Obviously at the moment that's really important.

Bryony Lancaster: [00:12:53] And I totally agree with that. And I'd love to add that with the book coming out, it's a way that we can widen our embrace and stretch our arms a little wider to encompass a bigger community, whether it's rural Australia or New Zealand or, you know, America and England. And what we really like is this ability to start where you are, you know, to meet people where they are. And the book coming out in spring is obviously a wonderful way for us to lean into the signposts laid out by what ancient traditions that sort of indicate we might be feeling more optimism

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and hope. Looking forward to a new season and to really then know that that's something to expect that we will be feeling, and for then us to be able to feel more connected to those emotions of each season. And then in spring, this wonderful sense of hope and optimism and excitement and planning that even with the lockdowns, you can't help but feel that little effervescence, brimming to the surface in the same way that tiny little green leaves sprout on the trees or daffodils pop out from the earth. And we ourselves have those same earth element that energy of earth rising up within us. And it's lovely when you can begin to feel that tangibly, and then connect to community in that way, even in really full on circumstances like lockdown.

Interviewer: [00:14:22] Yeah, I do like the way that you have broken down the book into the seasons and starting with spring, and, you mentioned those words optimism and desire for change, adaptability and hopefulness. And spring often does have that feeling of new beginnings or fresh starts. And I think certainly at the moment with the lockdown at this stage due to end at the end of September, and the easing of restrictions, that that will encourage a lot of people maybe to look forward to coming out of lockdown and maybe starting some new routines and looking forward to getting out there. And I know you mentioned that with the first lockdown, obviously, you know, you couldn't run classes in person and you had to go online, and I think that's one of the things that a lot of people

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miss, those little daily connections that you have with other people. So whether it is doing your yoga class or maybe going to have a coffee or a catch up after the class at the cafe, that it's all these things that we suddenly realize that we miss in our daily life with those connections with people.

Bryony Lancaster: [00:15:28] Absolutely. And I really I mean, we have got the most wonderful online community and it's, we've got wonderful teachers and a fantastic support team behind the scenes. So, we're so blessed to have been able to have such a tangible, wonderful community. And, being in person is just next level in terms of its ability to connect. And over many, many, many years as humans, we've developed to be in community and I really feel like as that wonderful quote I've forgotten who said it, unfortunately, "happiness is best shared". We really are designed to be together, and I think that's what I know a lot of our students and clients and cafe patrons are longing for, is just that sense of togetherness and that sense of community, and we certainly look forward to being able to celebrate that again.

Interviewer: [00:16:18] Yeah, hopefully it won't be too long now. So I did want to talk about one of the recipes that you've featured, and it's called the TedX Burger, and it's also accompanied by a comment "There's nothing

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wrong with a burger if you're using good ingredients". Harry, can you tell me the story behind this recipe and your comment?

Harry Lancaster: [00:16:37] Yeah, sure. Well, I guess it goes back a little bit of a way because many years ago I'd had a few digestive issues and I'd started looking around for a dietary solution and I did quite a long search looking for so many different ways to fix my digestive system. And when I finally came across the wholefoods philosophy, I finally found something and this is a book called Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon. I finally found an overarching food philosophy that could relate to every single culture around the world that had this most amazing commonsense approach to food. And what I realized was, and the relief within this, was that buried within each and every one of our global cultures is a traditional cooking, food production and cooking methodology that delivers fantastic health, nutritional health. So if you look at so many of our modern classic dishes from the different cultures around the world, what you realize is that the modern version that we're eating is a kind of sort of pale comparison to the original way that that dish or food was was produced. So, fast forward a few years and we were, I was invited to do a TED talk to explain our food philosophy, a TEDX talk, and I was trying to find something sort of symbolic to use to represent the overarching food philosophy on stage as I was talking, and I came up with this idea of going, comparing one of modern

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the modern version of a hamburger or a beef burger to one that was made using all the kind of correct wholefoods ingredients.

