

February & March

Happy, happy new year. I wonder what this 2009 will bring in the world of food. Will basil be the new 'it' herb, and will parsley be 'out'? As I pursue the 'ins' and 'outs' lists I wonder who makes these lists up and more to the point who cares. This year I have had some lovely food; here are some of my 'love moments' of 2008 and a few terrible 'hate moments', too. I loved the Beresford pub when it re-opened with a brilliant new fit-out still keeping a lot of the original features. They have the most glamorous bathrooms, which are unisex in the wash area. The hand dryers are amazing — they're so powerful I can imagine some boys having fun with them. Danny Russo is also doing a good job in the kitchen, turning out simple, relaxed Italian food at very good prices. This place has been an instant success from day one. We had our staff Christmas party there — an Italian feast on a Sunday. And boy did we did feast. The wood-fired, slow-roasted pork was heaven and the risotto was perfect: creamy, not gluggy, with each grain separate. Even though this is a simple dish very few people get risotto right — but Danny does.

Justin Hemmes got lots of my votes last year with the opening of his uber-glam Ivy in the city and, as regular readers know, I have loved lunching at Mad Cow. The whole building is just great and he has brought a big splash of decadence to this financial gloom. Check out the pool.

Alex, my dear friend at Bird Cow Fish, is still cooking my favourite comfort food: gnocchi with prawns and sage. And if you love pies, her beef-cheek with Jerusalem artichokes is simply the best in town. Glebe Point Diner still does the best roast chicken and continues to be one of my favourite restaurants in Sydney.

Just before Christmas Debbie and I sipped on pink French Champagne looking out at the water at the Pier restaurant. I waded gently through perfect consommé with fish-filled pasta; it was a triumph and renewed my faith in fine dining. Further afield I took Olive to Neil Perry's new Rockpool restaurant in Melbourne. I had to cover her eyes as we walked past all the joints of meat hanging up and aging in the open-for-all-to-see fridges; there is also a magnificent open-plan kitchen. This food world is set in the casino complex in Melbourne. (Why is Sydney's not so fabulous?)

Still in Melbourne, Gordon Ramsay is tipped to open his restaurant this year, and I will be back to check out the new Italian restaurant there — Giuseppe, Arnaldo & Sons. As always when I am down south, I headed to the best Greek restaurant — it's in a pub called the Rose in Port Melbourne — and I also never go without a visit to my favourite Italian restaurant in Australia, Di Stasio. Their house wine is a treat.

All is not so good in Brisbane, where I don't seem to have much luck (sorry Narelle). On my last visit Narelle and I arrived at a waterfront restaurant only to be told they had run out of gas so could not serve anything hot. I was with Narelle for the worst restaurant food of the year, which was at Fins at South Kingscliff. Here the food was a murky mess; I had a fish soup served in a hideous modern thing called Salt Village, a sort of cross between the Gold Coast and ... more Gold coast. (I know this chef can do much better.)

On the other hand, one of the best dishes I ate last year was with Narelle. For breakfast I re-fried some pasta with clams and some grated, very mature goat's cheese. It was perfect and Susie, Narelle's youngest daughter, wolfed it down while Olive looked on in horror — pasta for breakfast!

The best meal I had in Queensland was at the River House: delicious fresh ingredients simply presented. And I loved the long lunch I had with Debbie and Phil in Noosaville overlooking the water — it was all about location, location, location at Ricky's River Bar and Restaurant.

When it comes to ingredients, last year we had to say goodbye to one of our best — Kangaroo Island chickens. This company was one of the first to rear really good chickens in Australia; they made the taste of Red Rooster products seem like something from Dante's Hell. How come battery chicken farming is still going on? But when Melinda from Affineur brought me some salami to taste, made with certified organic Berkshire pig, all was joy in my mouth. This is the best salami I have ever tasted in Australia: chewy, fatty, meaty, with complex flavours. 2008 was definitely the year of the pig and boy did Australia welcome it back — pork belly (with lots of fat) graced so many menus.

My mouth was also happy when I took home huge loaves of sourdough from the new bakery in town, Iggy's, and a slice of C2, a hard cheddar-like cheese from Bruny Island in Tasmania. (Is there an island thing going on? Lots of good food stuff seems to come from islands.) When I got home I just could not stop eating it. Iggy's also make bagels: large, chewy and tasty all rolled into one.

In 2008 at Manna we continued to roll out Carême puff pastry — it has inspired many tarts. This puff pastry is simply the best (it's all in the fat) and has become a staple in my freezer at home. Do come and try our tarts at the next Pyrmont Growers' Market (the first Saturday of every month) and the Eveleigh Market (every week starting on Saturday 28 February). When I look into my glass ball for 2009, I see more cooking at home and more people buying great ingredients from local markets (they are springing up everywhere). I see even more specialist suppliers growing, like the salami company and little cheese makers and my friend Felicity with her bread — all very limited edition. In the economically difficult year ahead, we need to look after the customers we have — and I would like to be looked after, too! No one does this better than Hudson's Meats in Surry Hills: craftsmen, butchers and charming, handsome sales people all rolled into one. Everything I have bought from there in 2008 has been perfect, and you know what? I don't flinch at the extortionate prices. If you want something really good to eat, that's what it costs.

