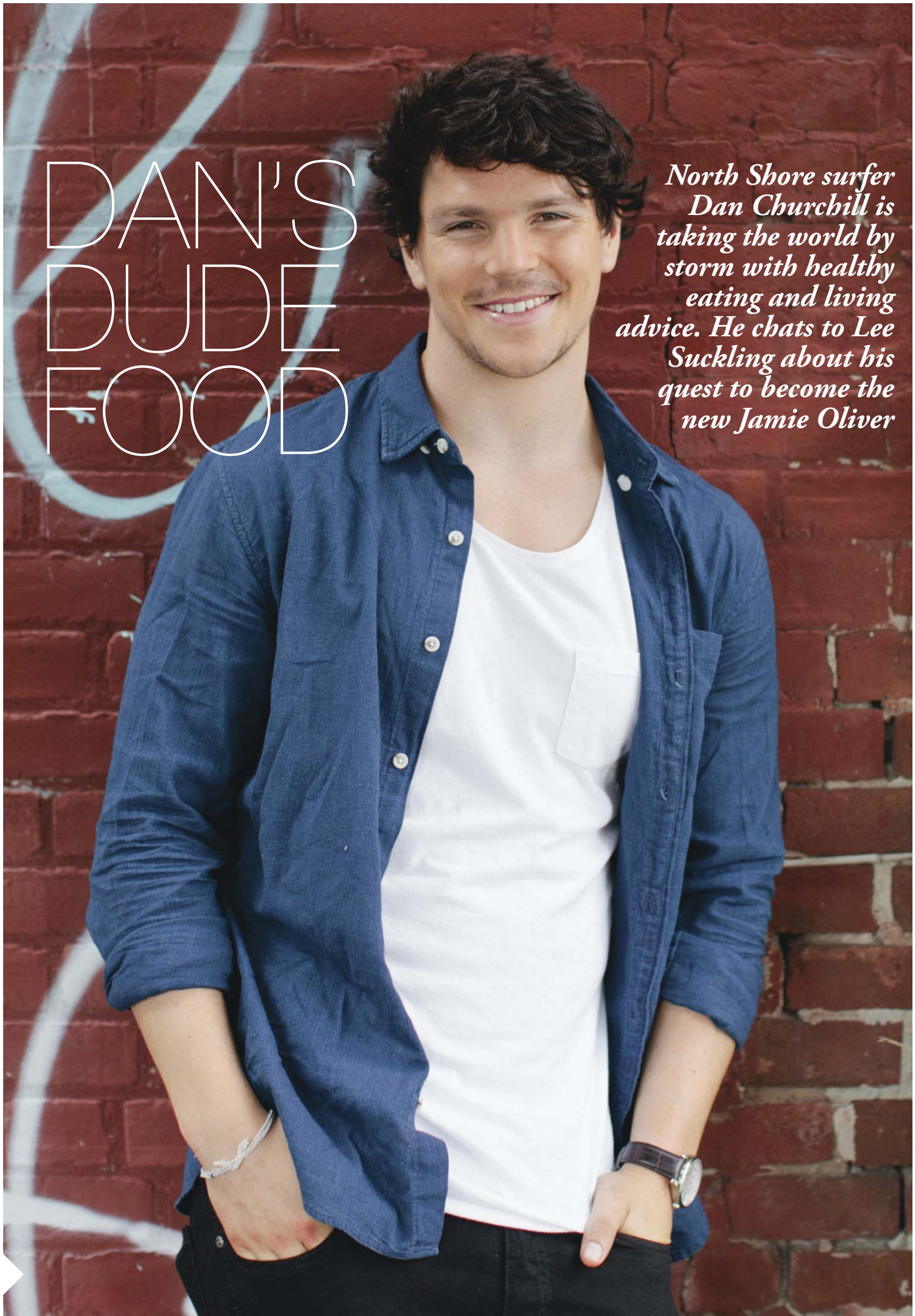


DAN'S DUDE FOOD

North Shore surfer Dan Churchill is taking the world by storm with healthy eating and living advice. He chats to Lee Suckling about his quest to become the new Jamie Oliver



Outdoor activities have been central to Dan Churchill's whole life. Born and raised on the Northern Beaches as the middle child of three boys, it has been backyard cricket, rugby and tree climbing that have instilled a desire to be active for his whole life.

"I wanted to be a professional rugby player, but an injury forced me to think about other things. I left high school and wanted to do what I loved, so decided to do a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise," says the now 24-year-old, who simultaneously started his own personal training and health coaching business when he was just 17.

Little did Churchill know, but it would be his vocational hobby of cooking that would jump-start his professional career. "I must have started cooking when I was 12, we'd sit around and watch Jamie Oliver on TV and Dad would make up a roster for each of us to cook. At first I was cooking once a week, then twice, then three times ... Jamie was my hero."

