



LEG OF LAMB
WRAPPED IN PAPER
(recipe p126)

wild at heart

Janni Kyritsis, one of Australia's most inspirational cooks, celebrates 30 years of great food with the publication of his cookbook *Wild Weed Pie*. Here's an exclusive extract and introduction by co-author Roberta Muir.

RECIPES JANNI KYRITSIS PHOTOGRAPHY IAN WALLACE

Janni Kyritsis is one of Australia's most-loved chefs. But why do we love him so? We love Janni for almost 30 years of memorable meals at Stephanie's, Berowra Waters Inn, Bennelong and MG Garage. We love him for the generation of young Sydney-based chefs ('the children' as he affectionately calls them, including Lotus's Lauren Murdoch, Tabou's Jacob Brown and The Boathouse on Blackwattle Bay's Perry Hill) that he's trained in his kitchens and let loose on the dining public.

We love him because he has the knack of making the humble – pig's trotters (think quail and trotter sausage), veal hoof, skate cartilage – sublime, yet in doing so, he's the first to laugh and say, "we aren't building the Parthenon, we're just cooking dinner".

We love Janni because his food is never pretentious, yet he has a wonderful sense of dining as theatre. The man who once sewed a banquet tablecloth from tripe also delights in presenting his guests with meals as gifts; these inventive, often pretty packages unwrapped at the table are a signature: guinea fowl baked in clay, lamb shanks with lemon and green olives cooked in parchment, steamed beef fillet in bone marrow dumplings or dolma-style parcels of lobster wrapped in lettuce.

We love him for his ability to take a classic dish, whether it's the galaktobourekos of his childhood or the chocolate mousse of mine, and reinterpret it in a way that retains the essential elements, but makes them much more than the sum of their parts. In the case of the galaktobourekos, it's baking the custard first before wrapping it in handmade filo pastry and soaking it in sugar syrup for just a minute, so that it retains its crispness. With chocolate mousse, it's the addition of icy coffee granita, a generous splodge of whipped cream and a melt-in-your-mouth wafer of chocolate sprinkled with ground coffee, that makes it my favourite dessert of all time.

I love him for all the above reasons, especially for his

chocolate mousse and coffee granita, and all the memorable meals at MG Garage (during Janni's last week behind the stoves in 2002, I ate lunch at MG five times and dinner twice). In the past two years, helping him write his book, however, I've come to know more than his food. I've seen his warmth, his humour, his generosity and his great gift as a storyteller.

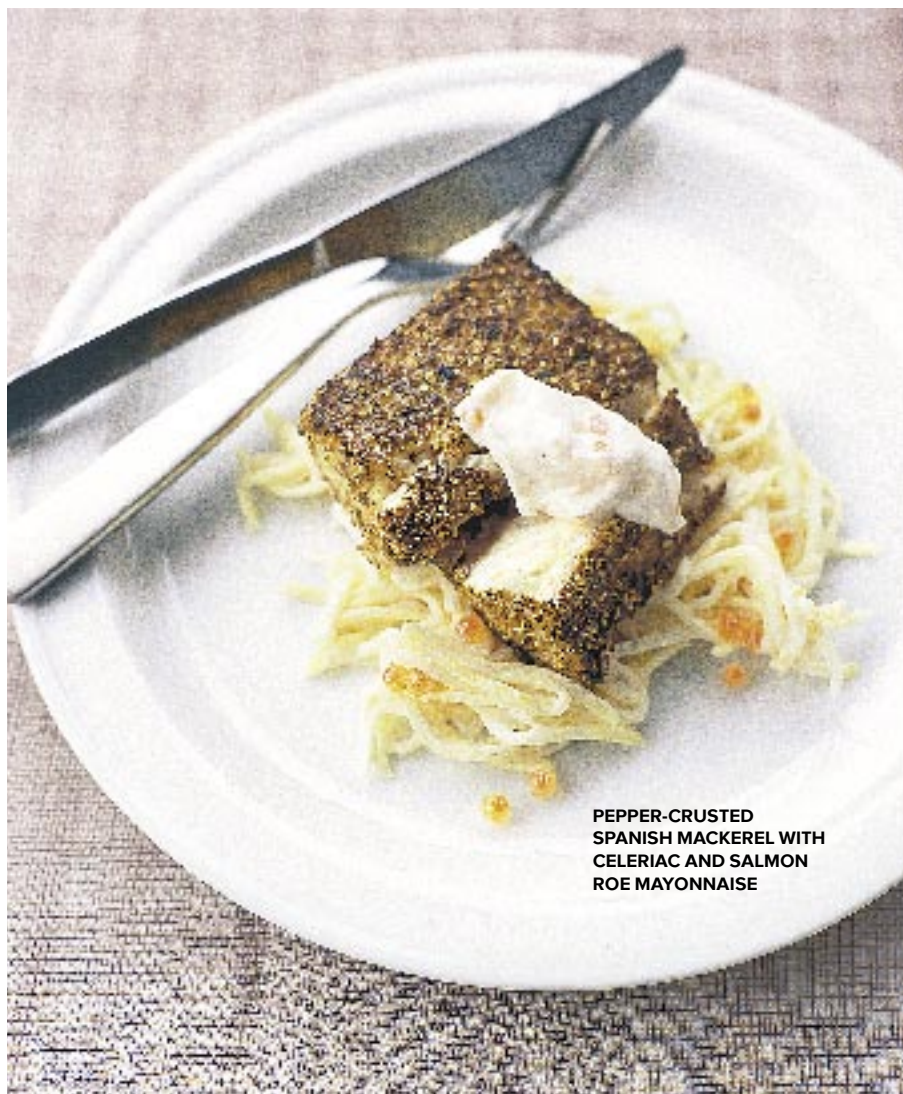
I love the fact that he never stops learning, whether it's asking an Italian apprentice's mother to show him how to roll Sicilian macaroni or going back to school to conquer dyslexia so that, at almost 60, he can read and write fluently now for the first time.

