

# SPICE

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AUTUMN 06

## AUTUMN OLIVES

### STAN KAILIS

Perth's olive guru

### CRAY TALES

from the Coral Coast

### QUINCES

persian delights

### VIOGNIER

new blends

Clint Nolan & Russell Blaikie

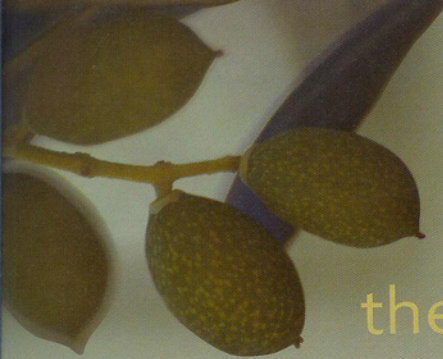
## NOBLE CHALLENGE

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# the fruit of passion

Tanya Dewhurst

Immediately upon meeting Professor Stan Kailis, I can sense he's passionate about olives. "I can't stop thinking about them," he says with a slightly wry smile.

He produces three different containers which he carefully places on the coffee table in front of us.

"These are from South Australia," he explains, gesturing at a plastic tub of Viva olives, their trendy label defining the times. "They're Australian-grown kalamata olives, the type of olive people are wanting. They're probably a bit softer, done in brine and vinegar, very tasty."

He proffers the tub full of purple-brown fruit swimming in red juice. They are soft, buttery and taste slightly sweet, slightly tangy. They're good.

"These you might find in a supermarket." He opens a jar of Always Fresh kalamata olives and sniffs the contents. "Most of the olives that people eat in Australia come from Greece and Spain. This crowd buy them from there in big barrels and repackage them. [By the packaging] you might think they're from Australia, but they're not, they're imported. There are several brands like this and they're very popular."

I peer at the array of olives with their mismatched colours, sizes and markings and decline to try them. I buy those all the time and know what they taste like.

And these are some of mine. He motions towards an unlabelled jar of large, yellow olives. "That's a French olive called a verdale which is a crunchy olive. They tend to come out a yellow colour, rather than green, that's the nature of them. I packed them myself this morning in oregano, olive oil and a bit of chilli - not too much, just enough to bring out the other flavours."

I open the jar and try one. I've always liked olives; love them in fact. But as soon as I taste one of Stan's home-grown, home-picked and home-cured olives, I know I've crossed over into the world olive aficionados inhabit. And I am in olive heaven.

Long revered as a symbol of peace and abundance, the olive tree is one of the world's oldest cultivated trees. Olives were being grown on Crete by 3000 BC and spread from there to Syria, Palestine and Israel. Muhammad used olive oil to anoint his head, while ancient Greek athletes rubbed it over their bodies. Homer referred to olive oil as "liquid gold" as it became the economic cornerstone of Hellenic society. And the ancient Egyptians believed olive oil to hold medicinal, even magical qualities, and used it as the basis for ointments and cosmetics. Olive

branches were found in Tutankhamen's tomb.

It is no wonder then, with his Greek heritage, that Stan Kailis has developed a passion for olives. Originally starting out investigating the biochemistry of food and drugs, Stan shifted to specialising in olive research and processes about twelve years ago. As a professor at UWA's Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, he oversees doctoral students and conducts research both in the lab and out in the field. With ten olive grove trials dotted around the state, Stan's research spans the gamut of industry practices from maximising water efficiency to quality control to safe and practical processing methodologies to economic "what-if" scenarios. His report for the government's Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, *Establishing Protocols for Table Olive Processing in Australia*, has put him at the forefront of table olive processing here in WA, if not the entire country. And his new book, *Making Table Olives* - due out this month (Landlinks Press) - will outline the process of curing olives for commercial growers and amateurs alike. However, his passion for the little green fruit began when he was a young boy.

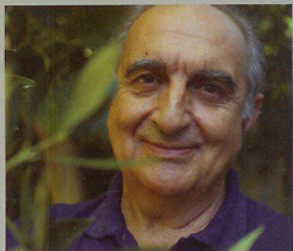
## talking olives with Stan Kailis

"When I was a kid we had olive trees at home, about four of them. I was born here in WA, but my family are from Greece. My grandmother used to live with us, and she was the olive maker and I was the assistant." Stan pauses as he paints the scene with his hands. "I had to climb the trees and granny would use a stick to shake the olives. Sometimes I would get the stick as well for not picking fast enough."

