

# Simply bellissima

THE NAME 'MANFREDI' LOOMS LARGE IN SYDNEY ITALIAN CUISINE BUT THE CELEBRATED CHEF HAS STOLEN AWAY FROM BRIGHT LIGHTS TO TEND A COASTAL KITCHEN GARDEN AND EXPLORE A FAMILY HERITAGE OF SUPERB PRODUCE.

RECIPES **STEFANO MANFREDI** PHOTOGRAPHY **CATH MUSCAT** STYLING **TRISH HEAGERTY**

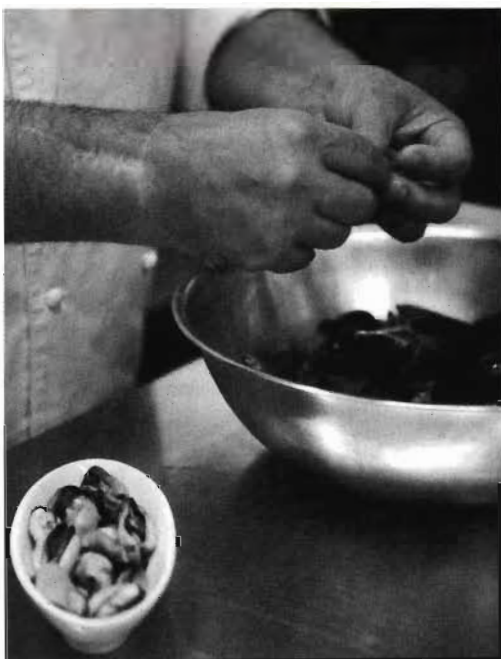


CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Spinach & ricotta gnocchi Match with the crisp, fresh and fragrant 2008 De Bortoli Windy Peak Pinot Grigio; scenes from the restaurant kitchen and garden at Bells At Killcare. FACING PAGE Steve Manfredi: "I'm having fun. It's an immense amount of fun."





**ABOVE** Roast mussels with chickpeas The bright, aromatic 2007 Barwang Sauvignon Blanc will reward the salad option, while the 2007 Cockfighter's Ghost Semillon has the extra body to handle the tomato and chilli sauce. **FACING PAGE** Steve in the kitchen garden.



**LAST SUMMER**, Stefano Manfredi's tomatoes took off. He'd planted *Costoluto Fiorentino*, a large 'beefsteak'-style Italian heirloom variety, in the garden of his restaurant in Bells At Killcare, a hotel on the NSW Central Coast. Loving their flavour, Stefano — known everywhere as 'Steve' — decided to add them to the restaurant menu, cutting off their tops, seasoning with olive oil, pepper and salt and roasting them until soft. The finish was simplicity itself — surrounded by lettuce straight from the garden, the cooked tomatoes were merely drizzled with pesto — and diners went nuts.

At a time when some high-profile chefs are pushing gastronomic

boundaries and experimenting with the complexities of molecular gastronomy, Steve finds his food is getting more simple. Having a kitchen garden has something to do with this, as does his Italian heritage.

