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EDITED BY PAT NOURSE

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NEW RESTAURANTS

A JUG OF WINE AND THOU

First Pizza e Birra, now Millevini: Sydney gets a booster-shot of Melbourne Italian style with the opening of this new wine bar. Co-owner Mauro Marcucci tells it like it is.

"I want Millevini to be like those little b acaros that you find in the corners of Venice, where you walk in and it's all appetisers and you pick at them and drink a glass of wine. That's the way we want to keep it – antipasto bar-slash-wine bar.

"I love places you can access however you want and spend \$15 or \$150. These days I think that is what people look for. At Millevini, we're going to be doing antipasti and stuzzichini, which are like Italian tapas.

"The way the place is designed, we've got a three-metre display case which will be full of antipasti, and we've got a four-burner, a couple of grills and a fryer, so we're going to be doing prawns on skewers, lots of small fried things such as arancini, zucchini flowers, little prawns, olives Ascolana, things like that. The idea is that you

walk in, have a bit of antipasto, and we'll probably have two hot dishes on, plus a good selection of cheeses, and we're going to build up an oil menu.

"There'll be some aperitivi, but we're not really going for cocktails. It's all about the wine. I don't want to see blenders and shakers. There'll be Negronis though, of course. If I can't get a Negroni in here I'm going to lose the plot.

"We want to ramp the list up to 400 or 500 wines, ultimately. Originally the idea was to have a thousand wines, but a thousand wines in a small space like this is very hard to manage. And I think Millevini ('1000 wines') rolls nicely off the tongue and is quite elegant as a name. Trecentocinquantavini doesn't have quite the same ring to it."

Millevini, 397 Crown St, Surry Hills, NSW, (02) 9357 3366.

Fact for the month: Riccadonna, the lightly sparkling Moscato d'Asti from Piedmont in Italy's north-west, is the biggest-selling imported wine in Australia.



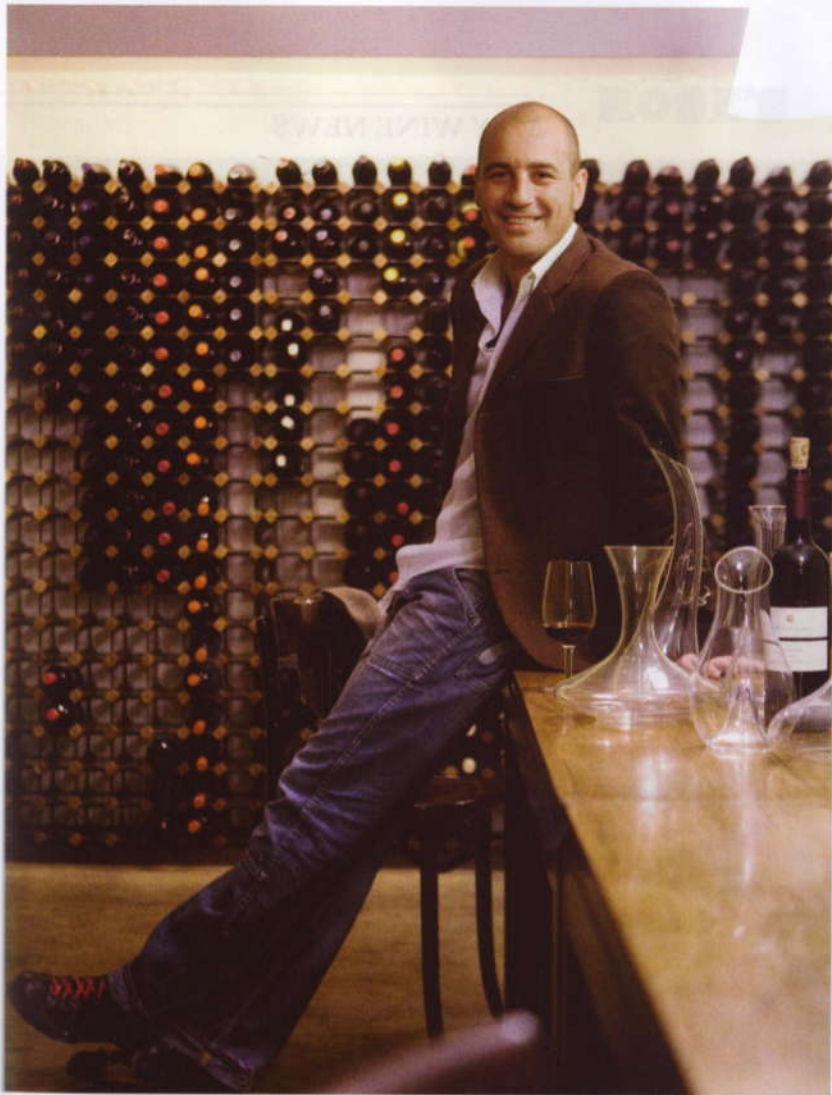
Plenty of bottle Millevini's owners (from left) Khali Khouri, Sabina Buoncompagni and Mauro Marcucci.