Stan chuckles as he continues. "She had this large earthenware urn with a small opening which she'd fill up with olives—she

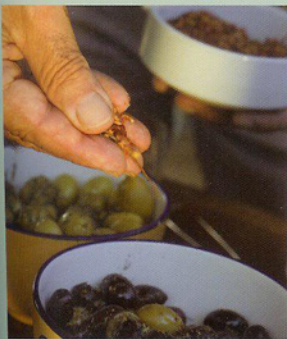
had several of these – and well I remember the image of her - she was in her eighties and always in black and she had almost alabaster skin because she never went out in the sun. And I remember her rolling up her black sleeve and seeing this white hand – clean, but very white – going into the urn every day to somehow coax these olives to sweeten up.

"And then at nightfall she'd put a big handful in a bowl for the table – we always had olives. She came from one of the Greek Islands – and they grew olives there –



Professor Stan Kailis holds qualifications in Science, Pharmacy and Teaching and has a doctorate in Science. He is a Professorial Fellow at the University of Western Australia, Fellow of Curtin University of Technology and a member of the Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology. His antecedents came from the Greek island of Megisti, one kilometre off the Turkish Coast. He was introduced to olives by his grandmother Konstantinia. Stan has made numerous presentations on olive growing, olive oil and table olives at national and international forums and to industry groups. He has also run numerous workshops on olives around Australia and at the cultural heart of the olive, New Norcia. He has published numerous papers on olives and has been invited to talk at national and international forums on olives. The focus of his research is on the quality of olives and olive products. He is joint author of a book on propagating olive trees and one soon to be published on making table olives.





and she practiced their same method of curing them. When they were green she'd pick about half of them. Let's say she'd have about 50 kilos, so she'd take about 15 or 20 kilos and crack them with a brick and then put those into brine. And because they were cracked and bruised, they'd sweeten up quickly because the skin was broken and the salt could get in there and all the bitterness could come out. Then she'd take some others and slit them and put them in brine and those would take a bit longer. Then she'd put another batch in whole and they would take up to a year. So when the green olives turned up, she had a sequence of events, it was her calendar of olive making."

He offers me another verdale and tells me they're from those original trees.

"She'd also do black olives. She'd leave some to ripen on the tree and they would eventually shrivel up. She'd pack those up with salt and olive oil and they'd have a bitter liquorice, but slightly sweet taste."

Of course Stan has carried on the tradition. Not only does he continue to cultivate his grandmother's olives, he also has about 50 olive trees at a small property in Chittering.

As players in the olive industry, WA producers are mere toddlers compared to

the great granddaddies of Italy, Greece and Spain. "We've only been seriously growing olives for about five years," says Stan. "Other countries are very interested in what we're doing here. Australian growers have mostly gone into olive oil, there's a certain fascination with it - table olives don't turn you on as much."

However, with between eight to ten million olive trees in the country, growers are certainly getting turned on by the olive industry. Small growers have been producing olives and oil since the 1800s when the first olive trees were brought to Sydney and industrial colonialists began touting olives as a viable industry for incipient colonies. In Western Australia, the Benedictine monks at New Norcia started growing olives in the 1840s. In 1908, their oil won a silver medal at the Franco-British Exhibition. Some people believe that the garden at Perth's Government House contains Australia's oldest olive trees.

Groves continued to thrive until the early 1900s, particularly in Victoria and South Australia. However, several factors including urban expansion, the Great Depression and disappointing yields all but killed olive production as a valuable industry.

It has only been in the last ten to fifteen years that Australia's olive industry has

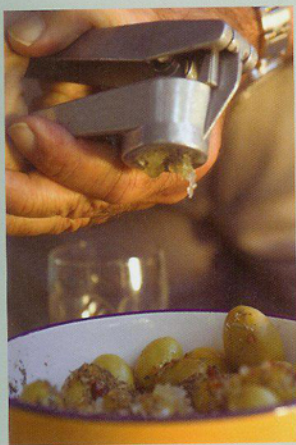
undergone a revival, which Stan partly attributes to our burgeoning fascination with European culture and Mediterranean cuisine.

"Forty or so years ago, when people travelled they got on a ship and went to England for a year and then came back home. Maybe they'd visit France. But now, many people travel to Europe—Italy, the Greek Islands—and have gotten used to this Southern European alfresco type of living and the associated cultural aspects such as the food.

"Also, people are becoming more conscious of their diets and see the Mediterranean diet, for instance, as being a good diet to follow. Olives are an important part of that diet."

In fact, nutrition is something that Stan is very much interested in, and he espouses the Mediterranean diet as a sound path to good health.

"I like to think that when I eat, I eat real food. I like to cook myself, but I also like to know what I'm eating and what's going into the food. A lot of the time people don't quite know what they're eating. With my background in pharmacology and science I can look at a cup of coffee for instance and know what's in it, what it's doing chemically and how good it is for you."



