

the heart of food

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Wenger Knives & Verde Cooking Classes



When it comes to chef's knives, I tend to prefer the heavier, European knives, mostly because it's what I'm use to. I have a similar mindset to knives as Boris the Blade does with hand guns (a character from the movie Snatch, if you're wondering).

"Heavy is good. Heavy is reliable. If it doesn't work, you can always hit him with it".

Ok, maybe not that last part...

A number of food bloggers and other media types were invited to Carrick to not only test drive some European style knives from Wenger, but also to learn to cook some Southern Italian food from Antonio Ruggerino, owner & head chef of Verde Restaurant+Bar.



After a meet & greet and some welcome beverages, we man our prep stations on long, industrial steel counters. The kitchen is setup as a commercial cooking school, with equipment that you would find in a commercial kitchen. There's even a rack stacked with loads of Kitchen Aid mixers! (no photo, unfortunately). At each station, there are brand new boxes containing a chef knife and paring knife from Wenger. It's a brand that has relatively recently entered the Australian market, as least where kitchen knives are concerned.



Chef Antonio Ruggerino, along with an assistant chef, work the class through a Calabrian one-pot mussel dish. It a dish from his family's native region of Calabria, located at the southern most end of Italy. The toe end of "The Boot", if you will.



The mussel dish is very simple and very quick to prepare. The Wenger chefs knife was ultra sharp, making short work of the *mise en place* for this dish. If, according to Boris the Blade once again, "*weight is a sign of reliability*", these forged knives have it is spades, as they're quite hefty blades.

If you're more into lighter knives, they also have a set of lighter stamped blades, which we were able to play around with as well. Though just as sharp, it felt toy-like in my hands. As I said, I'm use to heavier knives.

After about a minute of prep and a couple of minutes on the stove...



...we end up with a superb mussel entree for one.

It's amazing how little time, and even less effort, went into a dish that produced such fresh flavours. This is a dish that I'll certainly be adding to my mid-week dinner repertoire.

If you're interested in the recipe, I'll look to write it up in a subsequent post.



With a dish of this nature, there's no way that I'd pass up an opportunity to mop up all the juices with some fresh bread, and there was plenty to go around.

The class was also given a quick run through regarding the prep of another dish, a winter classic known as osso buco, which we would be having as dinner soon afterwards.

We forgo the process of making this dish through to the end, which would take too long due to the amount of time required to slow cook the osso buco. Instead we stick just to the prep of the mise en place.

It's really just an excuse to play around with the knives some more and practice our knife skills, or in my case, lack thereof. No complaints here in any case.



Once we're done playing- er... I mean prep for the osso buco, we step away from the kitchen and take our places at dining tables setup in what would otherwise be the foyer area of the cooking school. A three course Southern Italian meal awaits our consumption.



Stuffed zucchini flower was a wonderful way to start off the meal, with its crisp batter, creamy cheese filling and shaved Parmesan to add a contrasting bite.



The main, osso buco, is simple with its presentation, & what one might refer to as honest with its flavours. There isn't anything complicated or contrived with regards to the dish. The meat is tender, the sauce is light and the generous serve of smooth mash potatoes tastes just like potatoes, devoid of the richness that cream and butter often bring.

Despite the fancy table setting, the dim mood lighting cast by candles & sitting amongst strangers (for the most part), it felt very much like a home cooked meal.



We finish off the evening with a dessert of Limoncello panna cotta, served with a crunchy wafer of almond biscotti.

Limoncello, a lemon liqueur of Southern Italian origin (surprise, surprise), gives a subtle citrus tang to the creamy, velvety smooth panna cotta that has barely set. A light finish to a wonderful meal.

As we began to head off, to make our way out into the cold winter's night for the journey home, we were presented with the very knives that we'd used earlier during the cooking class, cleaned and reboxed, as a parting gift. A pleasant and unexpected surprised. Thanks Wenger!