



Inside: Good Weekend, MyCareer & Domain

THE SATURDAY AGE

FEBRUARY 26, 2011

Life & Style

THE GOOD LIFE | ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT | BOOKS



The new foodies

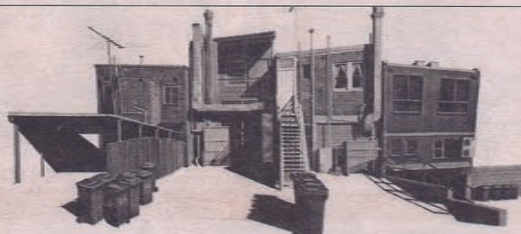
Why Melbourne's arts scene has embraced gastronomy.

Nigella's local wish-list Martha Wainwright does Piaf

freehand
RECENT AUSTRALIAN DRAWING

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Culture's O'Donnell
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March 11-12, 2011
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Drawing at the print and
Basilisk Draper Gallery, Sydney

ARTS
VICTORIA

AS WITH most tastings she attends, Kim Chalmers wagered which bottle would provide "the best drop" before the first cork was popped. She fancied a French chablis; its make and vintage promised to outclass its chardonnay competitors — "a sunny, warm climate Aussie and a full-on, oaky Californian" — by a mile.

Glasses were filled, wines sampled, tasting notes jotted, her suspicions confirmed. But then, after an interval, the fellow running the tasting did something unusual: he played a Beach Boys record. Several music bars in, he requested the tasters raise their glasses a second time. So they did, only to find the wines had changed vastly in flavour. "They were immediately, physically different. It wasn't a sympathetic effect, but a perceivable change in sweetness, texture and mouth feel. It blew my mind."

Unexpectedly, Chalmers found herself savouring the home-grown white with newfound appreciation. When the music switched to Ella Fitzgerald, the Californian wine found its feet. The chablis came into its own during a Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan song, *Jeru*. As a



Winemaker Kim Chalmers is fascinated by the "mysterious resonances" of music and wine.

PICTURE: EDDIE JIM

final exercise, tasters were told to hold mouthfuls of wine while 15-second grabs of different songs were played in quick succession; their flavours swirled like kaleidoscopes.

The tasting was part of a workshop titled "Music and wine: Mysterious resonances", presented by Californian oenologist Clark Smith at the Australian Wine Tech

conference in 2007. Chalmers, who studied composition and taught at Adelaide University's music department before taking the reins of her family's wine business, was transfixed.

"My original field of research was in anaesthesia and compositions of light and sound. There's a lot of research on the way the brain perceives sound and taste

in similar ways; the aesthetic effect of attacking two senses at once provokes a different response to what the two separate parts would do on their own."

A year later, Chalmers contacted Smith and requested permission to use his research for her own workshop, which she presented at the Alternative Variety Wine show in Mildura. In attendance was Max

"Attacking two senses at once provokes a different response."

Allen, the chief of judges and a mandolin player; and winemaker James Erskine, also a flautist; the workshop was later staged in Berlin, where percussionist Eugene Ughetti joined the team. Last year the four came together to present "Tasting Notes: The music of Wine" at the Mornington Peninsula's Ten Minutes by Tractor winery. The event comprised a six-course meal broken by listening exercises. For one, Erskine sent Chalmers three unlabelled bottles of wine; her task was to compose musical "tasting notes" for each, which Ughetti then performed live.

"Eugene gave an analysis of the music and its structure and James discussed the structure of the wine. The similarity between their notes was amazing; everyone at the dinner matched the wines to the

**SUMMER
READING
RELAY**
MELBOURNE 2011

Thursday 3 March 2011

Reading Relay 12 noon-6:00 pm
Twilight Panel 6:00-7:00 pm, chaired by 3RRR's Donna Morabito
State Library forecourt and lawn, Swanston Street, Melbourne.

Guest readers including Catherine Deveny (columnist), Kristin Henry (poet), Ann Tanks (Melbourne Theatre Company), Steve Grimwade (Melbourne Writers Festival), Councillor Jennifer Kanis and more.

