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Neil Prentice with some of his prized Wagyu

wagyu & wine

NEIL PRENTICE HAS A SERIOUS PASSION FOR WINE... AND FOOD...
AND MATCHING THE TWO.

"We often see a lot of sweet and sour on the plate with Asian flavours and that's where bitter can be a nice little counterpoint in your glass: Sometimes beer is a better option with Asian food than wine; or if you've got wine, you'll want it to have some phenolic component... and perhaps some sweetness to counter the spice."

Such sentences comprise a normal conversation with Neil Prentice: He is clearly passionate about his wine, and his food—and matching the two.

Born in Warragul, Neil is the grandson of Gippsland dairy farmers. He works his parents' property

'Moondarra', near Erica, running 60 wagyu cattle and the Moondarra vineyard.

Neil strives for low-yield wines to create quality, rather than quantity, and uses techniques that interest and intrigue him, rather than those that are considered commercial or 'safe'.

"We make it differently to most people in the New World, by using whole bunches (including the stem). We pick late, around Anzac Day in April, so the stems are quite dry and desiccated by then and provides a soft layer of tannin to the wine."

“I now aim for something half way between Kobe beef and really good Argentinian or Scottish beef... Melbourne restaurants love it.”

Quality is Neil’s main objective, another is to produce wine and beef that is distinctive to the region in which it’s grown, rather than aiming for what is considered ‘best’ in a traditional sense.

To illustrate this philosophy Neil explains how he initially kept his wagyu undercover to produce white fat rather than yellow, and grain fed them for two years at enormous cost. But he said the result was almost like ‘baby food’ it was so tender. Although the Japanese would no doubt have loved the meat he produced, Neil felt it didn’t reflect where it was grown. So rather than producing traditional wagyu meat, the type the Japanese revere, he produces meat that the Australian market appreciates. He now purely grass feeds the cattle out in the open resulting in more flavour and texture.

“I now aim for something half way between Kobe beef and really good Argentinian or Scottish beef that is grass fed and dry-aged on the bone, so we get the strong mineral flavour of grass fed meat (which is not what the Japanese like – it’s too smelly for them). But Melbourne restaurants love it.”

Neil sells his meat direct to restaurants and also value adds by making sausages. Initially they didn’t work too well as the wagyu fat has such a low melting point. But now the cattle are grass fed the fat

has a higher melting point and works better. He’s also started adding couscous to the sausages to absorb the fat. The result is, apparently, “fabulous”.



Wagyu & wine on the fertile hills of Moondarra

Moondarra Wagyu flank steak & braised silverbeet

This recipe is from **ANDRE DE LAINE**, Head Chef at the charming and highly recommended Libertine, 500 Victoria St, North Melbourne

INGREDIENTS

2 x 225g Moondarra Wagyu flank steak, sinew trimmed
2 pinches of salt
1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons of olive oil
100g unsalted butter
200ml water
1 bunch silverbeet, stems removed and finely sliced
1 brown onion, sliced
1 clove of garlic, chopped
1 lemon

METHOD

1. Preparing the braised silverbeet. On a medium heat in a large saucepan heat 40g of the butter until it’s foaming then add the sliced onion, garlic and silverbeet stems. Gently fry this until it becomes soft and translucent then add the remaining roughly chopped leaves. Stir until the leaves have collapsed and softened (about 5 minutes). Season with a squeeze of lemon and salt to taste. Keep warm.

2. Preparing the steaks. Season the steaks with the salt and scatter the pepper over them, pressing it firmly into the steaks on both sides. On a medium heat, in a large frying pan, heat the oil and remaining butter until the butter is foaming; it should turn light brown and smell nutty. Don’t let the butter burn or it will develop an

unpleasant taste. Now raise the heat to medium/high, lay the steaks in the foaming butter and cook 1 ½ -2 minutes each side for rare; 3 minutes for medium rare; or 4 minutes for medium.

3. Making the sauce. Transfer the steaks onto a warm plate. Pour the water into the hot pan; there will be a lot of sizzling and the water and butter will create an emulsion. Scrape the base of the pan with a wooden spoon to release the caramelised residue, which will give taste and colour to this succulent juice. Pour this juice over your Moondarra Wagyu flank steaks and serve immediately with braised silverbeet and your favourite mustard.



Head Chef Andre De Laine prepares his wagyu dish, the ones here have an additional *piéd et paquet* (little tripe and trotter packages) not in the recipe above