Never once when working on the book did he arrive without some small gift, edible or otherwise. He would always say as we sat side by side at the computer that he wasn't good at talking. Then off he'd go telling head-spinning stories of the evolution of Australian cuisine from the past three decades, from its adolescence, when he started at Stephanie's in 1977 after arriving in Australia as an electrician, through its formative years at Berowra Waters, to its coming of age with the simplicity of food at MG. Through his tales I came to know the great chefs and restaurateurs who played their part in the story of Australian cuisine: Mogens Bay Esbensen, Josephine Pignolet, and iconic restaurants at which I never had the chance to eat: Berowra Waters Inn, Pulcinella and Stephanie's. As he spoke, I typed, and now when I reread these stories in his cookbook, I can hear his voice. I hope other readers will be able to as well.

Janni, we love you, thank you for the three decades of dining pleasure, for every story, for every recipe. →

RECIPE NOTE

In editing Janni Kyritsis' recipes for publication, we strived to make only minimal changes to bring them into *Gourmet Traveller's* style, preserving his voice as much as possible.



PEPPER-CRUSTED SPANISH MACKEREL WITH CELERIAC AND SALMON ROE MAYONNAISE

LEG OF LAMB WRAPPED IN PAPER

When I was a child, my mother would prepare legs or shoulders of lamb on a large baking dish to be taken to the village baker's oven – she would have seasoned the meat with herbs, spices, garlic and lemon and wrapped it in greased paper ready for the oven. Wrapping the meat in paper is a method commonly used in northern Greece; it keeps the meat moist and, although nobody talks about it, it keeps the flies away. We were always delighted to take the dish to the baker; it was a social event – we would compare trays and ask what the other mums were cooking. Potatoes sprinkled with rosemary or oregano, salt, pepper and oil, were usually placed around the lamb, and the cooking juices were poured over them after the lamb was taken out of the paper. Oh! There was never enough meat on the plate, but it tasted wonderful and there were always plenty of potatoes. If serving the lamb cold, allow it to cool in the paper parcel. Start the lemons the day before.

Serves 8 (pictured p 124)

- 2 lemons, thinly sliced, seeds removed
- Salt, for pickling lemons
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for pickling lemons
- 3 kg leg of lamb
- 6 cloves of garlic, each sliced into thirds
- 10 sprigs of oregano or 2 tsp dried Greek oregano (see note)
- 60 ml (¼ cup) extra-virgin olive oil

1 The day before, pickle the lemon slices by sprinkling with salt and leaving for 1 hour. Pat dry and store in olive oil overnight.

2 The next day, preheat oven to 150C. Trim excess fat off the lamb. Roll garlic slices in salt and pepper. Make incisions all over the lamb and insert the garlic deep into the meat. Place two 40cm pieces of baking paper on top of each other on a work surface. Place lamb on top, scatter over oregano sprigs and the pickled lemon slices, drizzle over olive oil and sprinkle over sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cover with another sheet of baking paper and fold bottom paper over the top piece to form a tight parcel, ensuring no liquid can escape. Secure well with plenty of kitchen twine. Place in a baking dish, with end of leg bone elevated (so that juices don't run out of the paper) and bake for 2½ hours.

3 Transfer lamb from paper onto a chopping board. Put lemons to one side, carve meat from the bone and reassemble slices on a serving platter. Top with cooked lemon slices and pour over the cooking juices.

Note Dried Greek oregano, also called rigani, is where the whole stems are dried while in flower, so you use flowers as well as leaves. It's available from Greek delicatessens and select providers.

