

 Seasonal cook

POTATO FOCACCIA WITH TOMATOES AND OLIVES

200g floury potatoes (e.g. sebago)
1 litre water
12g fresh yeast
Pinch sugar
200g plain flour, plus a little extra
100g durum wheat flour (called semolina in Italy)
50ml virgin olive oil, plus a little extra
10 cherry tomatoes, halved
2 tbsp finely chopped olives
2 tsp chopped fresh oregano
2 tsp coarse salt

Scrub potatoes if they are dirty. Cook in their jackets in 750ml of water, with saucepan lid on. Peel, mash (preferably with a ricer) and allow to cool. Dissolve yeast and sugar in 125ml water using a fork to mix. Place the two flours in a pile on a work surface and make a well in the middle. Add potato, dissolved yeast, 50ml of oil and enough of the remaining water to produce a dough that won't stick to the surface or your hands. Work the dough by stretching and folding for 5-6 minutes. Place in a lightly floured bowl, cover with cling film and leave in a warm spot for 60-90 minutes until dough has more than doubled in size. Sprinkle 1 tbsp of plain flour in, working dough away from sides of bowl for 30 seconds. Liberally oil a 28cm round bread or cake tin and place dough inside. Spread 1 tbsp of oil over top and, using fingertips, stretch dough to fit bottom of pan. Press tomato halves into surface, scatter with olives and oregano and sprinkle with rock salt. Bake in preheated 220C oven for 25-35 minutes until golden.

Serves 8 (pictured)
Wine Vermentino

PLAIN FOCACCIA

540ml water
28g fresh yeast
900g flour (Italian bread or pizza flour with a milling grade of 00)
18g salt
120ml extra virgin olive oil, plus 20ml for brushing

Warm half the water to body temperature and dissolve yeast using a fork. Place in a mixer bowl and add flour and salt. Turn mixer on low, using dough attachment, and gradually add remaining water, then oil. Once dough has come together, increase speed a little and keep mixing for 5 minutes. Place dough on lightly oiled bench. Knead for another 5 minutes. Return dough to bowl, cover and let prove until double in size. Line two baking or jelly-roll trays (32cm x 44cm x 2.5cm) with baking paper. Divide dough in two and stretch to fit each tray. Let prove for 45-60 minutes. Dimple surfaces with fingertips, brush with oil and sprinkle with flaky salt. Bake at 210C for 15-20 minutes until golden.
Serves 10-15

 Full bottle

QUAFFING
DONA PAULA LOS CARDOS MALBEC 2011, \$24

Dona Paula is a comparatively new winery established in the mid-1990s but its owner, Ricardo Claro, purchased established vineyards, allowing him to produce wines of great depth and clarity. This is a delicious malbec; savoury and nuanced with plenty of enticing and vibrant fruit, including plums and berries. There is a tangy acidity and plust, velvety tannins. It is medium bodied and easy to drink with a long persistent finish. A super-smart wine punching way above its weight. Outstanding value.


TRYING
MOOROODUC ESTATE THE MOOROODUC MCINTYRE CHARDONNAY 2010, \$65

Moorooduc Estate on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria produces several chardonnays at different price points. The Moorooduc, its top wine, is the most complex, complete and restrained. It is subtle, yet reveals savoury nuances, along with figs and stone fruit. With a lovely texture and a hint of nuts, it is not at all heavy and the oak is neatly integrated. Hard to put down once opened, it is a really stylish and focused chardonnay.


CELLARING
G. D. VAJRA COSTE & FOSSATI DOLCETTO D'ALBA 2010, \$52

The Italian vineyards Coste & Fossati are just right for dolcetto. This wine is no wimp, but it needs a lot of air as it is initially somewhat reductive. It opens up beautifully to reveal dark cherry and bright raspberry fruits. Floral yet savoury, it has lots of spice and dried herbs, and bracing acidity (typical of the variety). It is tangy and pure, yet a touch raw. It needs another year or so in the bottle. It can handle meaty ragu or roast duck with all the trimmings.
Jane Faulkner



All rise

Plain or crowned with toppings, focaccia is an Italian staple that has conquered the world, writes **STEVE MANFREDI**.

Focaccia is the fluffy white bread of Italy. Rectangular in shape, it can be one to five centimetres high. It should be brushed with good extra-virgin olive oil and dimpled by the baker's fingers.

With a chewy crust and a soft, fine, springy crumb, it is often sold warm, straight from the oven and by weight.

The classic – and some think original – focaccia comes from Genoa. It is made using a long process (at least eight hours) of repeated risings, giving a result that is almost a flatbread.

Like pizza, focaccia has travelled throughout Italy and around the world. There are countless toppings that reflect local specialties, such as herbs, vegetables and cheese, as well as individual creativity.

Once the basic technique has been mastered, the variety of toppings is endless. Just remember not to overburden the bread by putting too much on top.

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