

 Seasonal cook


Photo: Marco Del Grande

Slam dunk

STEVE MANFREDI reckons a good biscuit beats a macaron hands down.

I'm sure the macaron craze that has hit Australia has a lot to do with how cute and colourful they look. Their popularity may also owe something to their cream filling, which comes without the kilojoule commitment a whole piece of cake would entail.

For me, however, the artificial colours used in many macarons are a huge turn-off. Give me a good biscuit any day. As Dan Leppard says in his new e-book, *Short and Sweet*, the perfect biscuit "... has a crispness at the edges when freshly baked, a moist and slightly chewy heart and, most importantly, a rich, buttery flavour".

Some classic drinks accompany biscuits but four are better matches for particular biscuits than others.

Dunking biscuits in creamy milk is an early childhood memory of mine. I still love dunking ginger snaps, holding them down with a spoon

so they soften a little and soak up the milk. Milk is generally biscuit-friendly.

Coffee, either espresso or milk-based, suits big flavours such as chocolate, heavy spices and rich fruits such as date and fig but I find the endless nuances of tea even more interesting and versatile.

Try these pistachio and sesame biscotti with a fine assam or darjeeling tea and the richer flavours of the Nutella baci with a full-bodied Taiwanesse oolong.

And let's not forget the adults-only biscuit accompaniment. Sweet wine, such as Tuscan Vin Santo or Rutherglen Tokay and Muscat, is the ultimate biscuit partner. Macarons are far too sweet to go with these.

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PISTACHIO AND SESAME BISCOTTI

Make a large batch and give them away as Christmas presents. They'll last a few weeks in an airtight container.

1kg unsalted butter
1.5kg castor sugar
1.5kg plain flour
60g baking powder
500g fine polenta meal
1/2 tsp salt
750g pistachio kernels, peeled
250g sesame seeds
10 eggs, beaten

Preheat oven to 170C. In a mixer, cream butter and sugar until smooth. Sift flour and baking powder together in a bowl. Mix in polenta, salt, pistachio and sesame seeds. Add mixed dry ingredients to creamed butter-sugar in a mixer bowl. Use a paddle attachment to slowly combine ingredients, adding the beaten eggs a little at a time, until mixture is smooth. Shape dough into logs about 8cm wide and 2cm high. Make them as long as your baking trays can handle. Place baking paper on each tray and logs on top. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove and let cool. With a serrated knife, cut the logs into biscotti about 1cm wide and return to baking trays. Reduce oven temperature to 150C. Bake biscotti for a further 8-10 minutes so they are dry and crisp. Remove from oven and leave to cool before serving.

Makes about 160 biscotti
Wine Vin Santo or Rutherglen Tokay

NUTELLA BACI

100g plain flour
90g unsalted butter, softened
60g almond meal
60g hazelnut meal
50g sugar
1 tsp cocoa powder
50g good-quality dark chocolate, chopped
1/2 tsp vanilla essence
Pinch salt
80g Nutella

Preheat oven to 160C. Place everything except Nutella in a food processor and pulse until well blended. Shape into a log, wrap tightly with cling film and rest in the fridge for at least an hour. Roll mix into small balls the size of a 10C piece, working quickly with lightly floured hands, and place on a buttered baking sheet. Place back in the fridge to rest for 20 minutes then bake in the oven for 20 minutes. Remove and allow to cool on tray. Once cooled, spoon a little Nutella between the flat sides of two baci and gently stick them together. Store in a well-sealed container in the fridge and they'll stay a week.

Makes 40-50 biscuits
Wine Rutherglen Muscat or Pedro Ximenez

 Full bottle

QUAFFING

YALUMBA ORGANIC VIOGNIER 2010 \$15

Yalumba makes viognier at every price point and this one, from its organic range, is a beauty and a bargain. It's full of ripe stone fruit, with a hint of apricot and some fresh mandarin/citrus notes. There's also blossom and ginger to be found. The texture is slick, which is telling of the variety, but it's not oily. It's super-vibrant, fresh and balanced. Louisa Rose, Yalumba's chief winemaker, is regarded by many as the viognier queen and she reckons it is perfect with a breakfast fry-up of eggs and bacon.



TRYING

VOYAGER ESTATE CHARDONNAY 2008 \$42

I've always been a fan of Margaret River chardonnay and the Voyager Estate '08 is a real stunner. There's lots going on in this wine but it's not overworked, as it is beautifully focused. It's a savoury chardonnay yet has a core of ripe nectarine fruit, grapefruit and lemon with fine acidity wound around complex, nutty, leesy texture and flavour. The new oak is integrated seamlessly and brings all its elements into one harmonious drink. Terrific with roast chicken.



CELLARING

KIR-YIANNI DIAPOROS 2007 \$77

Xinomavro is arguably Greece's top red, boldly tannic and acidic yet incredibly fragrant and beguiling, and its leading exponent is Kir-Yianni. The Diaporos is about 13 per cent syrah and built for ageing. It's dense with dark, ripe, sweet fruit, exotic spice and earthy nuances. The powerful tannins are tempered by a cleansing acidity and the oak is superbly integrated. What this will easily last another decade in the cellar, you can also enjoy it now. Serve it with ossu bucco.

Jane Faulkner