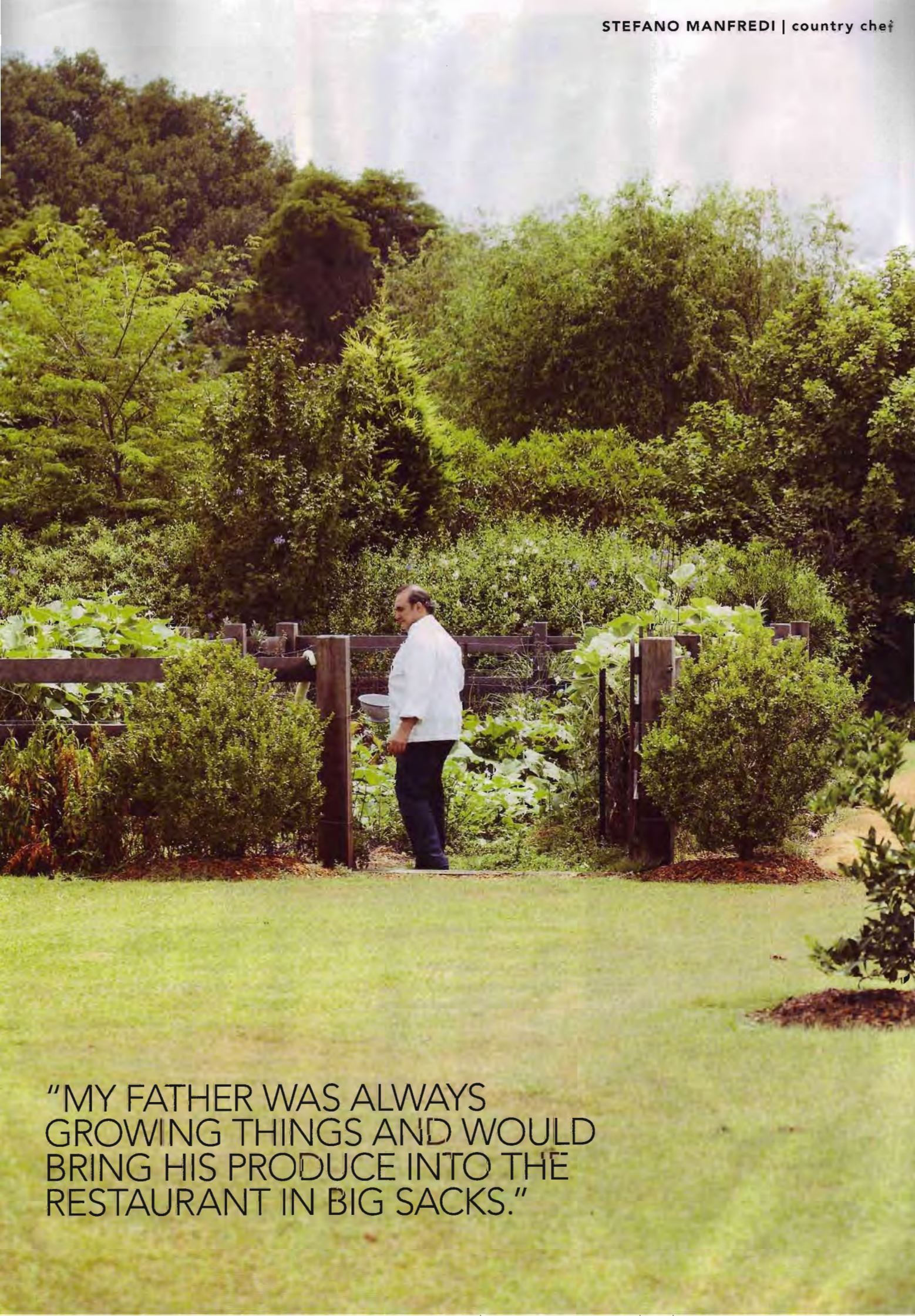
"The success of the tomato dish lay in what I didn't do to it," he concludes. "It's the summation of a lifetime of Italian food culture and eating simply at my mother's table." It's an approach that Steve applied faithfully when he prepared these recipes for *Country Style*. "Ultimately, they're very simple ways of utilising good produce. The gnocchi, for instance, is an evergreen: it's a family recipe, and reminds me of my mother and grandmother."

Before moving to Bells, Steve and his family were involved in some of Sydney's most successful Italian restaurants — The Restaurant and Restaurant Manfredi in Ultimo and then Bel Mondo in The Rocks, which was sold in 2001. "Even though they were city restaurants, my father was always growing things and would bring his produce into the restaurant in big sacks," Steve recalls. "Here, the link between the restaurant and garden is more direct. It's what got me excited about coming here."

There's also a direct link between Steve and his producers. "We get fantastic local oysters, seafood and lobsters from McMasters Beach. It's really satisfying to get produce that doesn't come from far away."

Nevertheless, as anyone who has a garden knows, there are challenges other than distance. "The zucchinis have jumped the fence," Steve says. "And don't talk to me about wildlife! It's easier to make a list of what's not looking to come in. We've got everything from rabbits to deer..."

"All you're trying to do is bring a little modicum of order and all the garden wants to do is run wild. But I'm having fun. It's an immense amount of fun." *Bells is at 107 The Scenic Road, Killcare Beach NSW. (02) 4360 2411; killcarebells.com.au* The restaurant offers a service to pick up guests who have caught the ferry across Broken Bay from Palm Beach.



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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Steve gathering fresh produce; the leafy hotel grounds; restaurant tables ready for lunch. FACING PAGE Prawn & barley stew Add the melon and cashew notes plus the clean palate of 2005 Pepper Tree Wines Unwooded Chardonnay.

parmesan, nutmeg and eggs, then season with salt and pepper. Stir until well combined.

Using a little flour on your hands, divide silverbeet mixture into five portions. Form each portion into 10 small balls.

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil. Drop 10 gnocchi at a time into the saucepan and cook for 3–4 minutes or until gnocchi rise to the surface of the water. Remove carefully with a slotted spoon and drain. Repeat this process with the remaining gnocchi.

Heat butter in a small saucepan over a medium heat for 4–5 minutes or until it foams and turns nut brown. Spoon gnocchi onto serving plates. Sprinkle remaining parmesan over gnocchi and spoon over the butter. Serve immediately.

### SPINACH & RICOTTA GNOCCHI SERVES 6

300g silverbeet leaves, stems removed and washed  
350g fresh ricotta  
2 tablespoons plain flour  
180g parmesan, grated  
pinch of grated nutmeg  
2 eggs  
80g unsalted butter

Place silverbeet into a large bowl and cover with boiling water. Stand for 1–2 minutes or until wilted. Drain and rinse under cold water and stand in a colander to cool. Squeeze as much water as possible from silverbeet. Finely chop and put into a large bowl. Add ricotta, flour, 80g

### ROAST MUSSELS WITH CHICKPEAS

SERVES 4  
1kg mussels, washed and debearded  
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 onion, finely diced  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
1 cup cooked chickpeas  
½ cup fresh breadcrumbs  
1 egg  
½ cup flat-leaf parsley, chopped  
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, chopped

Place mussels in a large pot with 1 cup cold water. Place over a high heat and cover with a lid. Bring to the boil and carefully stir with a long spoon to help mussels open. When they have opened, remove from heat



and strain. Discard any mussels that have not opened.

