

**top
drops**
CHRIS SHANAHAN



Madfish range: Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2008, \$15-18; Moscato 2008, \$17-22; Pinot Noir 2007, \$16-19; Carnelian 2006, \$19-24

Madfish, the second label of Jeff Birch's Howard Park Wines, has been one of the great successes of the last decade. It works for Jeff. But more importantly it delivers tonnes of flavour and value for drinkers – especially as both large and small retailers seem to have adopted it. And that means regular discounting. The latest Sauvignon Blanc Semillon sits on the herbal/pea-pod edge of sauvignon's ripeness spectrum. With its zingy taut, dry palate it's good as a refresher on its own or with food. The new Moscato (only 5.5 per cent alcohol) is sweet, crisp and grapey. The pinot's medium bodied but savoury and Carnelian and a huge, chocolaty, dry mouthful.



Rusty Fig Bermagui Verdelho 2008, \$23; Albarino 2008, \$25

Gary Potts and Frances Perkins grow verdelho, albarino, tempranillo and graciano on their tiny vineyard near Bermagui on the South Coast. Their tremendously good sense in hiring Roger Harris, of Brindabella Hills, as winemaker, gave them a head start in the quality stakes. I've not seen the reds (due for release next year) but the whites are outstanding. Verdelho can be a plain-Jane, but this one's excitingly aromatic with a brisk palate and passionfruit-like tang. The Albarino is more citrus and melon but restrained with a chalky, savoury dry finish. Wines can be ordered by the mixed dozen at www.rustyfigwines.com.au



Ten Minutes by Tractor Mornington Peninsula Wallis Vineyard Chardonnay 2006, \$55; McCutcheon Vineyard Chardonnay 2006, \$55

These two beautiful chardonnays come from individual vineyards (each 10 minutes by tractor from the winery) on the high, cool Main Ridge subregion of Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. They're subtly different wines, made by identical processes, but reflecting the fruit flavours from the Wallis and McCutcheon – the former being just a tad more restrained and brisk than the latter. They're barrel-fermented using indigenous yeast then matured in identical barrels for 13 months. They emerge as pale, bright wines of great finesse, complexity and rare-flavour concentration. They're made by Rick McIntyre and Martin Spedding. See www.tenminutesbytractor.com.au



Photo: MICHELE ROUND

Crispy delights

Snacks are all the rage. Uber cool Melbourne eateries feature menus with mouth-watering arrays of little plates of this and that. At restaurants such as Cumulus, Bar Lourinha and MoVida you don't have to order everything at once. Begin with a plate or two and then order a couple more as the appetite demands. Still hungry? Oooh, let's have another of those amazing crumbed sweet peppers filled with crab and potato . . . It's all very new and exciting but others have been quietly offering a similar service for decades.

Grossi Florentino Cellar Bar is my favourite Melbourne hang-out. I go there nearly every time I'm in Melbourne because I know that I can have something to eat at any time of the day – very useful if lunch has been a casualty of padding about airports. That something can be big or small. Bowl of spaghetti? No problema. Just a little tide-me-over-till-dinner plate of salt cod fritters? Certainly signora. Maybe today the crumbed olives filled with braised beef . . . or perhaps the arancini made from yesterday's risotto. With a glass of bubbly Prosecco at hand one feels instantly comforted as well as more than a

food
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little smugly sophisticated. It's worth making too much risotto to make croquettes from the leftovers. Arancini are Italian croquettes, except they're traditionally shaped into balls. To reduce handling I prefer to make fat bullet shapes, which is largely as the mixture comes off the spoon. An option is to pop a cube of cheese in the centre so that it melts deliciously as the croquettes cook. Mozzarella is the traditional choice but cubes of nutty gruyere are excellent, particularly in a mushroom risotto.

Any risotto without too many chunky bits will make excellent croquettes. Do make sure that the risotto is well-seasoned so the snacks are tasty. If you've thrown out last week's paper, which featured a rich mushroom risotto, go to the recipes section of www.pinothshop.com

Rice croquettes

mushroom or other flavoured risotto
cold small cubes of gruyere or mozzarella
1 egg, beaten
fine, dry breadcrumbs
olive oil for frying

Take heaped tablespoons of cold risotto mixture. Push a cube of cheese into the centre and close the risotto around. Carefully roll the croquette in beaten egg and then in the breadcrumbs. Set on a tray to firm while you make the rest.

Heat oil in a medium saucepan to a depth of 3cm. Over moderate heat, fry the croquettes (in batches) for a few minutes, rolling over in the oil, until they are richly golden brown all over. Don't overcrowd the pan. Drain well on paper towel.

You can keep the cooked croquettes warm in a low oven while you make the rest.