PEPPER-CRUSTED SPANISH MACKEREL WITH CELERIAC AND SALMON ROE MAYONNAISE

The first time I put this dish on the menu, I called it 'pepper steak of mackerel', a play on the classic pepper steak. It created some debate as to whether a piece of fish can be called a 'steak'. According to my fishmonger, a 'fillet' is the whole side of a fish cut off the bone, a 'cutlet' is a piece of fish cut through the backbone so that it contains the bone, and a 'steak' is a piece cut from a fillet, usually from a large fish such as kingfish, swordfish, marlin or mackerel.

Serves 6

- 6 200gm steaks Spanish mackerel, skin on (see note)
- Olive oil, for pan-frying

2 large celeriac, cut into thin strips

Salmon roe mayonnaise

- 100 gm salmon roe
- 1 clove of garlic, chopped
- 2 tbsp strained lemon juice
- 2 tbsp water
- 1 tsp freshly ground white pepper
- 200 ml light olive oil

Black pepper coating

- 2 tbsp cracked black peppercorns
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds, finely ground
- 1 tbsp fennel seeds, finely ground

1 To make the mayonnaise, thoroughly combine half the salmon roe with the remaining mayonnaise ingredients, except the olive oil, in a blender. With motor still running, add olive oil slowly, drop by drop at first, then in a slow steady stream, until all oil is incorporated. Season to taste with sea salt (depending on the saltiness of the roe). Remove from blender and fold through remaining salmon roe.

2 Preheat oven to 200C. Trim blood-lines (the dark parts) from the fish. Combine pepper coating ingredients on a plate. Rub the mixture onto the flesh side of the fish (opposite the skin side) to form a thick crust.

3 Heat an ovenproof frying pan and add 2mm of oil. When oil is very hot, sear the pepper coating, then turn fish to sear ends, and then turn skin-side down. Place pan in oven, with the fish standing on its skin side, for 15 minutes or until fish is cooked through.

4 Meanwhile, put 2 tbsp water in a saucepan, add celeriac, cover and steam over high heat for 1 minute. Drain and toss through enough of the mayonnaise to coat. Divide celeriac among 6 plates, top with fish and add an extra dollop of mayonnaise.

Note If Spanish mackerel is not available, any firm-fleshed fish such as mahi mahi, swordfish or blue eye may be used. In summer, when celeriac isn't available, substitute 2 telegraph cucumbers (peeled, seeded and cut into ribbons), 1 medium daikon (cut into ribbons) and 1 stick celery (finely sliced). →

Make the most of your lobster and use the shells to make a stock and vibrant sauce.



ROCK LOBSTER LETTUCE ROLLS WITH CHERVIL AND ROCK LOBSTER SAUCE (recipe p 129)



GALAKTOBOUREKO
(GREEK CUSTARD PIES)

“We love him for his ability to take a classic dish and reinterpret it in a way that the essential elements become more than the sum of their parts.”

ROCK LOBSTER LETTUCE ROLLS WITH CHERVIL AND ROCK LOBSTER SAUCE

When I first developed this recipe, I made it with cabbage, but as it was so tiresome making perfect little rolls with the thick cabbage leaves, I moved on to using ordinary iceberg lettuce. This recipe makes the most of the lobster, using the shells for stock and sauce.

Serves 6 (pictured p127)

- 2 500gm green lobsters (see note)
 - 125 ml (½ cup) extra-virgin olive oil
 - 1 small onion, chopped
 - 1 clove of garlic, chopped
 - 60 ml (¼ cup) brandy (see note)
 - 250 ml (1 cup) dry white wine
 - 500 gm tomatoes, chopped
 - ¼ cup picked chervil leaves, plus extra to garnish
- Lettuce risotto**
- 2 iceberg lettuces
 - 1 tbsp oil, retained from above
 - 1 small onion, roughly chopped
 - 100 gm arborio rice
 - 500 ml (2 cups) hot lobster stock, reserved from above

1 Preheat oven to 220C. Roast lobsters on a baking tray for about 10 minutes, until they just turn red (don't overcook). Allow to cool, then remove all the flesh from the head and the body, and cut into small cubes. Reserve legs for garnish. Place shells in a plastic bag and crush well with a meat mallet or rolling pin. Reserve for the stock and sauce.

2 Heat oil in a large saucepan and cook onion until soft. Add garlic and shells, and cook for a minute or two. Add brandy and wine, then bring to the boil and cook over a high heat for 1 minute. Add tomato, return to the boil, then reduce heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve, pressing down on solids to extract as much flavour as possible. Season to taste with sea salt and freshly ground white pepper and set aside to cool, reserving the solids.

3 Return solids to the same saucepan, add 3 cups water and bring to the boil for 1 minute. Strain and use stock for the risotto.

