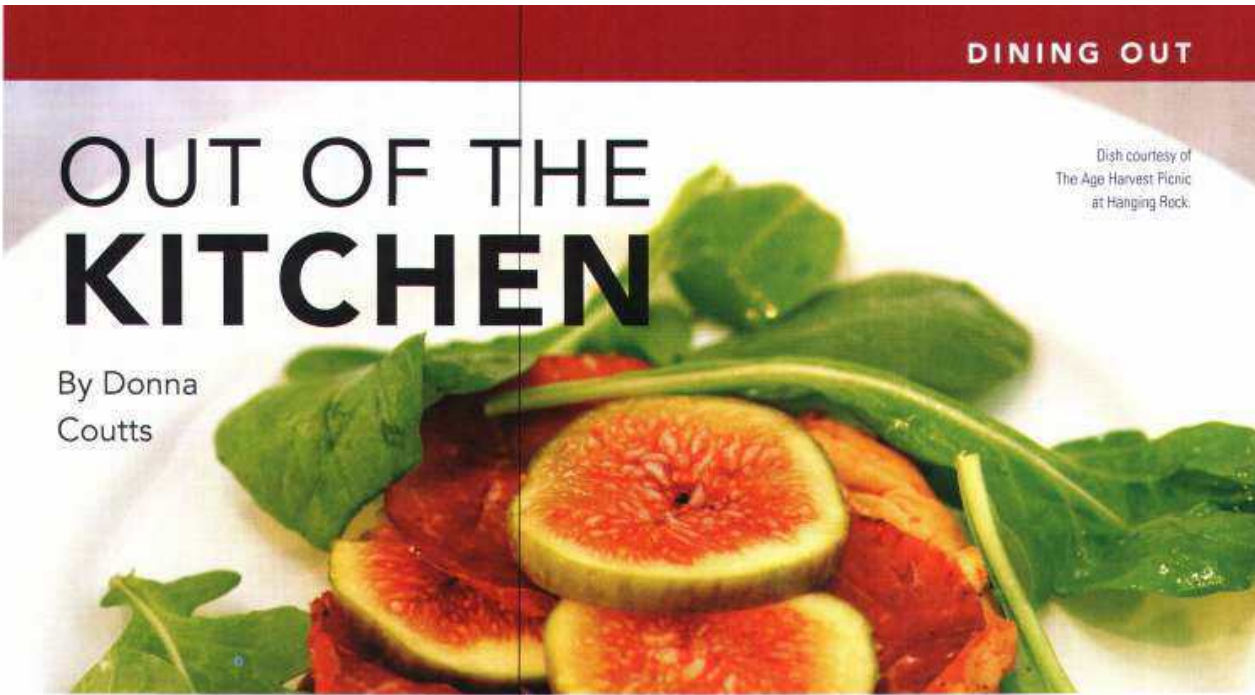




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OUT OF THE KITCHEN

By Donna Coutts

DINING OUT

Dish courtesy of
The Age Harvest Picnic
at Hanging Rock.

HARVEST PICNIC HANGING ROCK

Taste some of Victoria's best produce in a fairytale setting at this month's *The Age Harvest Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Take a picnic rug and your appetite for this one-day event at Hanging Rock, just 75km north of Melbourne up the Calder Freeway. More than 100 producers from across the state gather to sample and sell their wares. There are free children's activities, plenty of music, cooking demonstrations and of course, lots to eat.

Advance purchase tickets are \$20 online or buy a ticket on the day for \$25. Ticket includes event entry, car parking, entertainment, program, cooking demonstrations and a copy of *The Age* newspaper. You can travel by train or bus to the event. Trains from Southern Cross to Woodend are frequent and there is a shuttle bus from Woodend station to the event. Special Harvest Picnic buses depart the Arts Centre on St Kilda Road.

■ Visit www.harvestpicnic.com.au

LA DOLCE ITALIA

Live it up as an honorary Italian-Australian for the day on February 27. La Dolce Italia Festival in Lygon Street, Carlton (a short walk up Russell Street from the city) is a day-long party featuring the famous waiters' race, cooking demonstrations, great food, fashion and plenty of music.

■ Visit www.dolceitalia.com.au

STAR

Here are three spots to put on your must-try list this stay: La Vita Buona wine shop and bar, Three Below at The Westin Melbourne (a European-style food pub) and Caboose Canteen, aimed at city workers.

All three Swanston Street businesses have recently had a Paul Wilson makeover. And that's reason enough to schedule a meal at one, two or all three of them.

Who's Paul Wilson? Melburnians almost claim UK-born chef Paul Wilson as our own. He's certainly had a big impact on the city's food scene since Terence Conran brought him to Australia to open the redeveloped George's complex in Collins Street in the 1990s. He then launched Raddi at the Park Hyatt and in 2002 relaunched the Botanical hotel in South Yarra. Both Raddi and Botanical were top restaurants during Wilson's time at each venue.

Wilson is now a chef for hire and it seems he's systematically working his way through the city's food venues, renovating kitchens, revamping menus and injecting some of that Wilson magic.

■ Visit www.mrwilson.com.au, www.lavitabuona.com.au, www.caboosecanteen.com.au and www.threebelow.com.au

FULL OF FLAVOUR

Do your tastebuds a favour: extend your stay or book another trip to this food-mad city. Next month, you see, is Melbourne Food and Wine Festival month (March 4-14) and the entire state celebrates the world's best food across more than 250 events over 10 tasty days. Never has this cliché been so appropriate: it really is a feast for the senses.

Sure, there are international big names here to strut their stuff (Nigella Lawson is just one you'll know) but there are dozens of local food stars too: Stephanie Alexander, Maggie Beer, George Calombaris, James Halliday and many more.

And there are hundreds of events that anyone can attend, regardless of whether you know your sangiovese from your sauvignon or your extra virgin from your verjuice. Many are free or cheap to attend and tickets to some of these events are available at the door.

The festival is in its 19th year and attracts more than 400,000 food and wine producers, chefs, restaurateurs and those of us who simply appreciate a life-changing culinary experience.

Information and tickets are available at www.melbournefoodandwine.com.au