The City of Melbourne, Victoria University and the State Library are getting together to present a late Summer treat. We're reviving the tradition of gathering to hear stories read aloud.

Join a tag-team of Melbourne identities and local authors as they read short stories from *The Sleeper's Almanac* No. 6, to mark the end of the Summer Read program.

Stay for a story or two, or make a day of it with a picnic! The finale will be a Twilight Panel conversation (6-7pm) about the art of short-story writing.



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OPEN 7 DAYS

Chef Guy Grossi, left, will host *The Colours of Pommery* on March 6; tenor David Hobson, right, will perform at *Opera in the Market* on March 14 and 16.

PICTURE: SIMON SCHLUTER



music." They have since been approached to host workshops overseas, with plans to tour New York and Paris next year.

For Chalmers, the appeal of such exercises is to stimulate in people an almost childlike engagement with their everyday senses, opening a playful realm of wonderment and sensory delight. Such events are hardly new in Melbourne, which has a long and colourful history of happenings that combine food and art in novel and intriguing ways, but every so often a fresh wave of enterprising and creative chefs, artists, musicians and performers emerges to test new boundaries.

The idea of play sits at the heart of several events in this year's Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, particularly *The Colours of Pommery*. At Tolarno Hotel's Mirka — named after an artist celebrated for her enduring sense of mischief and passion — guests will dine on food prepared by Guy Grossi, indulge in four types of Pommery champagne, and paint the flavours they taste on an enormous collective canvas. Juliana Engberg, artistic director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, will then interpret what has been painted, a task she is looking forward to.

"How do you paint a flavour? I think it's a really interesting question. Citrus may have a strong orange or yellow association, but how do you render effervescence [a pertinent point given the menu's champagne focus]?" She is also curious about "how straightforwardly people will conform to the set of realities they know, or consciously decide to go outside them."

Engberg might encourage diners to think of the Fauvists and the Surrealists, who consciously set about working against prescriptive colour sets, instead rendering, say, trees yellow or leaves purple to play with people's expectations of the sky being blue, grass green or clouds white.

"It's about trying to create a parallel world that's not immediately logical, but releases us into a relaxed cognitive state that engages our sense of sensuality, sexuality and primitive impulses," she says. "If you're served a dish containing pine nuts, do you paint their texture, taste, the forest they remind you of, or the apron your grandmother used to wear when she cooked them in an old family dish?"

Engberg has mounted many exhibitions at ACCA that have explored intersections between art and food. *New10* included *The Outcome is Certain*, a work by Sydney-based artist Agatha Gothe-Snape based on the work of Swiss psychiatrist Max Luescher, whose research indicated a person's mood or personality could be read by the order in which they arranged a series of colours. His Luescher test has been widely appropriated by marketers and advertisers — think of the colours used in the packaging of basic foodstuffs: blue for sugar, red for spicy foods, green for organics. "Blue has clinical associations, think of nursing uniforms, but it's also the ego colour, a recuperative colour and a higher cognitive plane or knowledge colour," says Engberg. Yet, she says, reflecting on such associations can "reveal contradictions in what we think and what we know".

Artists have long used food to tease at ideas of memory, mortality, the subconscious, the complexity and mundanity of life. Salvador Dali

COVER STORY

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reportedly painted a self-portrait when he was eight that depicted him with a raw lamb chop on his head (in the vein of William Tell); his somewhat Freudian explanation for the rendering was that if his father got hungry, he could eat the lamb chop rather than his son. David Walsh's new Museum of Old and New Art in Tasmania is home to Belgian Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca Professional*, an artwork that mimics the human digestive system; it is fed daily, produces excrement, is a bit tedious to watch and stinks. In 2005, ACCA exhibited a work by Domenico de Clario called *A Second Simplicity*; it comprised a walk-up apartment, a re-creation of his parents' apartment in Trieste in the early 1950s. Guests were invited to lunch each day, prepared by de Clario's parents, with the conversation fed to speakers in the gallery.