ROSSO POMODORO

Seasonality can be a tough mistress. Tomatoes are a great example. The foundation of so many Italian dishes (especially those from the south), they're just not great fresh in the colder months. Generations of Italian families have gotten around this by making hay when the sun shines and bottling as much sugo – the basic tomato pasta sauce – and as many tomatoes as they can

manage while they're still good. (Many Italian delis and even caf es now sell their home-style sugo, as with Sydney's Bertoni Casalinga's Sugo Del Giardino.) We find Italian-grown canned tomatoes, especially La Gina, Annalisa, Casar and Venere to be the superior product, as a rule. And Antica Enotria's jars of cherry tomatoes from Puglia are sweet enough for a 'fresh' tomato sauce even in the depths of winter.





Pride of Puglia

Max Allen talks to one man who is bringing the best of his homeland's wine to Australia.

You can see the pride shining from Sabino Matera's eyes as he buzzes around Melbourne's bottle shops and restaurants in his little Smart car, delivering wine, pasta and olive oil from his native Puglia. When he hands you a box of fine Pugliese red, it's as though he's giving you the most precious gift imaginable.

For just over a year, Matera and his partner, photographer Jessica Bialek, have been shipping high-quality wine and food from the hot heel of Italy to Australia. Most of the produce is certified organic, and this inspired the name of their business – QUOCO – an acronym for Quality Organic Company and a pun on 'cuoco', the Italian word for chef.

"I love to share with people these wines," says Matera, who went to school with the children of some of Puglia's great vigneroni, whose bottles he now imports. "I like to show you the flavours of grapes like uva di troia – grapes you can find nowhere else."

It's niche marketing in the extreme: supplying organic wine and food from just one region in southern

Italy. But it works because what Matera is selling slots right in with today's Slow Food zeitgeist movement for traditional, regional, environmentally sensitive, artisan produce. The irony, though, is that the tradition Matera is so proud of is a relatively recent one.

Wine writer Nicolas Belfrage best sums up Puglia's wine past in his book *Brunello to Zibibbo*: "Although grapes have been grown here from time immemorial, and despite the fact that Puglia churns out something like twice as much wine as Australia, there has never before the present existed anything resembling a wine-culture, in the sense of fine bottled wine."

A new wave of winemakers started reinventing the region's reputation only as recently as the 70s and 80s. Before that, most Pugliese grapes ended up as rough plonk drunk mostly by the locals or as strong red wine used, as Belfrage puts it, "to bolster weaker wines of the north [of Italy]".

Since then, wineries such as Leone de Castris, Taurino, Rivera and the Accademia dei Racemi have produced an increasingly exciting range of wines, diverting the harvest from Puglia's ancient, low-yielding vines away from the vats in the local co-operative and into some smart oak barrels and even smarter expensive bottles.

These new-wave wines have, inevitably, lured many other winemakers to Puglia. Tuscan notables Antinori and Avignonesi have invested in Pugliese vineyards, as have Kendall-Jackson from California and Calatrasi from Sicily. American winemaker Mark Shannon has established the incredibly successful A Mano label here, and Australian winemakers have also flown in, including Kym Milne, who has consulted for the progressive Cantele winery, and Barossa star Chris Ringland, who has made some stunning Pugliese reds under the La Corte label.

But as impressive as these 'outsider' wines are, if you want a taste of the real Puglia – produced using organic techniques not because organic is trendy, but because that's the way things have always been done – try one of Sabino Matera's offerings or one of the glorious Pugliese reds imported by Enoteca Sileno or Arquilla (see tasting notes below for recommendations).

Puglia produces some good white wines from local grapes – particularly the savoury, mineral-rich falanghina variety and the nectarine-fruity fiano – and rather less exciting whites from 'international' varieties such as chardonnay. Matera even imports some méthode Champenoise sparkling wines made using intensely flavoured local grapes such as bombino and Montepulciano.

But Puglia's great strength is undoubtedly its reds. In the Salento region, the gutsy, tannic grape negroamaro rules, producing the best, most noble and long-lived wines, often blended with a touch of the dense, silky malvasia nera.

In Manduria, the primitivo grape shines, making wines of wild, rustic darkness with exuberant black>

On the grapevine
Sabino Matera, in
Mr Wolf's cellar room,
says the wines of Puglia
are unique.

WINE

fruit and plenty of warm spice. And in Castel del Monte, the savoury Montepulciano and tannic aglianico grapes (both also found elsewhere in southern Italy) are joined by the uniquely local, rich-tasting uva di troia (aka nero di troia).

