



Far left, a long lunch with the Pizzini family. Left, Barb Sartori, of the King Valley Cucina, serves up delicious meals. Below, the hills of the King Valley wine region. Opposite page, Fred Pizzini samples his wares



would coat his hands and whole families working together. His parents Roberto and Rosetta found the King Valley with its steep hills and clear air reminded them of home in Alto. The family was one of many that came to grow tobacco and then moved to other crops including growing wine.

They started with varieties that were popular in Australia at the time and then decided to go with the wine they knew best – beautiful Italian varietals such as Sangiovese, Arneis, Verduzzo and Nebbiolo.

Fred's son Joel qualified as a winemaker and went on to work on vintages in Italy in Tuscany and Piedmont before returning home to the King Valley to make wines that grace some of the best restaurants around Australia.

And remember that some of the best restaurants are not necessarily in the cities. Simone's Restaurant in Bright is a two-hat restaurant presided over by one of the queens of the Italian kitchen, Patrizia Simone. Along with

her husband George and son Anthony, Patrizia cooks and creates just as if she were in her native Umbria, using the absolute best of what's in season and not getting the food too tricked up. In fact, she has gathered a group of local producers who grow only for her and the restaurant.

"You know," she confides, as we drop in on one great source of produce after another, "when we opened the restaurant in 1986 it was hard to get local produce. They'd send it to Melbourne and it would come back frozen. I decided to go straight to the source. That means dishes that sing ... that are the epitome of the new credo of low food miles.

"We create food that people come back for just like food I remember when I was growing up. We would go quite a way to eat a great goat dish again, or something with zucchini flowers ... good food is worth the journey."

Back in the King Valley, the most exclusive restaurant is the Cucina – it

only opens two evenings a week and specialises in homestyle wood-fired pizza. It's owned and run by Walter and Barb Sartori who say they treasure their valley.

"The best thing about the King Valley is that it isn't developed," says Barb.

"I love it for its nothingness. There aren't shops here to spend your

money. There's the river and a group of families who are largely self sufficient and who have grown up knowing that a tough frost can wipe you out for year. That leaves you living in the moment and enjoying good food and wine when you can."

So that explains why big families enjoy sitting under a big gum tree having a long lunch.

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Gourmet Safaris runs food and wine tours in Australia and a few choice destinations around the globe. The tours are all designed by television presenter Maeve O'Meara, who appears on the acclaimed *Food Safari* series and is about to be seen in a new series from mid-March on SBS – *Italian Food Safari*.

It was while filming this latest series that Maeve fell in love with the Italian families in the northeast of Victoria and decided to design a special tour around them. The tour starts and ends in Melbourne and also features the culinary mastery of Grossi Fiorentino head chef and owner Guy Grossi, who co-presents the new show with Maeve. From a base in Milawa, the group will explore the High Alpine country and its food, visiting Bright, Beechworth, Myrtleford and the King Valley.

Gourmet Safaris tour to the Victorian High Country and Melbourne starts on March 22 and runs to March 28. All details are on [www.gourmetsafaris.com.au](http://www.gourmetsafaris.com.au) or call during office hours on (02) 9960 5675