



To preserve fresh oregano, chives, mint, dill, sage and thyme, wrap in damp paper towel and store in a sealed plastic bag in the fridge. Basil should be wrapped dry as moisture will turn the leaves black and limp.

You'll find more kitchen tips at www.taste.com.au.



STUART MACGILL

Off the bat

It seems nearly every time I ask someone to name their favourite wine lately, the answer is: Rockford Basket Press Shiraz. I should probably smile and move on, but it feels as if I've discovered they're sleeping with my ex-girlfriend - I need them to know that I discovered her first.

I like nothing better than serving a wine everybody loves, but nobody's heard of. However, in the early '90s, I shared the Rockford secret with too many. Then, a few years ago, I was nestled in a corner of my favourite Brisbane wine bar, talking Barossa with then sommelier, Travis, when I told him my story. He rolled his eyes and said that Rockford winemaker Robert O'Callaghan was his dad.

Nowadays, one of the best things about the Barossa is that many new labels are owned and operated by the offspring of some of the region's oldest winemaking families. Travis and his winemaking brother, Tim O'Callaghan, are fourth-generation and, after honing their skills both at home and away, they produce wine under the Diggers Bluff label.

Designed by Tim as the perfect barbecue wine, **Diggers Bluff Stray Dog Grenache Shiraz Mataro 2005 (\$16)** must have surprised even him. While it's easy drinking, it's also a great introduction to the Barossa big guns: shiraz and grenache. But be warned: production is small, so don't tell all your mates. (Stockists: (08) 8563 1510 or www.diggersbluff.com.au.)

The award-winning Stuart MacGill Uncorked returns to the LifeStyle Food Channel on Tuesday.



BIT ON THE SIDE AFTER DARK

Little Creatures Dining Hall, 222 Brunswick St, Fitzroy. Call (03) 9417 5500 or visit www.littlecreatures.com.au. Open daily.

The look: More a hangar than a hall, the industrial decor evokes memories of Fitzroy's working-class past. The oversize booths, open kitchen and long bar frame the room. If you feel agoraphobic, slip into the bottle shop for intimate cellar-style seating.

To drink: The entire LC range on tap, served in customised glasses - check the sizes before ordering. There's also a small but considered selection of boutique Aussie wines. **To eat:** Classic drinking grub such as the steak sandwich (\$17), pizza, and pies with mash and gravy (all from \$16).

The crowd: Plentiful. It only opened in July, but the word is out among Melbourne's bright young things.

Best for: A night out with the gang. Go early to bag a table.

For more hot bars, check out Deck of Secrets' Bar Secrets: Melbourne. Visit www.DeckofSecrets.com.

GLUTTON

HAKO 310 Flinders La, Melbourne. Call (03) 9620 1881

The name means 'box', explains my friend, Kazuyo, as we trip down Flinders Lane in search of the Japanese restaurant everyone's talking about. But there's nothing boxy about this loft-like space with its soaring black ceiling, sensuously curved wall and airy ambience. No doubt the name harks back to Hako's previous incarnation as a shoebox-style lunch spot in nearby Degraeves Street, which developed such a following it had to move to roomier premises. So here we are at Hako mark II, feeling a tad underwhelmed by the menu - a predictable list of Japanese cuisine's greatest hits: miso soup, gyoza, teriyaki chicken. It's not until we notice a blackboard of 10 or so specials that our pulses start to race. We're excited at the prospect of tempura calamari with calamari ink (\$13.50) and aren't disappointed by the almost butter-soft morsels, dressed ever so smartly in a crispy charcoal-coloured batter. They need nothing more than a squeeze of lemon and a pinch of sansho-infused sea salt to shine. We're equally enthused by the eel with a creamy egg sauce (\$14.50) - sweet, silky slivers draped across something that has the look and taste of scrambled egg. It's oddly delicious. Six plump, briny oysters (\$4 a piece) make a dramatic entrance atop drifts of grated daikon in a lacquered box, with a zesty ponzu and flying fish roe dressing. After all this, our main special of udon suki (\$28.50) seems lacklustre. The iron hotpot is packed with salmon, prawns, scallops and udon noodles, but we suspect it's been stewing for too long in its dashi broth. Still, it's a small niggle for a place that dares to operate outside the box.

Three of a find... mustards



1. Fortnum & Mason Hot English Mustard, \$17.95 (175g). This English brand's history can be traced back to 1707, a queen and a bit of leftover wax. Irrespective of its grand past, this mustard is a must-try. Stockists: David Jones or visit www.fortnumandmason.com.

2. Delouis Fils Mustard with Champagne, \$7.25 (200g). Impress your dinner guests as they slather this mustard on their rib-eye by telling them it's produced in the Limoges region of France and is made from the finest mustard seed, vinegar and Champagne. Stockists: The Essential Ingredient stores or www.theessentialingredient.com.au.

3. Yarra Valley Preserves Mad Dog Mustard, \$6.80 (106ml). They don't come more Aussie than a mustard called Mad Dog. With ingredients such as chilli powder and Tabasco, it may well induce a few houndish howls, which, we suppose, is the point. Go on, mustard up the courage. Stockists: (03) 9583 8966 or www.yarrawalleypreserves.com.au.