

# 13<sup>th</sup> Symposium of Australian Gastronomy

Impressions of a part-time attendee: Franz Scheurer

This year's Symposium of Australian Gastronomy (SAG 13) was held in Orange, NSW. Orange is situated just over 3 hours drive west of Sydney and about the same distance north of Canberra. With a population of 40,000 it is one of the country's most populated inland cities. It currently has one restaurant with two hats and one with one hat, (in the Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide) which is an incredible achievement and says a lot about the town's quest for quality and appreciation of gastronomy. Known for its regional food and wines it is also the highest altitude wine region in Australia, ranging from 600m to 1100 m a/s. Approximately 1666 Ha are under vine and a typical annual yield is in the vicinity of 10,000 tons of fruit. They are very proud of their Mt. Canobolas, which, with its 1395 metres, is the highest point west of Sydney all the way to Africa, as the locals will point out, again and again. I must admit the view from the top is breathtaking, especially at sunrise!

Orange's 'raison d'être' is gold. Found first in Ophir in 1851 (just 18km northeast of the modern city of Orange) there are still large commercial mines operating today. The citizen of Orange are an industrious lot, always thinking outside the square. Having founded F.O.O.D. (Food Of the Orange District) just over 13 years ago, they have managed to make this area a food tourist destination, staging their 'Food Week' every April. Not left behind, the ORVA (The Orange Region Vignerons Association) hold the Orange Winefest each October, and both these events are growing rapidly as the industry matures and their efforts get recognised Australia-wide. The microclimate guarantees very well defined four seasons and this, combined with the good food, good wine and healthy living, spells paradise for gastronomes. No great surprise then that this was the chosen place for the 13<sup>th</sup> Symposium of Australian Gastronomy.

Setting up 'camp' at the University of Sydney, Orange Campus, the participants were introduced to three different kinds of spit-roasted lamb whilst tasting the Templer's Mill Wines, the University's own wine label, at the Machinery Shed situated on campus. This informal, finger-licking, fly-swatting event was a great icebreaker for the participants. Trying to look your best with lamb fat dribbling down your chin while holding a 'leaning tower of Pisa paper plate' can be socially challenging, never mind about the parsley in your teeth!

After a well earned night's sleep the delegates visited the Farmers' Market early the next morning. The Orange Farmers' Market is predominantly a fresh food market that operates monthly on the second Saturday of the month. Lots of interesting produce from the Orange District and Central West makes browsing and tasting your way

around the many stalls an enjoyable event. Breakfasting on local venison sausages or, for the less steely-stomached, berries and nuts, we also had a chance to look at a display of old regional cookbooks at the adjacent library. Some of the products that caught my eye were the Midnight & Dawn's pickled quail eggs and their rose petal jelly, Ploughman's Hill's smoked olives, Bumbaldry's gorgeous rabbits with lots of marbled meat and last but not least Belgravia Vineyard's stunning 2003 Rosé, made from the run-off juice of the first pressing of their Merlot grapes. A full-bodied, dry and serious wine with a whopping 15% alcohol and a terrific mouthfeel, it displays red berry fruit without any jamminess, a touch of almost pinot-like barnyardiness and is eminently drinkable.

Pondering the subject of farmers' markets and their popularity I was wondering what drives the success of these markets Australia wide, and I have come to the conclusion that one of the driving forces might be the 'black economy'. From the producers' point of view there is no middle-man and transactions are cash. From the buyers' perspective they get to meet the actual growers/producers, which is a good thing, and they are assured of origin and freshness of the produce they buy and the majority don't 'give a rat's arse' about the Australian taxation system.

Three of us escaped for a 'Valentine's Lunch' at Lolli Redini in town (see separate review).

