

# birthday bash

THE OPTIMISTIC SWISS BELIEVE THAT 55 IS HALF LIFE; SO WHEN SWISS-BORN AUSTRALIAN FRANZ SCHEURER CELEBRATED THIS MILESTONE BIRTHDAY AT HIS HOME IN SYDNEY LAST YEAR, IT CALLED FOR A SPECIAL CELEBRATION AND A PARADE OF CHEFS



story *roberta muir* photography *franz scheurer*

"Special for me," says Scheurer, "means good friends, good food and good wine." And if there's a bit of good music thrown in as well, all the better for this advertising executive who is also a keen musician, photographer, motor biker and, in his spare time, runs foodie website Australian Gourmet Pages ([www.australiangourmetpages.com](http://www.australiangourmetpages.com)).

Franz is known for his hospitality, so his many foodie friends banded together to make sure this was one birthday he wouldn't forget. Tim Pak Poy, then owner of Claude's restaurant, and Cheong Liew from The Grange in Adelaide commandeered the backyard wood-fired oven to roast a whole suckling pig in salt crust. But there were many gourmet bites before that.

As guests arrived they nibbled on Spanish almonds and big meaty green olives while throwing down shots of rich gazpacho. George Francisco, chef and co-owner of Dish in Newport, set up an oyster shucking station in the backyard, opening Sydney rock oysters to order and topping them with a chilli granita he calls 'fire ice' or with a drizzle of red wine and shallot vinaigrette.

His wife, Lucienne Francisco, chef and owner of The Chelsea Tea House in Avalon, whipped up soft little rolls stuffed with barbecued Wagyu brisket and coleslaw while Chui Lee Luk, then sous chef, but soon-to-be owner, of Claude's, was in the kitchen creating some of the fantasy bites which are her signature: salsify was wrapped in nori and then in rice paper, creating a display that looked like a stack of gorgeous mosaic tiles; with the help of a blow torch, oysters were coated in a crisp maltose crust; and herb and tomato jellies, in the shape of whole cherry tomatoes, were served perched on silver spoons.

Most guests spent some time in the kitchen lending a hand throughout the evening, before wandering out to the upstairs balcony or down to





## menu for franz's 55<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY extravaganza

- Marinated Olives
- Marcona Spanish Almonds
- Gazpacho Shots - Roberta Muir
  
- Oysters with Fire Ice - George Francisco
- Petite Kansas City-style Wagyu BBQ Brisket Rolls w/Slaw - Lucienne Francisco
- Sugared Oysters - Chui Lee Luk
- Salsify Wrap - Chui Lee Luk
- Savory Jellies - Chui Lee Luk
- "Dirty Scallops" - Franz Scheurer
- Smoked Salmon Consommé - Tim Pak Poy
  
- Ricotta Calzone - George Pompei
- Salt-Bush Hogget - Cheong Liew
- Zuger Kirschtorte (Swiss Birthday Cake) - Chris Th
- Porcello on Bread - from the wood-fired oven - Tim Pak Poy
- Cheese
- Coffee with Belle Fleur Chilli, and Lime & Cointreau, Chocolates

### WINES:

- Ashton Hills Three 2003
- Tim Adams Clare Riesling 2003
- Bloodwood Schubert 2001
- Lake's Folly Cabernets 1987 to 2000
- Tokaji Aszu Eszencia, Hungary 1949



## GEORGE FRANCISCO'S SYDNEY ROCK OYSTERS WITH FIRE ICE

*serves 6 as a canap*

### INGREDIENTS

- 12 Sydney rock oysters, washed but unopened
- 150ml cold water
- 3 tbsp sambal oelek
- 2 tbsp castor sugar
- 1 tbsp fish sauce

### METHOD

1. Combine all ingredients, except oysters, in a large metal or glass bowl and whisk together well, making sure all of the sugar is dissolved. 2. Put liquid in a large shallow pan or dish. Place level in freezer. Every fifteen minutes remove the pan from the freezer and scrape ice with a fork. As the liquid freezes, the scraping will create ice crystals. 3. Once the fire ice is ready, open each of the oysters and arrange them on a plate lined with rock salt or crushed ice. Place a teaspoon of fire ice on top of each oyster and serve immediately. 4. Once frozen, the fire ice will keep in an airtight container for 2 - 3 weeks. Scrape it with a fork to freshen it up before using it.



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the courtyard where the focal point was the wood-fired oven. But it'd be a dry party without a drink and, yet again, the generosity of friends made for some memorable drops. Veteran winemaker, writer and judge (and lover of a good party), Dr Max Lake arrived with magnums of Lake's Folly Cabernets from 1987 to 2000, which fired many a healthy debate throughout the evening as to the relative merits of the various vintages. And, on the white wine front, winemaker Steven Doyle from Bloodwood in Orange, arrived, with wife Rhonda, just in time to see Scheurer emerge from his cellar laden with bottles of Bloodwood Schubert Chardonnay.

Scheurer himself contributed the first hot dish of the evening, 'dirty scallops': plump Queensland scallops coated in a black sesame paste, quickly seared and served still translucent inside. This was followed by shots of Claude's signature smoked salmon consommé, served, as it is at the restaurant, in the fine unglazed beakers specially designed for it by late potter, restaurateur and innovator Anders Ousback. Next, ricotta calzone, sent over by George and Adisa Pompei from Pompei's at Bondi Beach (arguably Sydney's best pizza and gelato bar) were pulled from the wood-fired oven and passed around, while Cheong Liew manned the BBQ to grill his salt-bush hogget ribs which had been marinating all night in a heady blend of spices and Mediterranean ingredients.

