

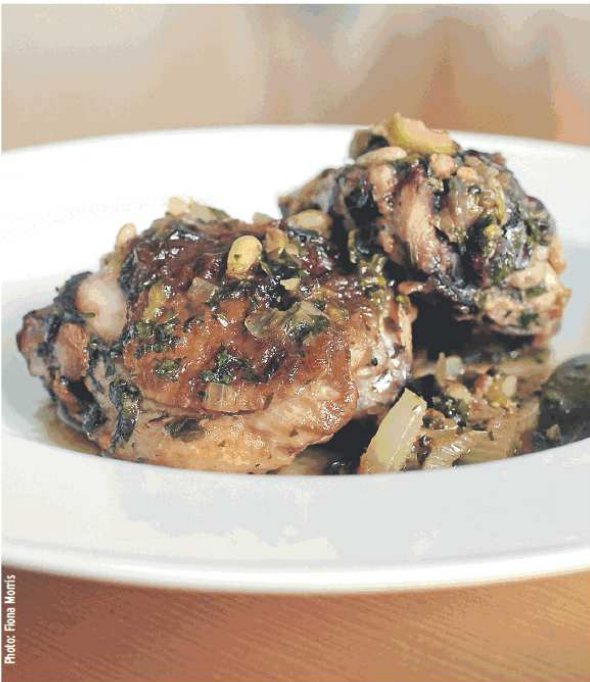
 Seasonal cook


Photo: Fiona Morris

# Tang with a twist

There's more to sweet and sour than bright orange Chinese pork, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

**S**weet-and-sour pork was probably the first restaurant dish I had in Australia. It was in a suburban Sydney Chinese restaurant more than 40 years ago and I remember it for its DayGlo orange colour and tangy honey and sugar flavours.

It's still a mainstay of Australian Chinese restaurant menus. That sweet-sour flavour paired with fatty meat is so damn good.

Many countries have sweet-and-sour dishes. And it's not always simply the sugar-vinegar combination that achieves the familiar flavour. Vietnam has sweet-and-sour fish soup, the sweet coming from pineapple and the sour from tamarind paste. The Thai version also uses

the sourness of tamarind but balances it with palm sugar.

The Japanese use mirin, a sweet vinegar, combined with "sweet" dashi stock for satoimo nakake (taro in sweet-and-sour sauce).

Around the Mediterranean, the combination is primarily wine vinegar and sugar, though grapes – both fresh and dried – are used for sweetness. Grape juice can also provide both sweet and sour elements: sweet in the form of concentrated must (also called saba or vincolato in Italy) and sour using verjuice from unripe grapes.

smanfredi@smh.com.au  
twitter.com/manfredistefano

## SWEET AND SOUR CHICKEN

1.5kg chicken thighs  
2 onions  
250ml dry red wine  
3 bay leaves  
Salt  
6 peppercorns  
1/2 cup plain flour  
6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
2 tsp finely diced pancetta  
2 celery hearts, finely chopped  
10 green olives, flesh removed and chopped  
1 tbsp capers  
50g sultanas  
50g pine nuts  
1 tbsp castor sugar  
4 tbsp red wine vinegar  
2 tbsp chopped parsley

Six to eight hours before cooking, rinse and pat dry chicken thighs. Place in a bowl. Peel and thinly slice 1 onion and place in a pot with red wine, 1 bay leaf, 1 tsp salt and the peppercorns. Bring to boil for a minute then remove from heat. Once cooled, pour over chicken, cover and refrigerate. When ready to cook, drain and pat dry. Dust chicken with flour and fry until golden using half the olive oil. Heat remaining oil in a casserole dish and lightly fry pancetta, remaining onion (finely chopped), celery, olives, capers, sultanas, pine nuts and remaining bay leaves for a minute. Add chicken, a couple of pinches of salt and stir on low heat. Dissolve sugar in a bowl with vinegar and add to chicken. Mix, cover with lid and cook on low heat for 10-12 minutes, adding water if too dry. Season, stir in parsley and serve.

**Serves 6 as a main (pictured)**  
Wine Barbera or dolcetto

## SWEET AND SOUR PRAWNS

24 medium-sized prawns  
80g sultanas or seedless raisins  
3 tbsp rice flour or plain flour  
4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
Pinch of ground cinnamon  
Salt and pepper  
30ml strained lemon juice  
1 tsp white wine vinegar

Peel prawns, leaving tails on, and remove digestive tracts. Place sultanas in a bowl and cover with tepid water. Soak for at least 30 minutes. Dust prawns with flour and shake off excess. Heat olive oil in a wide pan and gently fry prawns on medium heat for 30-45 seconds on each side. Add cinnamon, a couple of pinches of salt and a turn or two of pepper. Remove pan from heat. Using tongs, remove prawns (keeping juices in pan) and set aside. Drain sultanas and squeeze to remove excess water. Return to heat and add sultanas, lemon juice and vinegar. Simmer and keep stirring until liquid has reduced to a tablespoon or so. Return prawns for a few seconds then serve.

**Serves 4 as a first course**  
Wine Riesling

 Full bottle

### QUAFFING

**LES COURILLES COTES DU RHONE 2010, \$20**

I really like this uncomplicated red, a blend of grenache, syrah and mourvedre. It's very youthful, fresh and vibrant, so it needs to open up and be partnered with food, as there's still a slight rawness just from its youth. The juicy, red fruits are infused with spice and currants, and the wonderful grenache fragrance really jumps out with an almost red liqueur character that lifts it out of the ordinary, while adding grainy, ripe tannins. The lively, snappy acidity calls for mixed grill with lamb cutlets.



### TRYING

**QUEALY FRIULANO AMPHORA 2011, \$27**

Kathleen Quealy is no stranger to the wines of Friuli, in northeast Italy. She's a pioneer of pinot grigio in Australia and now friulano. This is the only commercially available friulano made here and it's stunning. Part of the secret is the wine is fermented in 800-litre terracotta amphorae. That allows in oxygen, thus creating real depth, texture and mouth-feel. While there's lovely fine crunchy acidity, it's soft, textural and round, with a wonderful phenolic grip on the finish. Classy. Enjoy with Japanese food.



### CELLARING

**WINES BY KT WATERVALE SHIRAZ CHURINGA VINEYARD 2010, \$40**

If you're charring a T-bone, this excellent Watervale shiraz, with fruit off the almost 60-year-old Churinga vineyard, can handle a bit of charcoal flavour. This really youthful, vibrant wine will age easily over the next 10 years or more. It needs a decent decant to open up and reveal its bucketload of dense, spicy plums and more. Crunchy acidity also complements freshly made horseradish cream with your steak.

Jane Faulkner