After lunch we all assembled at the local TAFE for the by-now-traditional "Box Dinner". Delegates were split into teams and each team was presented with a box of ingredients and a theme. They then proceed to concoct a menu, cook and present the dishes to a different team. In other words, we didn't get to eat our own creations but someone else's interpretation of their theme. To give you an example, 'Extravagance' might have to cook for 'Care' and 'Economy' for 'Extravagance'. It was amazing to see that you can design a horse by committee and not end up with a camel! Lots of furrowed brows, laughter and some tears, the teams attacked the two commercial TAFE kitchens and proceeded to wreak utter havoc, splattering flour here, chasing an escaped chicken leg there, or kneading some pasta dough over there, while the person nearby you worked on an ice cream. The fact that there was no air conditioning and Orange was going through a heat wave meant that many a dish might have tasted too salty to the tasters, trying in vain to wipe away their own perspiration. But in the end it all came together remarkably well and, lubricated by the wines generously donated by ORVA, the evening was a total success. Congratulations to Lynelle Scott-Aitkin for procuring a remarkable assortment of local produce and organising a terrific and satisfying event.

Sunday morning woke us with another shimmering, heat-haze horizoned day after the hottest night in Orange on record for the last 20 years. Daytime was taken up by papers

being presented by many illustrious participants. The oppressive heat (soon over the old ton) made concentration rather difficult.

Just when the organisers started tearing their hair out because they were worried that the heat would make the evening's event unbearable, a fierce dust/rain storm cleared the air and dropped the temperature by a welcome 15°C.

Ross Hill Vineyard owners Peter and Terri Robson's private house was the venue for this night's 'Frolic in the Vines'; a gorgeous, open-planned house with glorious views over the undulating countryside. The front lawn became the tasting ground for about a dozen vineyards, showcasing their wines. Ross Hill Vineyard's rosé, made from Cabernet Franc run-off, convinced the boys with depth and complexity and the ladies with its incredible colour, matching a nail polish and a top or two. Terry and Julie Dolle showed a very promising barrel sample of their Orange Mountain vineyard's 2003 Shiraz Viognier and they also produce a terrific Verjus. Two very different, but interesting, Pinot Gris were shown: by Ibis Wines, an Alsatian-style fruit forward expression of the variety and a much more austere, Italian-style version made by Word of Mouth wines. Murray Smith's Chardonnay under his Canobolas Smith label is as good as ever and his Pinot Noir is promising. Stephen and Rhonda Doyle showed off their whole range of superb wines and the Schubert still has to be one of the best Chardonnays made in this country. I also tried their 2003 Ice Riesling which is the only true-to-style version I have ever drunk made outside Germany. Cleaner and much more elegant than even the best of the Canadians, it ranks amongst the purest most elegant wines of its kind. If you expect a Noble One then you'll be disappointed. This is finesse in a glass not sheer opulence.

I was also privileged to try the 1994 vintage of the same wine, picked on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1994 (by comparison the grapes for Bloodwood's Riesling table wines are usually picked in the third week of March) it has matured to an extremely complex wine, dark amber in colour with no expression of botrytis but oodles of old English marmalade, with almost Gewürztraminer-like overtones on the nose. In the mouth it fills every nook and cranny and tickles all the tastebuds with its incredible texture and layered complexity and unbelievable length. There is no overt sweetness or stickiness, just acid and sugar living in perfect harmony. To quote Stephen Doyle: "To make this particular style, we need bone-dry, drought conditions from late vintage to midwinter. The Riesling usually has some low-level botrytis developing near harvest and this infection seems to stop and start, according to the prevailing moisture. Early light snows and sometimes severe frosts pull the infection up and defoliate the vines. This allows the winter sun to shrivel the grape bunches gradually, concentrating the sugars as high as 32° Brix, into the threshold for a light ice-wine. It is then a matter of holding our nerves and playing Russian roulette with the weather. When it holds and the snows aren't too heavy, we see some very pleasing results. Pleasing results indeed! I know Stephen only has about a dozen bottles left of this wine and they are not for sale, however, I reckon an offer at the price it is really worth might just secure you one. I'd happily pay the same as

I'd pay for an equivalent year Château d'Yquem... and I do think this is a better wine!  
The alternative is to buy the 2003 and wait 10 years.

But I digress...

A fabulous dinner, buffet style, helped the already ripe networking environment with the aid of more local wine, to a successful evening of merriment of headache proportion.

