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Dessert artist mixes it with locals

FOOD DETECTIVE: Judith Elen | March 01, 2008

SPAIN is the flavour of the moment in our eastern cities.



Dorinda Hafner

It's been an undercurrent for a while and is gathering momentum.

Frank Camorra's MoVida in Melbourne and chefs Elvis Abrahamowicz and Ben Milgate at Bodega Tapas Restaurant in Sydney have helped to extend a passion for Spanish cuisine beyond cultish aficionados. Jamon imports were allowed in 2006, bringing wider awareness, and there's the ever-present global buzz from El Bulli, Ferran Adria's mecca of kitchen magic near Barcelona.

Oriol Balaguer, revolutionary of the dessert kitchen, is the new focus. Balaguer worked with Adria at El Bulli for seven years, has won a swag of awards and since 2002 has run a chocolate and pastry studio in Barcelona, with a shop in Tokyo (where he is a bit of a cult). He arrived in Sydney last weekend en route to Melbourne Food & Wine Festival and, after a 30-odd hour flight, headed straight for Tetsuya's, where he cooked a dinner with chef Tetsuya Wakuda.

Over the following few days he shared Sydney kitchens with Longrain chef Martin Boetz and David Thompson of London's Nahm restaurant, with Neil Perry at Rockpool Fish and chef Alessandro Pavoni of harbour kitchen & bar at Park Hyatt Sydney.

Then to Qualia on Queensland's Hamilton Island, where he whipped up an exclusive dessert, and on to Melbourne for this weekend's masterclasses, the first to be offered by a Spanish chef at the festival.

Food Detective can report that Balaguer's use of chocolate in dishes such as chilled pea soup with chocolate sorbet is sensational, as was everything else on two (at least) of the Sydney menus, chocolate or not. (Let's not even mention his amazing Seven Texturas de Chocolate dessert.)

Balaguer's masterclass is full but Melbourne readers will be able to savour Spain and Balaguer's desserts tomorrow night when he cooks with Shannon Bennett at the 3,2,1 dinner at Vue de Monde. Six courses with matched Spanish and Victorian wines, \$400 a head; (03) 9691 3888.

Balaguer's artisanal chocolates and his book, *Dessert Cuisine* (Montagut Editores, \$185 plus GST), can be ordered online from The Spanish Pantry. www.thespanishpantry.com.au; www.oriolbalaguer.com.

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DETECTIVE would love to see Balaguer team up with home-grown dessert queen Christine Manfield of Universal for some sweet cuisine on his next Sydney trip; when Detective mentions this to Manfield at the Longrain lunch, it turns out she has already issued an invitation to Balaguer for next year.

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MEANWHILE Detective hears from providore Simon Johnson that he and some lucky staff members will be heading for Barcelona's annual gourmet fair, Alimentaria, on March 10-14. Expect new Spanish goodies soon at

Simon Johnson stores around the states and online; such as an intense new dried fruit product from Ferran Adria (wild berries, etc.) and fab chefs' knives. www.simonjohnson.com; www.alimentaria.com.

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FROM exotica to salt of the earth: South Australia's Kalangadoo Spud Fest is on tomorrow on the Limestone Coast, with potatoes from local growers, all the industry lowdown, plus tastes and sales of local produce. Sunday, Kalangadoo Institute Hall, Kalangadoo. www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au.

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ALSO in SA tomorrow, more fruit of the field close to Detective's heart, rare apples: Bedfordshire Foundling, McIndoes Russett, Grand Duke Constantine and others. Taste and buy them freshly harvested at Carrick Hill's Apple Day.

Heritage house Carrick Hill at Springfield has its own rare-apple orchard, with one or two trees each of more than 70 varieties (harvests are staggered). Normally the apples find their way on to the menu at Hayward's Garage Cafe at Carrick Hill, or into a basket for visitors to sample.

At the apple day, orchardist Tony Thorogood will demonstrate cider making, there'll be tastings and growing advice, orchard tours, apple-bobbing and more. Sunday, 10am-4pm; \$12/\$8adults and \$4children. www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au.

Hayward's Garage Cafe will feature tasting plates and an apple-inspired degustation dinner with wines (\$120). Bookings (08) 8379 1265.

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DETECTIVE'S favourite home away from home, northeastern Victoria, launches its two-weekend Tastes of Rutherglen Festival next Saturday; cellar doors will be open, chefs and food producers will be eager to talk and offer tastes. March 8-9 and 15-16. www.rutherglencvic.com.

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YIRRKALA Aboriginal community in East Arnhem Land will benefit from a third Feast for the Senses dinner at NG Art Gallery's Mission Restaurant & Bar in Sydney's Chippendale on Tuesday. In association with the gallery's Utopia Revisited exhibition (until March 8) and following two successful earlier dinners, chef John Rankin (formerly Astral and Quay) will offer a four-course dinner with wines from Tasmania's Hood Wines (introduced by winemaker Tony Scherer, an organic aficionado). Art expert Adrian Newstead of Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery, Bondi Beach, will talk about the art and there will be live music with pre-dinner drinks. 6.30pm, \$120. www.missionbar.com.au.

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PERTH'S favourite professor of (economics and) food, Peter Kenyon, has expanded his kitchens and programs and launched his 2008 classes in a purpose-built cooking school at Mt Lawley. Kenyon is not just a whizz with numbers, he's cooked at The Loose Box, Alain Fabregues's country-house restaurant in Mundaring. The program includes sessions with Italian coffee expert Andrea Capanni and baker Philippa Lindsell. www.thecookingprofessor.com.au.

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PENOLA Coonawarra Arts Festival, set for May 16-18 and in its 18th year, has signed up vivacious global food identity Dorinda Hafner for this year's Art of Food workshop. Register for a reminder on the 2007 website, which is in the process of being updated; www.artsfestival.com.au.

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GIVEAWAY announcement: Winners of the Barilla pasta hampers (Spoils, Indulgence, January 19-20) are being contacted by Barilla this week, with hampers on their way.

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FIND of the week: The Elements of Cooking: Translating the Chef's Craft for Every Kitchen by Michael Ruhlman (Black Inc, \$34.95). As the opinionated Anthony Bourdain writes in the introduction: this book "is an opinionated food glossary from a writer and cook who knows better than most what the hell he's talking about". There are 50 pages of notes on how and why things happen in the kitchen, followed by a 200-page AtoZ, from Acid to Zester via Glacage and Monte au beurre.

DETECTIVE loves: The television series Kylie Kwong: My China. The innovative Australian-born chef returns to her great-grandfather's ancestral home in Toishan, Guangdong province in the first episode next week; then it's from Hong Kong to Shanghai, Sichuan and Beijing, with stops on the way (nine episodes). LifeStyle Food, Thursdays at 8.30.

DETECTIVE loathes: Coffee that arrives too early. Queensland reader Clive Hodges shares his aversion to restaurants serving coffee before dessert. Detective adds: cafes that, horror, bring coffee at the same time as food plates. There's only one answer to this one: *Copyright 2008 News Limited. All times AEST (GMT +10).*

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