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Oxford Word of the Month – May: smashed avo

noun: a cafe meal typically consisting of a thick slice of toast topped with chopped or mashed seasoned avocado.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The term **smashed avo**, a popular breakfast item found on cafe menus, is Australian in origin. The first published evidence appears in 2011 (though avocado on toast certainly appeared on menus before this) and usage has increased significantly in the last two years. A spike in evidence in October 2016 reflects a new use of the term as a cultural symbol.

It began when columnist Bernard Salt wrote an article on ‘the evils of hipster cafes’, commenting:

I have seen young people order smashed avocado with crumbled feta on five-grain toasted bread at \$22 a pop and more. I can afford to eat this for lunch because I am middle-aged and have raised my family. But how can young people afford to eat like this? Shouldn't they be economising by eating at home? How often are they eating out? Twenty-two dollars several times a week could go towards a deposit on a house. There. I've said it. I have said what every secret middle-aged moraliser has thought but has never had the courage to verbalise. (Weekend Australian Magazine, 15 October)

Despite the humorous tone, the comments caused a furore in the press and social media, prompting headlines such as ‘Home dreams on toast’, ‘Your **smashed avo** guide to investing’, and ‘On **smashed avo** as a social good’. The reaction exposed the generational fault line between older Australians who had access to free education, could afford to buy their own home, and receive tax breaks, generous pension and superannuation entitlements, and their offspring who struggle to save while paying high rents and HECS debts, and who will not receive the same benefits in retirement. The deep resentment felt by the younger generations towards Salt’s ‘middle-aged moralisers’ was encapsulated in the headline: ‘Baby boomers have already taken all the houses, now they’re coming for our brunch!’

In response a number of inner-city cafes dropped the price of **smashed avo** (renamed on one menu the ‘Retirement Plan’), a bank advertised home loan rates with the slogan ‘Have your **smashed avo** and eat it too’, and the issue was raised

in federal parliament. A member of the House of Representatives noted that to 'put down a deposit on a typical house in Footscray ... you would need to forgo about 38,000 coffees or 150 years' worth of weekly smashed avocado brunches'.

It will be interesting to see how long **smashed avo** remains linked with the issue of housing affordability. Perhaps until cafe regulars prefer something else for breakfast?

Smashed avo will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. It was shortlisted for the Australian National Dictionary Centre's 2016 Word of the Year.

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