Next month, for the State Library of Victoria's Craft Hatch market, visual merchandiser-turned-artist Fiona Smith will exhibit a series of dishes — sandwiches, biscuits, doughnuts, cake and pizza — crafted from felt. Over at the Sutton Project Space in Fitzroy, artist Geoff Newton will exhibit paintings inspired by 1970s and '80s recipe books.

Another artist who delights in toying with people's expectations of colour and flavour is Ryan Foote, who in 2009 held *The Dinner Table Project* at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Part theatre performance, part dinner party, the night involved guests entering a white room to be served black espresso martinis by wait staff dressed in black. They were then led into a black room, attended by waiters clothed in white, seated around a 30-metre table, and fed a 10-course meal of white food.

Confronted with food stripped of its visual taste signifiers, diners responded in correspondingly unfettered ways: people bonded. "We live in such a visual culture, and we're so conditioned and set in our expectations of foods being specific colours and presented in specific ways. If you go to a restaurant and a dish is served in a way you weren't expecting, your response is that something is wrong with it. Bright things are sweet, earthy tones savoury. If you take colour away, you force people to focus on what they're experiencing in that moment. Serve people white food and the minute it hits their taste buds they're determined to figure out what it is."

At Platform Gallery last June, Foote held the *Red and Yellow*

Event, which involved preparing and filling 10 cabinets with food. In each cabinet, one half coloured red, the other yellow, sat 71 little dishes; every 10 minutes of the exhibition, models served tidbits from another cabinet. Commuters making their way through the "cold, stark, subway space in the middle of a Melbourne winter" enjoyed yellow tasters (popcorn rolled in chicken salt) and red (beetroot chips), followed by more complex fare. One red dish, made to look like a cherry on a bed of cream, was instead a cherry tomato on a cheese pillow. "The moment people put the food in their mouth and realised it wasn't what they expected, that was the art," says Foote.

The artist's fascination with food exists on many levels; he is drawn to the way civilisations are built on food trade routes, by the way people's first encounters with a new culture come through its cuisine, how recipes tell stories about ancestry, friends and geography. Making conceptual art from food renders it immediately accessible, he says, and fun. But also hard work: each project is a logistical nightmare, involving at least two years of planning, liquor, food and safety permit applications, detailed designs and directions for sets, performers and props.

"I'd never thought about ... music coming out of a kitchen."

Another event at this year's food and wine festival that invites its participants to look at familiar food with fresh eyes is Sound Soup, a workshop for children aged six to 12 at the Footscray Community Arts Centre. Conducted by instrument maker and percussionist Dale Gorfinkel, and chef Robert Monteau, and conceived by the centre's arts and learning producer, Bernadette Fitzgerald, it will focus on the music of food.

Dale, who has spent much of his career composing scores for unlikely musical tools, has recorded a range of kitchen sounds — from the grating of a carrot and the dicing of an onion, to the sizzle of steak on a grill and the sound of a wooden spoon stirring in a ceramic bowl — which he will eventually weave into a music tapestry.

Taking inspiration from Vienna's Vegetable Orchestra, the children will carve clarinets from carrots and other vegetables, devising ways to produce multiple sounds from



Musician Dale Gorfinkel playing a vegetable instrument, and one of Fiona Smith's food-themed creations.

them as they go. "Every material has different potentialities, but the goal is to get kids to focus on listening with a greater awareness."

The soup the children will make is minestrone; Monteau considered various recipes before deciding the sounds involved in its preparation provided great scope — frying, simmering, pouring, chopping — for sound play.

"I'd never really thought about the potential of music coming out of a kitchen, but once I did, it opened up an entirely new way of approaching cooking," Fitzgerald says that while children are naturally entertained by the sounds of eating, from slurping, munching, burping, to stomach growls and rumbles, simple tasks such as podding peas and coring carrots divert their focus from whether they like eating the vegetable in hand to appreciating its colour, shape and texture. "There are so many stories of dicing up broccoli and carrots and hiding them in the bolognese sauce so that kids will actually eat them. But this is about making children curious about food and interested in what's on their plate."