Come the end of his teenage years, Churchill was known amongst his community as a casual culinary aficionado. "My mates had all realised I could cook, and so had their girlfriends (and even their mums). The boys loved my food – but didn't like how much attention I got from the girls!

"[So] they asked for my help. While I did not have experience in some of the world's best-known restaurants, I had first-hand experience cooking simple, healthy, delicious and fun meals for the people I loved. I wanted to teach other young men to do the same."

Churchill began putting together a cookbook of the meals he cooked for family



and friends, and self-published it at 19 years old. "It was called *Dudefood*. Rather than meals around the traditional structure of 'breakfast, lunch, dinner', it was food for different scenarios. I had sections to cover 'food for the gym', 'food to make in bulk' and 'food to impress girls'.

"I've always been a go-getter, so once I had written a book I found a way to publish it. It was pretty successful and sold out in a few weeks." *Dudefood* is the ideal guide for guys who have always wanted to cook but don't know where to start; boyfriends who are intimidated by a frying pan; and sons who have too long relied on their mothers for home-cooked meals, Churchill adds. He has secured a publisher for the book and it will be professionally released in April 2015.

Churchill's publisher, Jonathan Karp from Simon & Schuster, says, "On behalf of all dudes who can't cook, I can attest to the need for this book. Anyone who has seen Dan Churchill's work will appreciate the authenticity and value of his approach to food. He is clearly a star on the rise."

With his first degree in hand, Churchill decided he wanted another edge in the health industry. "I really wanted to back myself up with further qualifications, so I set out to do a Masters in Exercise Science, Strength & Conditioning." Such credentials propelled Churchill onto stages and into events across Australia, where he became a motivational speaker on all things health and nutrition.

"Eighty percent of people working in this profession are women. Guys are interested in hearing about nutrition when it's from someone they can relate to and someone that doesn't use the word 'diet'," Churchill explains. "I love educating people and young guys in particular, that food isn't just a source of fuel."

Churchill takes a holistic attitude to teaching people about eating. "I'm not a dictator, but I try to help people understand that food is a choice that you not only need to enjoy the taste of, but you need to know how you're going to feel afterwards," he says. "I take on topics young people can relate to – like going out at night with their friends. We talk about the choices you have to make about what you eat, and how you can say no to certain things. At our age, young blokes (and girls too) often think they can conquer the world, but the reality is we need willpower to say 'no, that's enough of that [food]'.

After working with sports teams such as the NSW Waratahs and Manly Seagulls, Churchill believes much of his advice for professional athletes can be appropriated to everyday people. "I make sure everyone knows they are unique in the way they perform – that is, the way they digest food. What my body can cope with, others' bodies cannot and vice versa. We're all starting to realise that things like gluten, dairy and sugar affect some of us negatively. You need to find out what works for you, so you're always at your best.

"It's also important to highlight that pro athletes are regular people too. They have the same misunderstandings when it comes to food intake and they need to become their own individual regulators of what they're doing."

Last year, Churchill found himself as a contestant on Australia's *Masterchef*, which has helped his public brand to grow. "It was a really good platform to get my personality out there, and it has led to heaps of exposure on TV," he says. Since *Masterchef*, Churchill has become a regular on Channel Seven's *Sunrise* and Channel Nine's *Weekend Today*. His recipes, moreover, have been published in magazines like *Men's Health* and *Women's Fitness*.

Churchill's web presence has also contributed to his celebrity. He appears as a regular cook on HealthyMETV.com.au, and on his own website, has an active web series and blog that lets him demonstrate cooking techniques and give free recipes and health advice. The demand for his advice is not just local – Churchill has also hosted webinars for people in the USA, India, South Africa, and the UK can see and hear him talk about holistic nutrition.

Following his television success, Churchill's *The Healthy Cook*, his second book, has also been published. Moreover, he has recently been back and forth to the USA to work as a guest host on various American cooking shows, and has just sold the rights to a series of his own US-based TV shows, the first of which is based around *Dudefood*. "Getting guys to cook is something missing from the TV market. I can't say much about the format of the shows yet, but I hope we do something people really enjoy," Churchill says.

The Healthy Cook is also being re-released. "We've done really cool things like add capability for a mobile app called Layar, which lets you scan the pages with your mobile and you'll be taken straight to a video of me cooking the recipes," says Churchill.

"It's getting a nationwide release, and I'm stoked because it'll be in big stores like Kmart, Target and Big W with big posters and cut-outs. My head is going to be everywhere, just like Jamie Oliver's!

"It's pretty crazy actually. I can't believe I'm now up against my idol."