

PRODUCT TESTING

"We did that for many, many years, but as the restaurant evolved and became more successful, we were able to invest a lot more money into development and make that a specific thing here.

"Now we have quite a big creative group of eight to 10 chefs and we meet on Tuesdays and we have a document we are working from, split into three or four parts – a list of ingredients that we are not currently using, then a list of preparations we are working on – marinades or sauces or plates or preparations of any kind – then a list of dishes in development that are being worked on."

By Friday the ideas will have evolved and the team works together – what needs to be amended, what needs to be eliminated.

"We develop things that we like and hope people eat them – we're never too concerned about how they will be perceived because we have to like it first. We don't ever really reach out to the market to see what they would think of it. We've been doing this our whole lives.

"In the past people complained about what we were doing – something new takes a lot of self-belief. There were many years where the food was ahead of its time for people's taste and we were still learning. Not so much now – we work on dishes until they are really good and ready."

IRONSKINN

John Sundnes enjoys spear fishing and knows there's an inherent risk when you're pulling back a line with a struggling, bleeding fish on the end. He also knows that sharks are unpredictable and you can't stop them biting things. But he thought it might be possible to reduce the impact of a shark bite.

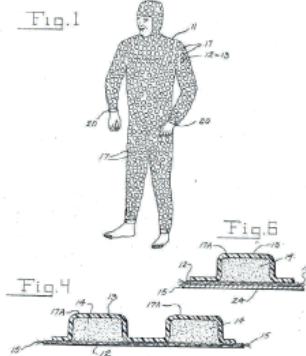
Since 1988 there have been an average of just over 16 shark attacks a year in Australia, according to analysis of the Shark Research Institute's data conducted by finder.com.au.

Working with partner Joe Christie, Sundnes tested hundreds of prototypes before finding a material strong enough to withstand the force of shark teeth but light enough that free divers still need to wear a weight belt.

"We have tested prototype suits which are very pleasant to dive and swim in, and yet afford a high degree of protection from a shark bite," Sundnes says. "We have internally tested various puncture-resistant materials and configurations, and validated that testing with official testing labs."

The company, Ironskinn, is scheduling

Inventors have long tried to create a wetsuit that reduces the impact of a shark bite, such as this 1986 design submitted to the United States Patent and Trademark Office.



product testing with various shark species to determine if the material used in the suits can withstand bites from different species. Product testing with professional commercial divers is also slated to help Ironskinn finesse the suits ahead of a commercial launch planned for early 2019.

AVEO CARE

It is predicted that by 2030, the number of older Australians needing community support or residential aged care will reach 1.4 million. But as any Baby Boomer will tell you, they may be getting older but they are not old.

Cashed-up Boomers exploring senior living options are a demanding bunch. But as Geoff Grady, CEO of Aveo Care, explains, product testing of different aged-care living options can be tricky. "Testing them in the way you might a new car is difficult because you begin to run up against what consumers don't know."

For example, they don't know when they might not be able to live independently and require some degree of care – or even round-the-clock, hospital-grade support. Aveo is one of a number of aged-care providers exploring the concept of vertical villages, where a "continuum of care" is available.

At Newstead, its latest 19-storey development in Queensland, people might invest in a penthouse or unit where they live independently on levels 10-18, transition to levels seven to nine when they need care packages of up to 15 hours, and eventually move to levels three and four where they can receive care to the end of life.

Product testing in a conventional sense

isn't possible, but Grady says Aveo runs focus groups, exploring what people want both from real estate and contract types.

It has worked with Queensland University of Technology to research the future of aged care, and engages in incremental testing across time – the learnings from one development inform the next. The demand for Newstead, for example, means that Aveo will probably double the number of penthouses in its next development.

"You need to put a price in front of people if you want to test it properly," Grady says. "We opened a sales centre with a mock-up of one of the units, provided a [computer aided] fly-through for all the facilities – the look and feel, the communal areas and the care areas.

"And we did a workshop with a number of prospective buyers as to what they would want in activities, what kind of functionality – we ended up with an app that the residents use to get access to what is on, to get together. Those changes and that innovation was more on the technology side than the physical building – but we received feedback on the layout and flow in one area. We shifted a wall around."



John Sundnes, top, and Joe Christie are testing a shark-bite-proof wetsuit.



Geoff Grady, Aveo Care CEO, says product testing can be tricky.

THE SPECS



Companies with no objective way to assess or set targets for their design team output



Companies that conduct user research before generating their first design ideas or specifications



Companies that don't talk to their end users during development



Proportion of products that fail at launch

SOURCES: MCKINSEY & CO; SANDY WALKER, FLINDERS UNIVERSITY