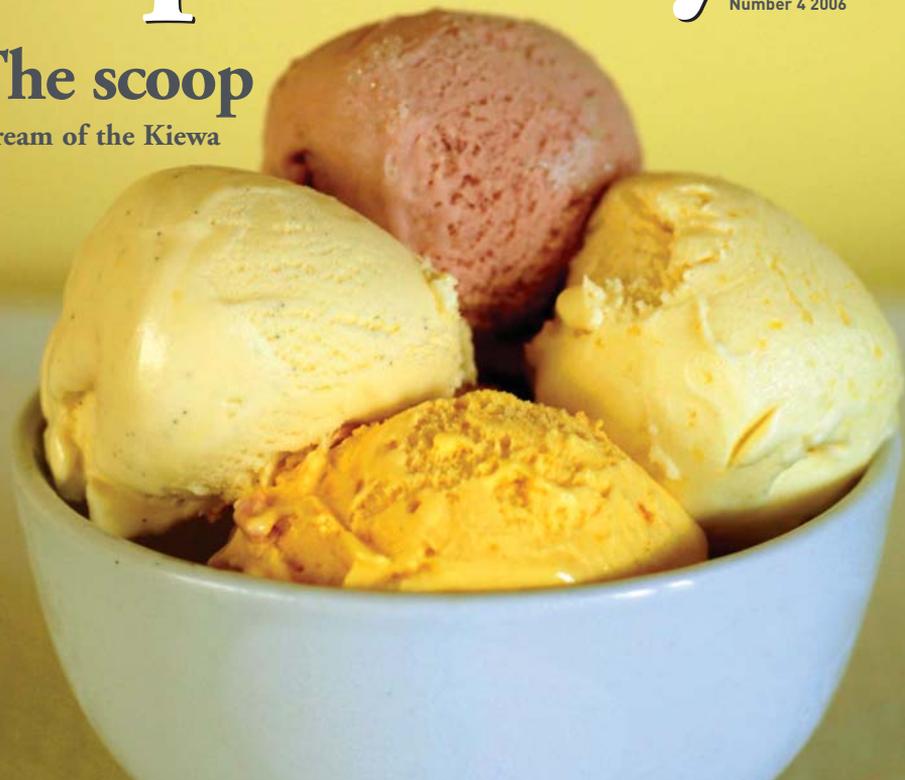


Alpine Style

Number 4 2006

The scoop
Cream of the Kiewa



Finding Beauty



Winter preview



Red Bank isn't plain

- Waddington's at Kergunyah • Indigo Cheese • Gundowring ice cream
- Fine wines blessed by high altitude vines

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Cream of the crop

Art is at the heart of this restaurant, writes MATT PRESTON.
 PICTURES BY HEATH MISSEN



Rhy...it's an unusual name for a chef. Well, let's be honest it's an unusual name for anyone.

"It's my parents," sighs the 27-year-old owner of Waddington's Restaurant in Kergunyah. "They were hippies. They even lived in Nepal for a while. You should hear what they called the other children."

With such an exotic childhood it is perhaps a surprise that 2 1/2 years ago he made the 285 hectare family property in the Kiewa Valley the home of his first restaurant.

Dig a little deeper and it all starts to make sense. "My family has been on the land up this way for 170 years. They were the first people to take cattle up on to the high country.



Citrus tasting plate - lemon brulee, kaffir lime custard tart and Gundowring Cumquat ice cream sandwich.

"Then my grandfather and great uncle were pioneers in the organic farming up this way. They used to organise organic field days in the 80s," Rhy reveals.

Rhy felt the family property and plant nursery was the ideal location as it was only 20 minutes drive from Wodonga.

"There was no good food in Albury-Wodonga. Eating out was really dominated by the big pokie clubs and this is one of the fastest growing inland cities in Australia.

"I just wanted to do good honest food," says the young chef who has previously worked in Melbourne, Brisbane and Port Douglas.

Good and honest it may be, but what makes Rhy Waddington's food stand out, both literally and figuratively, is his desire to make it look spectacular.

Something that is at odds with the prevailing fashion for dishes that champion local produce to look very rustic, "I like the artistic side of it," says Waddington about his chosen career.

"I think of each dish as a picture on the plate. Each dish is made up of simple components but I am trying to give

LOCAL PRODUCE

“Even the ice cream comes from the dairy just across the valley, which you can see from the deck of the restaurant.”

everything that comes out of the kitchen a visual wow factor as well as that taste ‘wow’ that comes from the local ingredients I have access to.”

It’s all part of Waddington’s desire to do something different – to make the meal memorable and to put out something that is different to what you may find in the region’s other fine restaurants like Myrtleford’s Range, Beechworth’s Warden’s or Stanley’s Galloping Goat.