Rachel Grosz



Special of The Month

We are very pleased to bring you our new gluten-free polenta cakes. Come and try: strawberry and white chocolate; pineapple and marigold; and dark chocolate and blackberry.



MANNA FROM HEAVEN
HANDMADE IN AUSTRALIA

Recipe

This makes two long tarts, perfect with a salad for lunch — or take it on a picnic and the children will gobble it up (there are the vegetables done for the day). On Christmas Eve I made this tart for the non-meat-eaters. It went perfectly with the veal with tuna sauce and sauté potatoes with lots of butter. At Manna we made these tarts individually without the brie and topped them with smoked trout for breakfast; delicious it was.

Leek & Brie Tart

3 large leeks
50g butter
A few sprigs of thyme
200g Brie (I used Udder Delights)
375g packet of Carême puff pastry
1 egg and a dash of cream
Salt and pepper

Set oven to 180c

Trim up the leeks and cut into 2cm slices. Wash with lots of water until all the grit is out. Put into a large saucepan and cover with a cup of water plus the butter and thyme. Cook on a medium heat until the leeks are tender — this should take about twenty minutes. Leave to cool then take out the sprigs of thyme and season with lots of salt and pepper. Cut the brie into thin slices about 1/2cm thick. On a lightly floured work bench cut the pastry in half, then roll each piece into a

rectangle about 15cm long. Lift on to the baking sheet and repeat with the remaining dough. With a sharp knife cut a line halfway down into the dough along both of the long sides about 2cm from the edges. This will make the sides of the tarts. Spread the leek on the middle of the tart and sprinkle the cheese on top. Brush the sides with the egg and cream. Bake in the oven for twenty to thirty minutes until the pastry is puffed up on the sides and golden brown on the bottom.



Do take a look at our new website:
www.mannafromheaven.com.au

eveleigh markets

Every Saturday from 8am to 1pm Manna from Heaven is going to be at this new market, starting on 28 February. We are going to make breads and pastries for people to eat while they are there for breakfast and lunch. Come and taste long tarts with olive oil pastry filled with taleggio and walnuts, or Italian bread topped with pesto, olives, tomatoes, capsicum and ricotta, and we are going to serve up slices of puff pastry with leeks and slivers of brie. And in the winter we will have warm tarts for breakfast.

'Our new, brightly-coloured, gluten-free polenta cakes are all made with 100% natural colouring using fruit and flavours.'



Eat, Memory & Ripailles

Stéphane Reynaud brings acres of French memories to his new tome of all things French.

The New York Times' Amanda Hesser, asked some famous authors to write about their food memories and *Eat, Memory*, is her collection of those essays. If you enjoy reading about bad food and how it has affected people positively or negatively this is the book for you. Yes, it's well written (it's by writers) but most of the pieces are not about something nice: a visit to MK Fisher's house leaves the interviewer with a dead mouse in her bag; there is a man who worked in a ice-cream shop for a couple of years who now hates desserts; a man who stopped eating altogether; and a man who lived in Japan where he never touched sushi and lived off food bought at a convenience store. I got slightly excited by a man's quest for garlic and his happy descriptions of it when he finally tasted it, but this whole picture was ruined by the recipe at the end of the chapter, which called for two cups of asparagus juice from two fifteen-ounce cans of asparagus. (Just the juice, mind, they never say what you should do with the asparagus — hopefully the bin.)

My food memories are filled with joy and the bad ones I tend to forget about — or they are very amusing in their terribleness (every chef must have a rat story or a disaster story that's aching funny).

Stéphane Reynaud brings acres of French memories to his new tome of all things French: *Ripailles* (feasts). Here he celebrates the people who bring us a very old cuisine that is steeped in tradition. We read about artisan cheese makers, wine makers and people who do everything you can do with a duck or a goose. This is interspersed with recipes and I am loving it; there are plenty for foie gras, cooked every which way. Along the way I am reminded of how rich this food is in history — and in fat. For those of you who love a meaty terrine and hearty casserole this is the book for you. For me Stéphane is a breath of fresh air: he combines as he writes deep traditions with modern jokey irreverence — just what the stuffy opinionated French need, as for too long they have thought their food the best in the world. This book is a perfect companion to his first book, *Pork and Sons*, a tome paying homage to all things piggy. Both are illustrated with quirky drawings by José Reis do Matos.

Manna From Heaven kids' classes

We are giving two parent-and-child cooking classes in the next school holidays held here at Manna From Heaven in Marrickville. For bookings, please call Leanne on 9517 3688.

Saturday 18th April 2pm – 4pm Saturday 25th April 2pm – 4pm

Do take a look at our new website: www.mannafromheaven.com.au



MANNA FROM HEAVEN
HANDMADE IN AUSTRALIA