So, if you imagine a wholefoods beef burger being created using amazing, traditionally proven bread, using traditionally lacto fermented pickles, using pasture meat from a pasture raised organic animal, sauces and condiments within the beef burger or being home created, then you end up with a food at the end of that, you end up eating has a completely different nutritional profile to that of a beef burger you'd go and buy from McDonald's, for example, or if you just bought everything pre-made from the supermarket. And, so for me like this and this is what we represent in the cafe as well, we often do really classical traditional dishes, but just done in the correct way when we make everything ourselves in the house, at the cafe, and we also play around with lots more sort of modern modern dishes as well. We love that play between representing classical dishes done well can be perfectly healthy, and you don't necessarily need to be following any new newfangled fancy diets. It's just traditional food, simple seasonal foods done well, created in your own home will lead you the majority of the way down down the right path towards great nutritional health.



Interviewer: [00:19:29] Great. Now you've possibly answered part of this question with some of your other answers. What would you like your readers to get out of the book?

Bryony Lancaster: [00:19:37] Well, I think I would love them to have a felt sense, of how it feels to live a life or even a morning, or just a moment, in a more connected way of being, which is why we were so happy with the beautiful photographer Alan Benson and the illustrations by Lara Zilibowitz to bring a sort of whimsical element of beauty to what we offer, so that when you're flicking through the pages, you kind of feel, what it feels like to be eating that way, or moving that way, or breathing that way, or incorporating meditation and how that affects your day or that little aspect of the journey to go back to that previous comment. So for us, it was a real sense of letting the feeling of the practices on offer come through the pages and really touch each of the readers in a meaningful way, wherever they are in the world.

Harry Lancaster: [00:20:42] And just, and I think get that inspiration to start exploring wholefoods and to start exploring yoga and to start exploring a meditation practice wherever they're at. And Murdoch's done such a great job of pulling it together to to be represented in a way that's likely we hope to have a really broad appeal to a wide range, wide range ranging

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audience. And yeah, we'd love to invite people just to start where they're at. See what inspires them and to explore a little bit further.

Interviewer: [00:21:12] Yeah, I'm sure there's something in there for everyone. Now, just before we finish up today, as this is a library podcast, are there any other books - other than your own of course - that you would like to recommend to our Inner West Library listeners so that they can further their knowledge of yoga, health and well-being.

Harry Lancaster: [00:21:31] From a wholefoods perspective? what I sort of consider is the wholefoods Bible is Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon, which is based on the work by a dentist called Weston Price in the 1920s. And for me, this is a really important, amazing, amazing book and source of great inspiration still. And if anyone's interested in exploring wholefoods to a deeper level, then that would be my next, my next suggested book. And then also, as I mentioned before, Yoga of Eating by Charles Eisenstein is a great intellectual exploration into how people can develop their own yoga practice and how in how they relate to their food. And we kind of represent a very small element of that within our book. But it's a great intro, and if people are interested in exploring further, that would be the next book to go into.

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Bryony Lancaster: [00:22:22] And I think for yoga, there are so many really, really, really fantastic yoga books out there. One of the ones that I think is most accessible and really powerful in that accessibility is a book by Baron Baptiste called Journey into Power. And I really love the way he writes, and it was one of the first books I read right back in the beginning, and it's just really, really accessible and brilliant. And those who perhaps want to dive a little bit more deeper is the Heart of Yoga by Desikachar, which is also an absolutely beautiful book. But there are so many.

Interviewer: [00:22:59] Oh, fantastic. I'm sure lots of people will be looking those suggestions up. So, Harry and Bryony, thank you so much for your time today. It's been really interesting having a chat to you about your book. Egg of the Universe has recently been published by Murdoch Books and is available in hardcover format at all good local booksellers, and it's also available as an e-book. Copies of the book and e-book are also available on the Inner West Library catalogue. Thank you for listening and look out for more upcoming digital content through the Inner West Library What's on and social media channels.

Thank you.



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Bryony Lancaster: [00:23:35] Thank you so much.

