 Seasonal cook

Photo: Steven Sawert



Tough love

A slow braise can turn chewy morsels into tender mouthfuls, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

Braising is such a convenient cooking method, especially for some of the tougher muscles such as shanks and cheeks. Once the work of preparing ingredients is done and the liquid added, the braise can be left to simmer gently for hours unattended. And the result is a rich, full-flavoured dish not often matched by quick cooking.

A case in point is our feature recipe, the pepero. Its full name is pepero all'impruneta, named after the town of Impruneta, a few kilometres outside of Florence. The town has always been famous for its fine terracotta made from the excellent local clay.

The story of the pepero is that the kiln workers would prepare their next day's lunch by filling containers with cheap and often tough scraps of meat, along with aromatic vegetables. A good dose of black pepper was mixed in to cover any hints of unsavoury flavours from the less-than-fresh meat.

They'd cover the ingredients with red wine and leave it in the cooling kilns at night before they went home. The next day the pepero was removed and the kilns fired up again. The meat would be tender and the sauce rich and plentiful.

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PEPERO BEEF CHEEKS BRAISED IN PEPPER AND RED WINE

2kg beef cheeks, cut into 3cm cubes
4 garlic cloves, peeled and lightly crushed
1 red onion, cut in 1cm dice
1 carrot, cut in 1cm dice
2 celery stalks, cut in 1cm dice
1L chiliantl or other red wine
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1tbsp tomato paste
2 bay leaves
500ml veal stock
Polenta or crusty bread, to serve

Place beef in a casserole pan with garlic, onion, carrot, celery and just cover meat with some of the wine. Simmer for 2 hours, partly covered with a lid. Add 1 heaped tbsp freshly ground black pepper, tomato paste, bay leaf, remaining wine and stock. Add 2-3 pinches of salt. Stir. Continue to simmer, uncovered, for 2 or more hours until sauce has reduced and thickened. If it dries out and catches on the bottom, stir in a little more stock. When cooked, check seasoning and add more salt if needed. Serve with polenta or crusty bread.


Serves 6 as a main course (pictured)
Wine Chianti or sangiovese.

BRAISED TRIPE WITH PEAS

The tripe called for in this dish is the "honeycomb" type. It is available partially cooked from good butchers.

1kg veal or beef tripe
3tbsp extra virgin olive oil
2 medium onions, cut in 1cm dice
2 medium carrots, cut in 1cm half rounds
1 celery heart, cut in 1cm pieces
125ml dry white wine
500ml chicken stock
2 garlic cloves, minced
½ cup roughly chopped parsley
2 small sprigs rosemary, left whole
6-8 basil leaves, torn
100ml tomato passata
2 chopped chillies (optional)
2 cups fresh shelled peas
Salt and pepper
Parmesan, to serve

Wash tripe well. Cut it into strips 1cm wide and 5-6cm long. Wash again and drain then set aside. Heat oil in a casserole pot and gently fry onion, carrot and celery for 2 minutes until fragrant. Add tripe and keep stirring and frying for 5-6 minutes. Add half the wine and keep stirring and cooking for another 5 minutes. Raise heat and pour in remaining wine and chicken stock. Bring to the boil then reduce heat to simmer for 1 hour. Add garlic, parsley, rosemary, basil, passata, chillies and peas. Stir well and simmer for 20-30 minutes until tripe is tender. Season, turn off heat and let sit for 15 minutes. Serve hot with grated parmesan.
Serves 6-8 as a first course.
Wine Chardonnay.

 Full bottle

QUAFFING BEACH ROAD WINES GRECO 2011, \$25

Greco is an Italian white variety that hails from Campania. This drop from Beach Road is the only commercially Australian example. Winemaker Briony Hoare says when the grapes were fermenting, the aroma reminded her of a lemony margarita. That's exactly what this tastes like. Expect grapefruit, lemon juice and zest, plus blossom fragrance. On the palate, there's super-zingy fresh acidity tempered by a hint of creamy lees character. I love it with freshly shucked oysters.



TRYING YABBY LAKE VINEYARD SINGLE BLOCK 6 CHARDONNAY 2010, \$90

Some may balk at the price, but this chardonnay, made from grapes from Tuerong on the Mornington Peninsula, is wonderful for its depth, balance and sheer drinkability. There's plenty of body to it and it's luscious and round, yet so fine and subtle, with mouth-watering flinty sulphide notes. It boasts amazing palate and length. Plus, there are citrus and fig nuances and a hint of lees. It's scary how quickly this goes down with an entree of creamy cauliflower soup topped with fried onions.



CELLARING JOSEPH MODA CABERNET SAUVIGNON MERLOT 2010, \$75

I've long loved Joseph Moda, an extraordinary wine from McLaren Vale made in a similar fashion to amarone. The grapes are partially dried on mats, in this case for a week to intensify their flavour. It's partly why there's incredible depth, complexity and perfume alongside sweet fruit. There's bright, fresh fruit, too. It has wonderful ripe, luscious tannins and fine acidity. This will easily cellar for 20 years. It's delicious with ox-tail ragu.
Jane Faulkner