No wonder Sabino Matera puffs up with pride every time he delivers another box of wines from his homeland.*

Tasting Puglia's great red wines

2005 Antica Enotria Nero di Troia, \$50

Made from organically grown grapes in the region of Foggia, this is nero di troia at its floral, gorgeous best: the wine has a core of sweet blackberry fruit, surrounded by a mantle of pleasantly prickly tannin and spice.

2004 Rivera 'Puer Apuliae' Castel del Monte, \$120

Rivera's classic red, Il Falcone, helped put Puglia on the map and, while it is truly wonderful, this super-cuvée (100 per cent barrique-aged nero di troia) is even more seductive, with its plush concentration and richness.

2005 Giancarlo Ceci Castel del Monte Rosso, \$28

Another organically grown wine, this time a blend of uva di troia with Montepulciano and aglianico. It has good purple fleshy fruit in the middle and some marvellous chewy, grainy tannins, crying out for spit-roast lamb.

1999 Taurino 'Patriglione' Salento Rosso, \$112

It's been called the Barolo of Puglia but, to me, it tastes more like a great Hunter shiraz. It's very earthy – dusty even – like licking terracotta, but it has power, punch and warmth. It needs meat to show off its true glory.

2002 Leone de Castris 'Donna Lisa' Riserva, \$80

Like the Patriglione, this is a barrique-aged blend of 90 per cent negroamaro and 10 per cent malvasia nera. It's complex and full-bodied, powerful yet seductive.

Top grape treader
Troy Kalleske, winner of the 2008 Winemaker of the Year award in Tanunda.



MAY WINE NEWS

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Longview Vineyard Wines in Adelaide Hills – as well known for its quirky labels (My Fat Goose sem sav, Iron Knob riesling etc) as the quality of its wines – has been sold to Adelaide's Saturno family, the name behind the city's famous Booze Brothers retail chain.

MONEY IN THE BANK

The huge 650-ha Chalmers vineyard near Euston, on the New South Wales side of the Murray River, has become the first wine industry purchase for the Macquarie Group. Let's hope the Mac Bank continues the good work of Bruce and Jenni Chalmers.

THOUGHTS ON 2008 VINTAGE

After a drought- and fire-ravaged 2007 comes a harvest of extraordinary extremes. While much of NSW experienced one of its coolest, wettest summers ever, many South Australian vineyards sweltered in record-breaking March heat. Will we ever see a 'normal' season again?

WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR

Stephen Henschke, the Grand Master of the Barons of Barossa, awarded the 2008 Winemaker of the Year award to Troy Kalleske, one of the region's brightest young grape-treaders, at the annual Declaration of Vintage in Tanunda.

HARVEST IN THE HILLS

The 15th Beechworth Harvest Celebration takes place on the weekend of May 17-18. Many renowned vineyards in the north-east Victorian region will open their cellar doors just for this occasion so it's worth making the trip.

REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS

Staff at leading Melbourne wine retailer Armadale Cellars spent the month of April walking, cycling or taking a tram to work. "Not only will this help offset the impact of our business," said Ann Marie Johnston, "but it makes us all healthier as well!"

TOP DROPS OF THE MONTH



BARGAIN

2004 Vincognita Bullseye Shiraz, Fleurieu/McLaren Vale, SA, \$15

This boisterous, blackberry-fruity shiraz is stunning value. You may not have heard of Vincognita yet – but with wines as good this, and plenty of awards to boot – you'll soon be hearing a lot more. Drink with steak, of course.



WHITE

2007 YarraLoch Estate Arneis, Yarra Valley, Vic, \$25

YarraLoch is a top label and while its traditional Yarra wines – chardonnay, pinot and merlot etc – are good, this unusual Italian white varietal is terrific: lean, tingling, full of minerality. Drink with pan-fried whiting.



IMPORT

2007 Quartz Reef Pinot Gris, Central Otago, NZ, \$33

Rudi Bauer makes some of NZ's best pinot noir, but he's also a dab hand with pinot gris. This has plenty of spicy, ripe, melony flavour without being oily; it's crisp without being lean. Drink with steamed mussels.



RED

2006 Banrock Station Montepulciano, Riverland, SA, \$20

The Montepulciano grape makes some fabulous spicy, rustic reds in Italy and it's obviously well-suited to the heat of the Riverland too, if this succulent, juicy, deeply purple example is anything to go by. Drink with Italian spicy sausages.



ONE FOR THE CELLAR

2005 Olssens of Watervale The Olssen Six, Clare Valley, SA, \$65

Once, there were six red grapes in Bordeaux: cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, malbec, petit verdot and carmenere. Now the six are reunited in this sumptuous, bold red. Drink with slow-cooked lamb.



SPARKLING

Agrapart Terroirs Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru, Champagne, France, \$89

This is a splendid example of the blanc de blancs Champagne style: green-apple-tangy, chalky and lemony flavours, lead onto a creamy, powdery dryness. Drink with oysters.

For more wine tastings go to gourmettraveller.com.au

Stockists p185