"But with many foods that people eat, they really don't know what's in it so they rely upon others to make sure it's okay. Personally I've got nothing against hamburgers, but I don't really know what I'm eating... I know from my experience that they've got to make sure the stuff doesn't go off so they add in preservatives and other substances. So what I mean by real food is you actually start off with dried beans and you cook them, then you add salt, pepper, olive oil, lemon, etc so you really know what you're eating. Even foods like bread and yoghurt - my wife makes all of our own bread so I know exactly what goes into our bread, but when you buy a loaf of sliced bread I know what's in it, but most people don't..."

"I've been doing research looking at the composition and biochemistry of foods, which is part of my interest in the

Mediterranean diet. It's been shown that people in the Mediterranean who practice this diet have less heart disease, etc. But we also know when those same people come to Australia their incidences of diabetes and heart disease rise to the average numbers of the rest of the population."

The Mediterranean diet includes plenty of fish, lentils, yoghurt, white cheeses (rather than yellow ones), fresh fruits and vegetables and of course olives and olive oil. With olives' high concentration of monounsaturated fats, vitamin E and polyphenols, studies have shown that olives have anti-inflammatory properties and are good for protecting cells and neutralising free radicals. They are thought to help reduce the risk of colon cancer and heart disease as well as assisting in the treatment of asthma, arthritis and menopause.

I glance over at the olives on the table; all that goodness in one little fruit.

But goodness isn't all that's driving the burgeoning olive industry. In 2004, Australia exported approximately \$3.39 million in olive products with olive oil making up almost \$2.5 million. Although Australian olive oil production is currently only at around 5,000 tonnes annually, this is expected to rise to 28,000 tonnes of olive oil this year alone. With more plantings, researchers are estimating that Australia may be producing 40,000 - 50,000 tonnes of oil by 2011.

In global terms, this is very small scale. However, with much of Australian oil being high quality extra virgin, producers are recognising a golden opportunity to market their products overseas.

"Our oil is very good," says Stan. "WA is exporting oil to Italy and I'm sure from



the east as well. The big thing about the Italian olive oil industry is that they sell twice as much as they actually make. So we have a big opportunity to export oil to them. And because oil goes off, if we can get them fresh oil at say, six-monthly intervals at the quality our oils are becoming known for, then you can pretty well guarantee that our oil isn't going to be knocked back."

In the quality stakes, WA producers are ranking well. With a good dry climate and rains at the right times, much of southern WA is ideal for growing olives. However, not all groves produce the same oils, even if they're growing the same variety.

"Different regions produce different flavours," Stan explains. "For example, if I've got a Spanish Manzanilla growing in Geraldton and a Manzanilla growing in Albany and I pick one a bit greener and one a bit riper, the two oils can be totally different. If you want an oil that's going to keep, then go for a greener oil, it keeps better and it's a bit more punchy. If you want a softer oil, they tend to be a bit more yellow and have slightly less flavour. There are some very good oils coming out of the Margaret River area, the Frankland River area, the Gingin area, and the Moore River."

For table olives, one of Stan's favourites is the *valos* olive, the Greek-style black olive generally available from continental food shops. But he admits that he has quite a passion for the *verdale*. We try another one from his grandmother's trees. I have to confess that now, I do too.



Sophie Zalokar

GOATS CHEESE, GREEN OLIVE AND PRESERVED LEMON TART

SERVES 8

**PASTRY**

- 250 g plain flour
- 2 tbs arrowroot
- 200 g unsalted butter, chilled & diced
- 1 egg
- 2 tbs cold water

**FILLING**

- 6 eggs
- 200 ml cream
- 100 g Kervella Fromage Blanc
- 2 pieces preserved lemon, sliced thinly and cut into thirds
- 8 pitted green olives, sliced lengthwise
- salt & freshly cracked black pepper
- ¼ cup roughly chopped basil

To make the pastry, process the flour and arrowroot with the butter until the texture appears like breadcrumbs. Add the egg and cold water and process until the pastry starts to come together. Form into a flattened disc and refrigerate for 20 minutes. Roll, line and lightly prick in a 27 cm loose-based tart tin and rest in the freezer for 15 minutes.

Blind bake in a preheated 180°C oven for 20 - 25 minutes.

To make the filling, lightly whisk together the eggs and cream, and season. Dot the goats cheese over the pastry base and scatter over the olives and preserved lemon. Pour over the egg mixture, scatter over the chopped basil and a little freshly cracked black pepper. Bake in a preheated 200°C for 25 - 35 minutes.

