

food & wine

KYLIE FLEMING



UPPER CRUST

A CLASSIC TART IS THE IDEAL WAY TO SHOWCASE SEASONAL FLAVOURS

WORDS KYLIE FLEMING PHOTOGRAPHS RUSSELL MILLARD

Tarts are a culinary classic which are always in fashion and never fail to impress. It's hard to pass up a slice of freshly baked tart whether it's a luscious lemon or silky chocolate tart or savoury favourites such as the classic French *pissaladiere* onion, olive and anchovy tart.

It has been a staple dish for thousands of years and the basic concept hasn't changed much - fillings encased in a crust made of flour, fat, and water.

Tarts have a reputation for being difficult to cook at home but they're actually a no-fuss dish, easier than a pie without a lid and a great showcase of seasonal flavours.

Home cooks who are fearful of baking blunders can leave the hard work to chefs such as Murray Smith from The Lion Hotel who tweaks tart recipes and elevates them to gastronomic heights.

"My main inspiration for tarts is that they're simple to produce for large numbers. I can be very creative with them, they're ideal as an entree or main and at the moment they really suit the weather," he says.

"My personal favourite tarts have both been on our menu...one is made with goat feta, semi-dried olive and rosemary and the other is a Jerusalem artichoke, asparagus, verjuice and tomato."

Murray's current menu features a spring-influence caramelised leek, pear and artichoke tart with baby

beetroot, parsnip puree and fig paste.

"The key is getting good pastry, we always make our own, and this is *pate brisee*, a French term for short pastry which is a rich, flaky dough used for sweet and savoury crusts," he says.

Murray's tart is topped with leeks prepared as a confit (a method of immersing foods in a substance for both flavor and preservation) in olive oil, garlic, orange and lemon zest, thyme and bay leaves. He also adds confit globe artichokes and layered *beurre bosc* (brown) pears.

The tart is served with steamed parsnips pureed with onion, butter, cream and beetroot which has been blanched before roasting with olive oil. A spiced beetroot puree is made with shallots, beetroot, cinnamon, star anise, red wine vinegar, sugar and salt.

"We make our own fig paste with rehydrated figs with vincotto, olive oil and thyme which adds decadence and the tart is then garnished with chard leaves," Murray says.

For those who prefer their tarts on the sweet side, artisan chocolatier Steven Ter Horst's salted caramel truffle tarts are sublime.

"I was pretty chuffed recently when a bride ordered four of the tarts in different sizes to have as the wedding cake," he says.

The tarts are a spin-off of Steven's best-selling Fleur de Sel salted caramel chocolate. "I wanted to move



Chief Murray Smith

the caramel into something larger and we didn't have anything in our range with pastry," he says.

"We played around with about 10 different pastry recipes - it can do your head in. The pastry has to work well with both caramel and chocolate and we ended up making one with quite a high butter content."

Steven and his partner Chantelle first saw salted caramel when travelling in Europe and have worked

with it for the past three years.

"The thing that's important to me is that we find a way for our chocolates not to be too sweet...it's a balancing act to have a nice, clean profile and not too sweet and it was the same with the caramel," he says.

"I played around with the salt levels until I was happy with it...caramel is actually bitter, it's burnt sugar after all, and the salt controls the bitterness really well."



Chocolatier Steven Ter Horst

