



## CHEFS of SOUTH AUSTRALIA

WORDS GRAEME ANDREWS

# Amabile Ambrosini

Executive Chef - Ambrosini's Restaurant

*Amabile Ambrosini slipped gracefully into the seat next to me. His well groomed hair was totally grey and his handsome face creased and furrowed with the passage of time. But it was still hard to believe that this man before me was 74 years old. Erect posture and a firm handshake. Eyes bright and sparkling, the corners of his mouth pulled back into a warm, mischievous smile. There was still a young man inside.*

Amabile grew up on a small farm near Cercino in the alpine region of Lombardy. It was a hard life, demanding his mother's full time attention to their rural existence. The teenaged Amabile was forced to prepare his own food. Encouraged by a dotting aunt, he found he enjoyed cooking simple dishes like polenta, roasting chickens and braising pieces of pork.

At 21 the lure of good money and availability of work beckoned and he moved to St. Moritz to work at a resort hotel. He became apprentice to a Swiss trained chef and learnt the essentials of classical European cuisine and of course, fondue. "The head chef encouraged me to go further and expand my knowledge by reading and

experimenting," says Amabile. Next he moved on to the famed Il Tris restaurant in Lugano. "It was wonderful," he remembers. "Cooking with luxury ingredients like lobster, salmon and fine cuts of beef fillet. Unlike the resort, it was open 12 months of the year, offering a full a la carte menu and silver service." It must have done something for his self confidence too, for just three years later at 27, he and wife Lena opened the first of two restaurants in Valtellina.

Fast forward to 1972. By now the family included sons Remo and Paul. They decided to migrate to Adelaide. Finding little work they quickly moved to Darwin where Amabile secured a position as head chef at the now defunct Colosseum Restaurant. "I remember that they paid me \$500 a week to do lunch and dinner. I also prepared breakfast at another restaurant for \$200 a week. Imagine! I was taking home \$700 a week and it was 1973!" Cyclone Tracey put an end to those good times and the family returned to Adelaide.

The sons grew up fast. Remo found work cooking in various restaurant kitchens while his younger brother Paul moonlighted as kitchenhand at the Enfield Hotel. But the call to have their own place was getting stronger and they took over Asio's Restaurant in Whitmore Square in 1984 before finally moving to their current location on Magill Road in 1988.

Paul looks after front-of-house while Remo handles the heavy duty kitchen work. Amabile delights in cooking stocks for the restaurant's light-handed cuisine and making authentic perfectly balanced sauces for pasta. "I also make my own sausages from pork, veal and venison and I serve them cooked with a red wine glaze." And his favourite dish? "I have perfected a salmi, a venison casserole. I love making it and it sells well."

Perhaps unkindly, I remind him that he's no longer a young man. Does he have any unfulfilled dreams? A culinary pinnacle to be scaled? He smiles: "No, nothing more. I have everything. My family, my herb garden and my days cooking in my kitchen. What else could I want?"

### Salmi di Cervo con Polenta Serves 6-8

1.2 kg shoulder of venison, *diced*  
1 large onion coarsely chopped  
2 sticks of celery coarsely diced  
1 large carrot coarsely diced  
3 cloves of garlic coarsely diced  
1 small stick of cinnamon  
4 whole cloves  
1 tbsp cracked black pepper  
1 tbsp of salt  
4 whole bay leaves  
4-6 rosemary sprigs  
6 fresh sage leaves  
1 bottle of dry red wine  
1/2 cup of brandy

#### Method

Put all ingredients except brandy in a large ceramic or enamel bowl. Ensure meat is well covered with the wine mixture and marinate for two days. Separate meat and vegetables and set aside. Seal meat on all sides in a hot pan and allow to simmer for 10 minutes. Separately cook the vegetables in half the red wine marinade. Add brandy and simmer for 10 minutes to boil off the alcohol. Puree the vegetable mixture and add to meat. Add more of the remaining red wine marinade to cover meat. Simmer gently for approx three hours or until meat is tender.

**Polenta**  
300-400g polenta  
1 ltr water  
1 tbsp of salt  
100g butter

#### Method:

Bring water to the boil in a heavy copper-based saucepan. Add salt and slowly add polenta, whisking steadily with a wooden spoon. Continue to turn over low heat until a crust starts to form on the base of the saucepan. Add butter and continue to stir until dissolved and the polenta is reasonably firm.

Turn on to a serving plate and serve separately with the salmi.

