

# 48 hours eat, drink, cook ...

## WINE MATTERS

### Sweet excess

**SURFEIT.** That's one word that comes to mind now that the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival is over for another year.

Yet, in between various official wine events, an unrelated tasting took place at the City Wine Shop last week. One of our most gifted yet no-nonsense winemakers, Stephen Pannell, who is based in McLaren Vale, managed to flee vintage for just a night, and he sat beside Giuseppe Vaira, a young

known as G. D. Vajra, in the tiny village of Barolo, in Piedmont in north-west Italy. There were thought-provoking discussions on the three leading red varieties of that region, namely barolo, barbera and dolcetto, plus on what's wrong and right with Australian shiraz and grenache, two varieties Pannell excels in making. In 2004 Pannell worked vintage at Vajra, learning from Giuseppe's parents — Aldo and Milena —

#### S. C. PANNELL SHIRAZ GRENACHE 2006 \$51

While colour is no indication of quality, this wine's colour is enticing, starting with its dark, cherry-purple tones. A blend of 40 per cent grenache with the delicate musk and licorice notes of the variety to the fore, it's pretty and aromatic, laced with cherry fruit; pippy on the palate, medium-bodied with those grainy tannins and grip adding to its moreish character. Terrific length, and will evolve beautifully.



#### G. D. VAJRA BARBERA D'ALBA 2007 \$55

As a young wine, barbera is all about freshness, vitality and bright fruit, something this Vajra has and much more. It's loaded with bright raspberry fruit, some plums too; quite floral, particularly violets; licorice and spice too with firm yet ripe tannins and minerality that drives the finish. A gorgeous wine and anyone who's unfamiliar with great barbera, start with this and swoon.



#### G. D. VAJRA BRICCO DELLE VIOLE BAROLO 2004 \$189

The mighty nebbiolo grape is the heart of barolo and a variety that has amazing ageing potential. Like most young nebbiolo, this is tight with its firm tannic structure ensuring a more than decade-long ageing proposition but the impatient should decant and partner to meaty dishes. This is a complex, focused wine that builds on the palate before a firm finish.



about these special Piedmontese varieties. He's now a friend.

All up, 13 outstanding wines from both producers featured, including Vajra's top cru, the 2004 barolo Bracco delle Viole (hill of the violets), planted by his grandfather in 1949 and barolo Albe, a wine made from comparatively young vines, around 20 years old, sourced from three vineyards. Pannell had a hand in the making of both. What a joy to taste them in context.

Despite the structure of barolo, Giuseppe says Vajra's are "not wines to put in a boxing ring". In other words, they are not big, hunky or powerful. All are focused, often understated and beautifully expressive medium-bodied wines.

At one stage, Pannell spoke heartily about his Australian nebbiolo, although it didn't feature on the night. It's a wine that "does my head in" he said — he never knows whether to take it seriously. Yet it turns out as a gorgeous expression of that special Adelaide Hills site.

He mentions grenache's distinctive sandy tannins, and how Australians tend to suffer from tannin-phobia, seemingly preferring sweetness to that grip. Yet, with food, tannins are essential — they complement one another. Pannell says "I eat what I like to eat with what I like to drink". Makes sense. Let the wine breathe then enjoy with mushrooms and polenta, pasta ragu or roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, even venison.

All wines below are available at City Wine Shop, or try Rathdowne Cellars in Carlton or Enoteca Sileno in Carlton North, which imports Vajra.

JANE FAULKNER

## ONCE BITTEN

MY FORMER hairdresser continually tried to persuade me to allow her to layer my hair. She disapproved of my lifeless hair and advised that layering was the only way to achieve body and volume. I eventually succumbed and she proceeded to give me a multi-layered hairstyle. Apart from adding three centimetres to my height, the result was not favourable, as my hair resembled a Christmas tree. My mum tried to console me by saying that at least my hairstyle looked festive. I have since completely sworn off layering. The only layers that work for me are the tasty and textured ones in Cavallero's trifle dessert. A scrumptious biscuit-like almond base is covered in a layer of raspberry jelly followed by a layer of amaretto cream

and vanilla-poached peaches. The trifle is topped off with fresh raspberries and candied almonds.

**Almond raspberry Trifle**  
**\$12.50**  
**Cavallero,**  
**300 Smith**  
**Street,**  
**Collingwood,**  
**9417 1377**



CATHRYN HUI

## RIPE ... CHESTNUTS

THE season's first chestnuts have arrived at the markets and supermarkets, and although a little bit of elbow work is needed in preparation, the reward is



worth the effort. The two simplest ways to peel fresh chestnuts is to first score the base with a sharp knife or Stanley knife and either boil nuts for 15 minutes then

remove them from the pot one by one to peel the outer layer and inner furry skin (the nuts must be warm to peel), or roast for 20 minutes, cover with a tea towel for five, then peel. While still warm, toss roasted nuts in butter and salt flakes and serve in a large bowl. Peeled nuts are well matched to a pan of sauteed brussels sprouts or a salad of radicchio and crispy pancetta.

TESSIE VANDERWERT