Preheat oven to 200°C. Remove mussels from their shells, keeping 20 of the best shells, making sure they are still hinged. Chop mussels into three or four pieces and set aside.

Heat oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add onion and cook for 3 minutes or until soft. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Remove from heat. Add chickpeas, breadcrumbs, egg, parsley, thyme and chopped mussels. Season with salt and pepper. Stir until well combined.

Fill reserved mussel shells with mussel mixture. Tie shells together with kitchen string. Put filled mussel shells on a baking tray and roast for 10 minutes or until the filling is light golden. Serve with a salad or a tomato and chilli sauce.

## PRAWN & BARLEY STEW

SERVES 8

- 1.2kg green prawns, peeled (leave tails on), deveined, heads and shells reserved
- 1 small leek, white part only, washed and thinly sliced
- 1 small carrot, peeled and cut into 2cm rounds
- 2 sticks celery, sliced
- 1 cup tomato puree
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled
- ⅓ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 4 eschallots, peeled and thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon smoky paprika
- ¼ teaspoon chilli powder
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 cups Italian tomato passata sauce
- 3 banana chillies, deseeded and halved
- 1⅓ cups pearl barley
- 300g shelled peas
- 1 cup flat-leaf parsley leaves, roughly chopped

Place peeled prawns in a bowl. Cover and refrigerate until required. Put prawn heads and shells into a large bowl. Cover with boiling water and stand for 20–30 seconds to blanch. Drain.

Place blanched prawn heads and shells into a large deep saucepan. Add leek, carrot, celery, tomato puree and

three garlic cloves. Cover with cold water and place over a high heat. Bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 1 hour, skimming the surface occasionally. Remove from heat, strain and set aside until required. This makes about 2 litres of stock.

Heat olive oil in a large, deep saucepan over a medium heat. Add eschallots, 3 crushed garlic cloves, paprika, chilli powder and fennel seeds. Cook for 2 minutes or until eschallots are soft.

Add wine, stir until well combined and simmer for 5 minutes or until wine has almost evaporated. Add 1 litre prawn stock, 8 cups water, passato sauce and banana chillies. Bring mixture to the boil.

Put barley into a sieve and wash under running water to remove any dust or dirt. Add to saucepan and simmer for 45 minutes. Add peas and cook for 10 minutes. Add reserved prawns and cook for 5 minutes or until just cooked through.

Remove from heat and stir through parsley. Season well with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

**NOTE** Freeze extra prawn stock in airtight containers for later use.

This stew is excellent a day or two after being made, although the barley will have absorbed all the liquid. Reheat by adding water and extra tomato passata sauce and gently bring to the boil. More prawns or other seafood can be added.





#### PAN-FRIED LAMB CUTLETS WITH SPINACH & CURRANTS

SERVES 4

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 16 lamb cutlets, trimmed
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 100g baby spinach leaves, washed
- ½ cup currant grapes, removed from stems
- 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar

Heat half the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium high heat. Season cutlets with salt and pepper on both sides. When pan is very hot, add cutlets and cook for 1 minute on each side for rare, or until cooked to your liking. Transfer to a large plate and cover to keep warm.

Reduce heat and add remaining oil to frying pan. Add onion and cook for 3 minutes or until soft, add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add baby spinach and cook for 1 minute or until just wilted, then season. Add currant grapes and balsamic vinegar, stir until well combined. Spoon spinach and grape mixture onto serving plates. Top with cutlets and serve.

#### FIGS WITH ZABAGLIONE & AMARETTI

SERVES 4

- 3 egg yolks
- 2 tablespoons caster sugar
- 30ml grappa\* (optional)
- 8–12 ripe figs, depending on size
- 8 amaretti biscuits, broken into crumbs

Whisk egg yolks and sugar in a bowl until mixture is pale and thick. Add ½ cup water and grappa, and mix well. Place bowl over a saucepan half-filled with simmering water and take care that the bottom of the bowl does not touch the water. Continue whisking zabaglione until it thickens and doubles in volume.

Cut a cross in the top of each fig with a sharp knife, carefully peeling back about one quarter of the skin to expose the flesh.

To serve, place 2 or 3 figs on each serving plate. Pour some of the zabaglione over the top and sprinkle with crushed amaretti biscuits.

\* Grappa is an Italian brandy available at bottle shops and specialty stores. \*

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Pan-fried lamb cutlets with spinach & currants Create a bit of magic with the vibrant berry and cherry flavours of 2007 Coriole Sangiovese; Steve chats to waiter Daniel Mustchin; Figs with zabaglione & amaretti Elevate the lusciousness factor with the honey-and-spice-richness of 2006 Brown Brothers Patricia Botrytis Riesling.