

writers *Fiona Stocker and Chris Champion*

Understanding food and wine is a diplomatic passport to life. A demonstration of epicurean knowledge and discernment, as long as it is done with modesty, will always be appreciated.

Our Sips and Nibbles section offers a dash, a dab and a dribble of facts and occasional figures about food and wine, and the people who create them. It will never be dull. It will be at times dense but interesting, at others light but fun.

It will enhance any conversation. It will be like a fine dinner.

1 A-GRADE DOLLOP

Butter doesn't taste like it used to, or so many of us devoted to our morning toast believe. When families made their own butter at home, cream would be collected over the course of a few days, allowing natural cultures to develop and begin fermenting before it was churned. This resulted in a cultured butter with a tangier flavour.

Launceston's Olivia Morrison wanted butter like that. She also wanted a change from her web design career, and a means of working from home after the birth of her daughter. So she built a dairy in the old laundry underneath her house in Trevallyn, and set about churning her way into the hearts of toast and real butter lovers.

Morrison's butter, with its distinctive gold packaging, has collected plenty of accolades, and was proclaimed "the best butter in the world" recently by visiting Michelin chef Alain Passard.

You can find it gracing the tables at Stillwater and Saffire restaurants, and at Harvest Launceston farmers' market every Saturday.

2 FARM-BRED ALE

Everything in Will Tatchell's world begins on the farm, including Will. Raised on Everton Park, 150 hectares of rolling, English-style country just

north of Evandale, he has remained there ever since, brewing mostly. Half his 35 years have been spent pursuing the art of craft beer and building Van Diemen Brewing into a respected brand, with a clutch of traditional ales such as amber, pale, IPA, stout, and the occasional brew that pushes the boundaries a little, such as After Dinner Mint, a peppermint flavoured stout. Not for this Irish traditionalist, but interesting.

Now Tatchell is set to release Australia's first "estate ale", a brew that's grown and processed entirely on the farm. A half-acre hop field produces 75kg of hops, which dries down to 18kg.

Tatchell says the furthest any ingredient travelled for this beer was 430 metres.

The first batch of about 2,500 bottles of the light, summery ale will sell exclusively through his mail order service and at Saint John Craft Beer in Launceston.

3 WEED FEED

Tasmanian seaweed has the potential to become a multi-million dollar industry rivaling salmon, according to a UTAS scientist.

Dr Craig Sanderson, who works with Sustainable Marine Research Collaboration unit of the university, told the ABC recently that seaweed,

which is used in food, health products and fertilisers, is already a \$3 million industry in Tasmania annually, with 80 licence holders, and he believes it could be worth much more.

4 DEAN'S MEAN CURRIES

Tom Dean was nine years old when we first reported on his hot food business ideas. Now the curry paste maker from Lenah Valley is a grown-up 11 years old and the world is starting to recognise his acumen.

T&D Curries recently won a first and a second prize in the herbs and spices section of the Tasmanian Fine Food Awards. The first was for his green masala paste and the second for his balti masala paste. Neither last long in my kitchen.



*Tom Dean, master maker of curry paste, at Richmond Market
courtesy T and D Curries*

5 FARMGATE FABULOUSNESS

The West Tamar Valley's famed Farmgate Festival takes place this year on November 25 and 26. One of the features is a "farm-trail" experience, with visitors invited to take a self-drive tour of the Tamar, visiting any of 15 farms open to the public for the weekend.

The farms offer tours, tastings and produce sales, and their offerings range through truffles, apples, berries, rare-breed pigs, hazelnuts, salad leaves and vegetables, olives, Angus beef cattle, salmon, honey, cider, wine and dairy.

6 CREATIVE HICCOUGH HERE

For years, writers have claimed that there is a positive link between alcohol and creativity. These claims probably stem from the fact that the two are so often present on my desk at the same time.

I am therefore not surprised by the results of a study by Dr Mathias Benedek, of the University of Graz, into the effects of "mild alcohol intoxication" on creative cognition. What Dr Benedek proved, in layman's terms, is that wine can solve writer's block.

7 WINE UPDATE

The export value of New Zealand wine was a record A\$1.51 billion in the year to June, according to the 2017 annual report of New Zealand Winegrowers. The figure was up 6 per cent year-on-year, and the result makes wine New Zealand's fifth-largest export.

8 SCOTCH UPDATE

And in further growth news which will have Tasmanian eyebrows rising, the volume and value of rare Scotch whisky sold at auction in the UK rose by record amounts in the six months to June. The value "collectable" bottles of single malt almost doubled, up 93.66 per cent to £11.18 million.

9 QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Malbec could become as big as shiraz in Australia."

—Bleasdale Vineyards' Paul Hotker,
the newly crowned Halliday Wine Companion
Winemaker of the Year.