Monday, another day to exercise the grey cells with more papers and discussions. After a successful wrap up session and a hand-over for SAG 14 to Victoria we are picked up by a cattle truck for 'The Banquet'. Arriving at the showground the attendees are 'herded' out of the cattle truck and into the great agricultural hall by 2 cowboys, a sheepdog and a shepherd on a dirt bike. The Orange community had obviously gone to great length to make this night a surprise and it started with the amuse gueules of beef penis and local snails. The agricultural theme wonderfully displayed with fabulous local produce and produce demonstrations, including clever video footage, costumes, local colour and colourful identities. The feast that followed defied description, suffice to say that there was more than enough to eat and drink, in variety and quantity and with a quality second to none. Congratulations to the local team. What a splendid effort! It is amazing that everyone turned up (well... almost everyone) for Paul Van Reyk's wonderful Sri Lankan breakfast of 'String Hoppers with Mulligatawny and Sambals' on Tuesday morning before we all said our goodbyes and left to face reality once again until it's time for SAG 14.

Summary: a successful, informative, challenging and wonderful event.

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Some of the suppliers of local produce:

First Cross Merino lamb – David Hughes Butchery, Orange

Corriedale lamb – Tony Manchester of Roseville Stud

Aged lamb (merino) – Southern Meats, Harden

Goats Cheese - Jannei Farm Fromagerie, Neil and Janette Watson – tel.: 02 6355 1107

Hazelnuts - Colin and Lyn McCrae from Anyco Hazelnut Farm

Scarlet Princess peaches - Max and Grahame Davidson of Hillside Orchard

Orange Region Farmers' Market: Jane Arnott – tel.: 02 6362 0276

At the Farmers Market:

Belgravia Vineyards, Belgravia Road, Orange – tel.: 02 6365 0633

Don Brook Orchard, Janet Treweek – tel.: 02 6365 3145

Midnight & Dawn's – Narromine NSW 2821 tel.: 02 6889 4427

Phillip & Margrit Skinner, Bumbaldry Rabbits – tel.: 02 6345 5801

Ploughman's Hill Olive oil and olive products – tel.: 02 6866 1260

Produce Junction Free Range Eggs, Jim Milne – tel.: 02 6364 1046

Protea Farm, Susie and Phillip Miller – tel.: 02 6365 6066

Proven Artisan Bread, Paul Wilderbeek – tel.: 02 6360 0722

Quality Hams & Bacon, Zanzie D'Souza – tel.: 02 6368 8660

Rajarani Curry Sauces, Mohen Sing, Mudgee – tel.: 02 6372 3968

Rose Garden Cottage, Michelle Rollo – tel.: 02 6367 5300

Rosewood Farm, Graeme Eastwood – tel.: 02 6365 3540

Russell Morris Organic Vegetables, Cowra – tel.: 02 6344 3625

Sallydale Organic Fruit & Vegetable Farm – tel.: 02 6368 2550

Scarborough Fair Plants, Lyn Robertson – tel.: 02 6364 1038

Sherwood Orchard, Mario Laspina – tel.: 02 6365 3199

Smiths Fruit and Vegetables, Eugowra, Judy Smith – tel.: 02 6859 2218

Streatfield Potatoes, John Streatfield – tel.: 02 6366 5025

Waru Organics (Herbs and Vegetables) Anna Debaar – tel.: 02 6365 9269

Williams Propagation, Plants – tel.: 02 6362 3693

Wilson's Flowers and Vegetables, Janette Wilson – tel.: 02 6366 5003

Yuri's Organic Produce – tel.: 02 6365 3773

Some of the local vineyards:

Bloodwood Wines, Stephen and Rhonda Doyle – tel.: 02 6362 5631

Canobolas Smith Wines, Murray and Toni Smith – tel.: 02 6365 6113

Orange Mountain Vineyard, Terry and Julie Dolle – tel.: 02 6365 2626

Ross Hill Vineyard, Peter and Terry Robson – tel.: 02 6360 0175

Word of Mouth Wines, Peter Gibson and Debra Upjohn – tel.: 02 6365 3509

And last but not least, the self-published recipe book 'Flavours of the Four Seasons' by Yolanda Torrisi and Elisabeth Edwards (who also made the Peach and Hazelnut Tart on the first night). ISBN 0 9750338 0 8