“I’m just trying to give people a reason to come back,” he says disingenuously, as if the flavour of the food, the restaurant’s

garden setting or the views across the Kiewa Valley weren’t enough.

From that restaurant garden comes much of the produce that Rhy uses like figs, quinces and tomatoes. The lemons for the tart (pictured on previous page) and the limes for the curd served with it, both come from the property, as does the yucca flower that garnishes it.

“It’s all about the flavor,” says Waddington. “You seldom get the same flavor from plums and peaches supplied by a wholesaler as you do when you pick them from your own garden.

“And when the produce tastes great you don’t need to play around with it. So for me, real food is all about how short you can make the journey from paddock to plate.” Even the ice cream comes from the dairy just across the valley, which you can see from the deck of the restaurant.

Gundowring ice cream has been making a name for itself at Albury-Wodonga farmers’ markets, in Albury cafes like Zilch and Green Zebra and in the freezer cabinet of organic retailer Macro.

Being so local means Rhy has built a relationship with the owners and ice cream makers Sarah and Stephen Crooke.

“I’ll go over there and we’ll drink Pimms, play petanque and trial batches of new flavors and different shaped moulds for the restaurant. I might arrive with some cumquats from our garden and they’ll churn it into ice cream to be served that day!”

The duck neck sausage dish (pictured above right) also shows how prominent local ingredients are in his cooking.

The sausage is made especially for Waddington’s by local butcher Michael Frederick and the discs of cherry jelly layered between the sausage slices are made from setting the cinnamon and clove pickling brine from preserved cherries picked from Hotson’s in Chiltern. They in turn sit in on a bed of organic carrot puree. The carrots come from, you guessed it, the Waddington’s garden.

Anything that Rhy doesn’t have in the

Rhy Waddington.



“What makes Rhy Waddington’s food stand out, both literally and figuratively, is his desire to make it look spectacular.”

garden he sources from Byron Gray of Willowbank Farm who you may see at local farmers’ markets.

“He does great zucchini flowers and has about 15 varieties of potatoes now,” Rhy enthuses.

It is growers like Byron that explain why Rhy describes the area as “blessed” when it comes to local produce.

Milawa chicken, Brimin Lodge-farmed Murray Cod, trout from Harrierville, beef from local Welsh Blacks, and soon, the prized salt bush lamb, all represent local produce on Rhy’s menu.

There’s also slightly peppery Nevadillo olive oil from a grove up the Kiewa Valley to go with the bread Rhy’s mum makes.

This might be flavoured with anything from orange and cardamom to fig and fennel seed. Naturally, the fennel seed

comes from the garden’s own fennel plants once they go to seed!

But it is for Wodonga butcher Michael Frederick at Morrison Street Continental Butcher in Wodonga that Waddington reserves special praise.

For his duck and pistachio sausage, for his Suffolk ham and for what Rhy reckons is the best chorizo in Australia. “I was at his shop tasting stuff this morning – for an hour and a half!” laughs Rhy.

“His saucisson with hazelnuts, his Moscow salami which is just a bit drier than normal salami and the andoulette that he’s just started making. This is made with pork tripe and has that smell of a good andoulette! In fact his stuff is so good we are doing a charcuterie plate which just features his produce.”

Another way Rhy tries to create something





Rising to the top - Gundwring ice cream and the fruits of Waddington's garden.



memorable is through his program of wine dinners – he has even started to open bottles from his private cellar, allowing guests to try great aged wines from, say the Leeuwin Estate Art Series, by the glass. Local wines are also something he's become increasingly passionate about since opening, with favourites including Christmont, Pizzini and Sorrenberg. He also recommends the Annapurna Estate sparkling grown at the head of the Kiewa Valley in the shadow of Mount Bogong and Wood Park's substantial 2003 zinfandel as bottles well worth seeking out. "Even though 2003 was a smoke affected year, that zinfandel is very special. You just need to realise that it's very different in character to Californian zinfandels." Some joke that it was Waddington's commitment to the region that saw him marry a local Stanley girl a little over a year

ago, but the way Rhy tells it, he's still amazed Samantha even talked to him when they first met at Beechworth's Hibernian Hotel.

"It was Melbourne Cup day and I was suitably 'refreshed!'" he laughs.

Now Samantha looks after front of house at Waddington's and Rhy claims she's taken his name.

Well, his surname at least. **AS**

Waddington's at Kergunyah, Restaurant and specialist plant nursery RMB 1059, Kiewa Valley Highway, Kergunyah, 3691. Tel: (02) 6027 5393

Open 11am to 4pm Wed-Sun and for dinner bookings Fri and Sat nights,