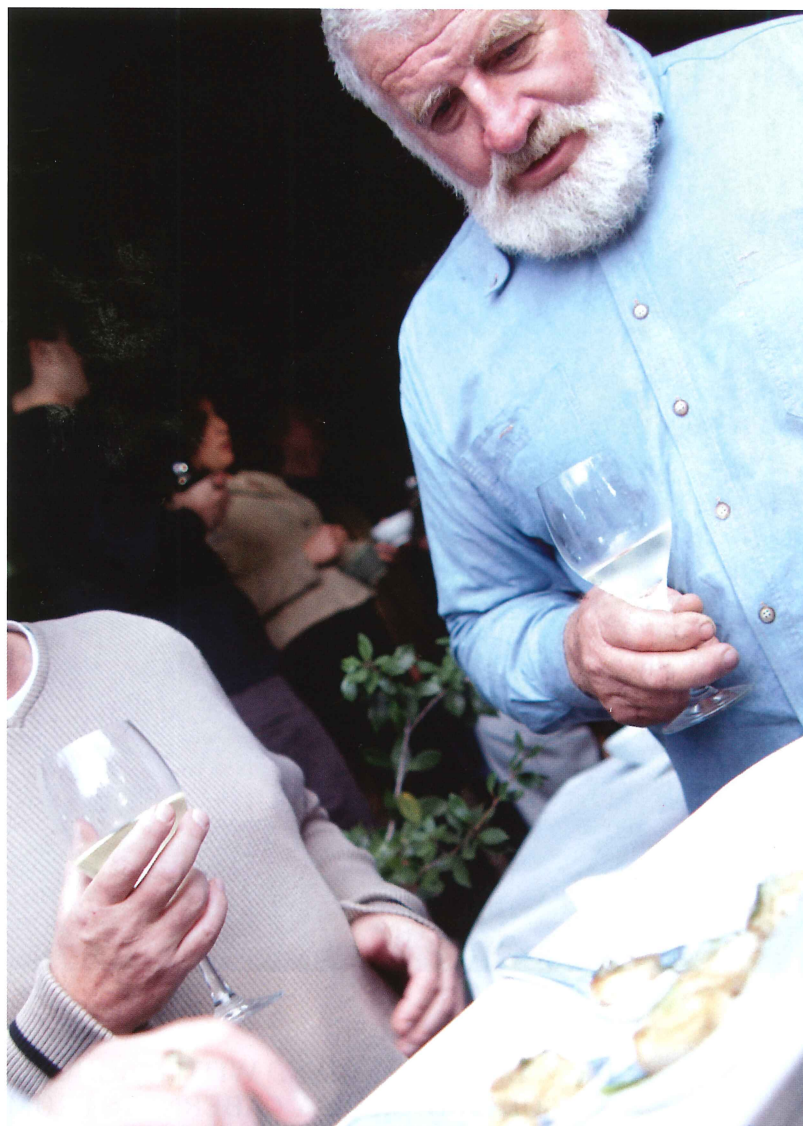
The next surprise was the arrival of swing band



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Slide McBride to play a few songs before the traditional 'Happy Birthday' and the presentation of a Zuger Kirschtorte, the birthday boy's favourite Swiss cake, which Claude's pastry chef, Chris Thé, had created, complete with a marzipan alp horn-playing, lederhosen-wearing bear on top, meant to represent the bear-like Scheurer. As day faded into evening, guests gathered around the brazier and swapped jokes, the pig was pulled from the oven and carved for those who needed more sustenance, more red wine was opened, cheese, coffee and exquisite Belle Fleur chilli chocolates and lime and Cointreau chocolates were served and a birthday present bottle of Tokaji Aszu Eszencia (1949, Scheurer's birth year) from Hungary was poured and passed around to toast friendship and the bond that a common love of food can build. 🇮🇪 🇨🇭



## CHEONG Liew's salt-BUSH HOGGET

*Serves 4 as an entrée*

### INGREDIENTS

- 8 hogget ribs, French trimmed
- 1 tbsp very finely ground black pepper
- 1 tsp very finely ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp very finely ground allspice
- 1 tsp very finely ground cloves
- 40g sea salt
- 3 green onions, finely chopped
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 20ml balsamic vinegar
- 50ml white wine

### INGREDIENTS

1. Combine black pepper, cinnamon, allspice, cloves and sea salt in a mortar and pestle and pound to combine well.
2. Combine with remaining ingredients, except hogget.
3. Add hogget and marinate overnight.
4. Remove ribs from marinade and wipe most of the marinade from them.
5. Grill ribs slowly over hot charcoal until medium rare. Serve with cumquat salsa (see recipe).



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## cumquat salsa

### INGREDIENTS

- 300g cumquats
- 1 green onion
- 1 red chilli
- 10g shrimp paste
- 1 yellow capsicum, deseeded, roasted, peeled, and cut into long strips
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 2 sprigs flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
- 80g light Greek feta
- 30g pine nuts, roasted
- 100ml extra virgin olive oil
- juice of 1 lemon

### METHOD

1. Juice cumquats and cut the skin of 5 of them into very fine strips. 2. Pound cumquat skin together with green onion, chilli and shrimp paste. 3. Mix with capsicum, red onion, parsley, feta, pine nuts and lemon juice. 4. Slowly whisk in olive oil to make a thick sauce.