Food has long been a focus at the National Gallery of Victoria, where each exhibition is conceived as a "holistic experience", according to Andrew O'Brien, head of commercial operations. In

preparation for the gallery's *Salvador Dali: Liquid Desire* exhibition, O'Brien travelled with curators to the artist's birthplace, Figueras, in north-eastern Catalonia, to see where he lived and what he ate, meet local suppliers and travel along the same roads Dali ventured down. His fieldwork was collated into a storyboard; it included menus, works of art, key colour palettes, and a narrative describing what the "experience" of the exhibition would be like. NGV International's three dining areas and their respective chefs, from Persimmon, Tea Room and the Gallery Kitchen, then devised menus to fit their individual briefs; Persimmon teamed Victorian products with imported Spanish fare to create dishes to seduce gallery goers into the sensory world of Dali on multiple levels.

The same 12-month development process was followed for the coming Winter Masterpieces exhibition, with O'Brien drawing up a storyboard based on his explorations of Vienna. In 2007, the gallery held its first Banquet of Cleopatra, which comprised a tour of the gallery's collection of 17th and 18th-century European paintings, a private viewing of Tiepolo's painting of the same name, and a feast inspired by the work. Described by curator of international art Sophie

Matthieson as telling "an exciting story of one of the most famous love affairs and battles of wit and ego", the feast was conceived to celebrate the work's use of "food as an erotic and political contest".

A highlight of the 2009 State of Design Festival was Baking Architecture, an event that involved 10 of the state's top architects and 10 of its top chefs collaborating to create a cake model of an unbuilt project. Another event involved architects and designers creating wild interpretations of pizza. Both events, says festival general manager Bev Robinson, were conceived to highlight parallels between the two fields, and the philosophies and approaches that underpin them.

"Both design and cooking touch every aspect of our lives. Whether you're cooking or building, you're thinking of components and resources as you would cooking methods and ingredients. You're thinking of how best to source raw materials, the most efficient way of using them, whether leftovers can be reused or recycled. Just as good design is not about furniture looking great in a museum, great food is not only about a meal in a restaurant; it's about bringing those ideas into your everyday life, using those approaches to make your life richer and more rewarding."

PLAYING WITH FOOD

MELBOURNE FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL

THE COLOURS OF POMMERY

Sample champagnes matched with three-course lunch by chef Guy Grossi and illustrate what you taste on a collective canvas. Juliana Engberg, artistic director of ACCA, will be the creative guide.

March 6, 12.15-4.15pm, Mirka at Tolarno Hotel, St Kilda, \$130; bookings 9525 3088.

AUTHENTIC JAPANESE FOOD & ART

Curatorial talks on Japanese art and antiques and three-course Kyoto home-style lunch with Victorian wines

SOUND SOUP

Instrument maker and percussionist Dale Gorfinkel and chef extraordinaire Robert Monteau of Raw Materials Studio come together for a playful culinary sound-art collaboration and a children's workshop creating vegetable instruments and instrument soup.

March 13, 1-4pm, Basement Theatre, Footscray, \$35; 9362 8888.

THE ARCADIA PROJECT (CRAFT VICTORIA)

Craft Victoria presents Sydney-based artist Sean Rafferty's humorous collage of fresh fruit and vegetables reconstructing the

FARMERS' MARKET PHOTO EXHIBITION

Silent auction of 25 finalists.

March 4-14, 9am-5pm, Gasworks Arts Park, Albert Park, free.

FOODIE FILMS IN FEDERATION SQUARE

Pull up a deck chair — movies screened with associated food aromas.

March 7-11, 5.30-9pm, no bookings needed.

OPERA IN THE MARKET

Food, wine and a 100-piece choir

DINNER IN THE STUDIO

Chef Matt Wilkinson and potter Shelley Pantone present a four-course dinner in a century-old butcher's shop in Middle Park that is now her studio and homewares store.

March 8, 7-11pm, \$120; bookings 9537 0737.

SBS FOOD JOURNEY FESTIVAL

Food, music, dancing.
March 4, 10am-8pm, March 5, 6 10am-5pm, Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton, \$18 adults, \$39 family, senior concession and group bookings. (02) 9452 7575.

OVER THE TEA CUPS: TEA & TOUR

A guided tour of the Johnston Collection, East Melbourne

