

# 48 hours eat, drink, cook

## WINE

### All's care in love and wine

"I see myself as the sushi chef of wine," declares Keppell Smith, raconteur and winemaker at Savaterra in Beechworth. And while that comment might raise an eyebrow, it actually makes sense – with an explanation, of course, as he's been reading a cookery book on Japanese food where the chef describes making perfect sushi rice. "This is the real kicker," says Smith, "there's a picture of the chef holding some rice with the statement underneath: 'the art of making good sushi rice is care and understanding.' And that was the only cooking direction given! But the older I get and the more I do (in the vineyard and winery), I realise that is also the secret to winemaking – care and understanding." However, Smith says that knowledge always comes later, usually after each vintage when you learn a bit more. It's why he has adjusted the amount of oak in Savaterra's latest releases – the 2006 pinot and chardonnay. While he uses French oak, Smith didn't want his wines to dry out, particularly in the mid-palate. The solution? After spending a year in oak, a third of each wine – both the chardonnay and pinot noir – went into stainless steel for another 12 months; it freshens the wines, too. It's why the '06 vintage proved a turning point for Smith; not that he was making underrated wines before (the '05s were stupendous) – it's just that he got serious. "I want people to now come on a journey with me. I've changed my winemaking. I don't want my wines drying out because I want them to look really beautiful when older." So the chardonnay especially is

rounder and richer on the palate but with both varieties the message is balance and not so much control. "Besides, it's the wine in the glass that's important. Going from big, macho to feminine – ah, that's what I want!" In typical Burgundian mode, he close planted his pinot noir and chardonnay vines – 8000 a hectare in 1997 – when few were doing so. The best wines he'd ever tasted were from close planted vines so "why reinvent the wheel?" It proved the right viticultural decision, as did adopting bio-dynamic principles. Yet Smith isn't just a Burgundian clone: he has a love of Italian varietals, particularly the brooding, tannic sagrantino that hails from Umbria, which he planted two years ago, alongside some shiraz for good measure. But why the former? Several years ago, wine importers, Maurizio Ugge and Barbara Evans from Arquilla, showed him Italian producer Arnaldo Caprai's sagrantino, known as 25 Anni. "I just fell in love with that wine. It had this balance between the wonderful wines of brunello and barolo with all the power and the glory, too." Later, when Smith visited Umbria, the similarities between Beechworth were uncanny, minus the castles of course – that is, the climate and soils. Early days yet with Savaterra's sagrantino and several years away from being made but it's promising. Too few sagrantinos are produced here, although D'Arenberg makes an impressive one as does Chalmers. Check out City Wine Shop, Europa Cellars and Armadale Cellars.

JANE FAULKNER  
janefaulkner@winematters.com.au

#### SAVATERRE PINOT NOIR 2006 \$75

Tight and closed as you'd expect from a young pinot but with a decent decant, it opens up superbly to reveal enticing cherry, savoury nuances to an alluring sage-herbal character. Tangy fruit on the palate with a moreish slightly bitter note that sits alongside smooth, ripe tannins, terrific acidity and a lingering finish. A wine that makes you think.



#### CHALMERS SAGRANTINO 2005 \$28

Yes, the tannins are prominent yet ripe but they're tempered as the wine's matured in old French oak adding softness to the palate, making this sagrantino very approachable. Lovely plum and sour cherry fruit with spicy, notes and excellent acidity.



#### SAVATERRE CHARDONNAY 2006 \$75

A hard act to follow with the '05 so tight and outstanding but while this seems more forward, there's a lot going on in the glass from the plump stone fruit notes to the creaminess mid-palate. It's opulent but not heavy with the nutty, leesy notes adding to its exceptional length.



## TOP FIVE ... CROQUE-MONSIEUR

### THE TOFF IN TOWN

Local interpretations of the croque-monsieur, a relatively modern French cafe-food classic, vary enormously. At one end is what is essentially a ham-and-cheese toasted sanga – and at the other is something quite majestic. Chef Karen Batson's (pictured) version is top notch. At the glamorous Toff in Town, with its cosy "carriage" cubicles and *Blade Runner-meets-Cabaret* atmosphere, her rather decadent croque-monsieur is on the after-midnight supper menu and is well worth staying up late for. The crispy toasted bread is filled with ham-off-the-bone, a fine touch of dijon mustard and excellent comte cheese. But, of course, the making of a good croque is in the bechamel and Batson's is rich yet not dominant. Creatively, she teams it with a little pot of excellent relish to add piquancy. No need to fly to Paris.  
**Second Floor, Curtin House, 252 Swanston Street, 9639 8770**

### The European

Equally wonderful is the European's fine version, which boasts thick and fluffy white high-tin bread. "The softer, the better," says breakfast chef Sam Kenway, who whips up his tasty bechamel with divine gruyere cheese. This teams very well with good leg ham and a little dijon mustard. Kenway toasts the bread under the grill after smearing it with butter, producing a crunchy, fried effect on the golden outer surface; the innards are warmed in the salamander grill and the whole thing is reconstructed and served – and promptly consumed by discerning early-birds in the dining room.  
**161 Spring Street, 9654 0811**

### Cafe Vue

There is much to be said for simplicity: the Vue croque has no excessive goo, just a thin layer of bechamel made with cider and a hint of Worcestershire sauce, which enhances the top-quality Kurobuta ham (known for its superior taste and yielded from Berkshire pigs) and



decent gruyere cheese. The bread encases all this in a little nutty icing – a great house-made sourdough.  
**Normanby Chambers, 430 Little Street, 9691 3888**

### Cacao

Here, amid the many chocolates, you can be found a delicate croque that is in the form of soft, deep brioche bread with a dark crust. Atop a slice, the ham is not overpowered by the subtle bechamel, which gets its texture from mozzarella – a nice touch. All to be followed by a good chocolate or two, or a fine chocolate and croissant.  
**52 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, 9551 1111**

## DISHLICIOUS



**WHAT** Traditional rare beef noodle soup, \$7.50  
**WHERE** Pho Hung, 447 High Street, Preston; 9470 1588

At this busy, no-frills eatery where slurping your soup is customary, the chef puts his stock on the heat at 4pm each day, simmering beef bone broth with brisket with ginger and spices. T