

Wine.



of bacon powder. What a way to celebrate the classic flavour marriage of fish and cured pork.

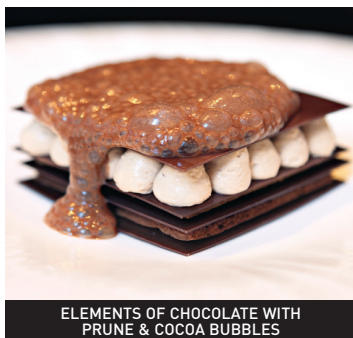
Benn and Wild have attracted talent: pastry chef Penelope Ransley, another Tetsuya's émigré, for example. Her golden brick of olive oil sponge with layers of white bean chiboust, tart raspberry paste and crunchy, raspberry-flavoured gravel keeps sugar to a minimum, while the slightly granular white bean ice cream is a nice play on the Japanese staple with red beans.

And the chocolate creation? A layer of prune in dark sherry; a square of 70 per cent pure Valrhona, eggshell-thin; choc flourless sponge; another square; milk chocolate cream; another square, and that aerated cocoa liquid, like glossy brown lava running down the sides. Minimal sweetness, maximum textural intrigue.

Benn's food mixes technique, tradition and free-thinking in the best manner. And Sepia is a fine, if slightly conservative, vehicle for it.

I could see why my neighbours had lost their train of thought. Martin Benn is a chef who will stop corporate-speak in its tracks.

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ELEMENTS OF CHOCOLATE WITH PRUNE & COCOA BUBBLES

SEPIA

Address: Darling Park, 201 Sussex Street, Sydney

Phone: (02) 9283 1990

Web: sepiarestaurant.com.au

Hours: Lunch and dinner; Mon-Fri

Typical prices: E\$24; M\$38; D\$18

Summary: The start of something big.



James Halliday



2007 LAURENZ V FRIENDLY GRÜNER VELTLINER

The grapes are predominantly from the Kamptal region, with a small percentage from Kremstal. It has zippy, zesty and flowery apple aromas, the palate with similar freshness and vitality; it also has the nuances of white pepper, which is the hallmark of the variety. It has excellent balance and great length. Screwcap; 12% alc/vol; to 2011.

Rating: 92 **Price:** \$31



2007 LAURENZ V CHARMING GRÜNER VELTLINER

Made from grapes grown at Langenlois in Kamptal, from 25-year-old vines on granite and loess (loam) soils. Quite apart from the touch of CO₂, it has an extra dimension to its structure, and a notably powerful finish. Pepper and musk notes on the bouquet and a richly flavoured palate underline the food-friendly nature of the wine. Screwcap; 13% alc/vol; to 2012.

Rating: 93 points **Price:** \$48



2007 BRÜNDLMAYER KAMPTALER TERRASSEN GRÜNER VELTLINER

Willi Bründlmayer is not only charming, but is one of Austria's greatest winemakers. His winery and estate vineyards are, by chance, also at Langenlois. This totally delicious entry-point wine has a highly floral lime, herb and spice bouquet, then a remarkably juicy palate backed by pronounced (but balanced) mineral acidity. Screwcap; 12.5% alc/vol; to 2012.

Rating: 92 points **Price:** \$32

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If your family can trace its wine business roots back to 1124; if it acquired its then 1000-year-old wine cellar in 1849, the year after Austria first allowed private ownership of real estate; and if your grandfather, Professor Dr Lorenz Moser III, revolutionised viticulture in Austria (and elsewhere) by designing a high vertical trellis using catchwires – and made the winery the largest in the country in the early 1980s, exporting 40 per cent of its production – then you have earned the right to call your current-release wines whatever you wish. All grüner veltliner, they are labelled Singing, Friendly and Charming.

There are a couple of missing links here. First, in the mid-'80s the Lenz Moser winery was caught in the Austrian "antifreeze scandal" which forced its closure and sale. Tom Stevenson, in *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*, points out that ethylene glycol (used in antifreeze compounds) is toxic, and that diethylene glycol, used to sweeten wines, is less toxic than ethanol (alcohol). The much-trumpeted health risks did not exist, but the public hysteria did.

Next is the longstanding family tradition (since 1880) of naming the eldest son Lorenz or Laurenz (shortened in common use to Lenz). When the company imploded, Laurenz (Lenz) Moser V, the present incumbent, became general manager of Robert Mondavi Europe GmbH, and held that role until Constellation acquired Mondavi in 2004.

During that time, Lenz had become a personal friend of Robert Mondavi; it was Mondavi whose credo was to make wine as accessible and simple as possible for consumers confronted with choice. Hence the names. **IT WAS LENZ'S GRANDFATHER WHO SAID, "SON, AUSTRIA IS SUCH A SMALL WINE PRODUCER, ALL YOU NEED IS A RED AND A WHITE FOR THE HOME MARKET, AND ONLY GRÜNER VELTLINER FOR EXPORT."**

Lenz moved quickly to pick up the family business, with two long-term friends as partners. Theirs is a virtual winery operation: they rely on contract-grown grapes from Kamptal (where the business is based) and Kremstal, supplied by growers well known to Lenz, and the wines are contract-made by the highly regarded Fred Loimer. The first vintage was 2005, and the Charming of that year (possibly available later this year ex museum stocks) is a totally delicious wine.

GRÜNER VELTLINER, LIKE RIESLING, HAS THE CAPACITY TO AGE GRACEFULLY FOR DECADES: IN AUSTRIA, I TASTED WINES SPANNING SEVEN DECADES, THE OLDEST FROM 1938 – MY BIRTH YEAR – AND MORE SPRIGHTLY THAN MYSELF.

Grüner has at last reached Australia, too, with two wineries awaiting their first vintage next year. Lenz Moser wines are imported and distributed nationally by Red + White (www.redandwhite.com.au) and are available at fine wine retailers and restaurants.