4 For the risotto, remove and discard damaged outside leaves from the lettuce and trim off the end of the stem. Remove 9 large, intact leaves and set aside for making the rolls. Weigh remaining lettuce, including the trimmed core – you'll need 200gm, coarsely chopped, for the risotto (use the core and thick stems in preference to the outer leaves). Skim oil off the surface of the sauce, place in a large saucepan and heat. Add onion and fry until golden. Add rice and stir to coat well in

oil. Add lettuce and cook for another minute, then add a ladleful of hot stock and stir until almost absorbed. Continue adding stock a ladleful at a time, stirring constantly and allowing each ladleful to be absorbed before adding the next. It will take 20-25 minutes for the risotto to cook. If you run out of stock, use hot water. The risotto should be sloppy, as the lobster meat will absorb some of the liquid. Remove from heat, taste and season with sea salt and freshly ground white pepper. Set aside to cool. Add lobster and chervil to cooled risotto, check seasoning and refrigerate until cold.

5 Halve the 9 reserved lettuce leaves, blanch in boiling water until just wilted and refresh in plenty of cold water. Drain well and pat dry. Spread out leaves on a work surface and divide the cold risotto among them. Roll up each leaf into a neat parcel. If the leaves are too large, trim off the excess. Steam rolls for 10 minutes. Spoon lobster sauce onto 6 plates and top with 3 lettuce rolls, extra chervil leaves and reserved lobster legs as a garnish.

Note Ask your fishmonger to kill the lobster for you. If you feel confident doing so, flame the brandy before adding it to the sauce. Roasted fennel goes well with this dish.

GALAKTOBOUREKO

This is a Greek custard pie. Traditionally, a custard is made and poured onto commercial filo pastry, topped with more filo, baked to cook the custard, then removed from the oven and doused in sugar syrup. I always found this resulted in soggy pastry, especially on the bottom. I'm not trying to reinvent traditional Greek cooking, but at MG Garage I made my own filo and used cooked custard, which gives a drier and crisper pastry and a custard that's still moist in the middle. Once my galaktoboureko comes out of the oven, I soak it in syrup for just a minute then serve it hot, so that it remains crisp. You'll need to make the custard several hours before assembling the pastries.

Serves 6

- 500 ml (2 cups) milk
- ½ small vanilla bean, split
- 110 gm (½ cup) caster sugar
- ¼ cup fine semolina
- 2 small eggs
- 30 gm unsalted butter
- ½ cup whole almonds, blanched and skinned (see note)
- 1 tbsp pure icing sugar
- ¼ tsp ground cinnamon
- 12 sheets filo pastry (see note)
- 125 gm unsalted butter, melted

Lemon sugar syrup

- 440 gm (2 cups) white sugar
- 250 ml (1 cup) water
- Grated zest of 1 lemon (see note)

1 Preheat oven to 165C. Combine milk, vanilla bean and half the sugar in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Sprinkle semolina into the milk and return to the boil, stirring constantly. Remove mixture from heat once it boils, and stir for 30 seconds as it thickens. Whisk together eggs and remaining sugar. Pour hot milk and semolina mixture into the eggs, stirring constantly. Add butter and stir until combined. Pour into a buttered 12cm x 15cm ceramic or Pyrex baking dish. Cover with a lid or tray, to avoid a skin forming on the custard, making sure the baking dish is deep enough for the custard not to touch the lid when it puffs up. Bake for 30-40 minutes, until a thin skewer comes out clean. Remove custard from oven, allow to cool a little, then refrigerate until cold. Reduce oven temperature to 150C.

2 Meanwhile, toast the almonds on a baking tray in the oven for about 20 minutes or until golden. Leave aside to cool, then chop finely and mix with icing sugar and cinnamon.

3 When custard is cold, turn it out of the dish and cut into 6 large fingers (about 12cm x 2.5cm x 2.5cm). Brush a filo sheet with melted butter and place another sheet on top and brush with butter. Repeat with remaining filo and butter to make 6 sheets. Sprinkle two-thirds of the almond mixture over the sheets and place a finger of custard at one end of each sheet. Roll up forming a tube with a custard centre. Brush tubes liberally with butter, sprinkle over remaining almond mixture and refrigerate until cold.

4 To make the lemon sugar syrup, combine all ingredients in a saucepan, bring to the boil, then remove from heat and keep warm.

5 Preheat oven to 200C. Bake tubes for 10-20 minutes, until golden. Remove from oven then place straight into the warm lemon sugar syrup for 30 seconds. Cut each tube in half diagonally and serve immediately.

Note Janni prefers to blanch his own almonds because it results in a better flavour, than using commercially skinned ones. Plunge almonds into boiling water for 30 seconds, then drain and rinse under cold water. Squeeze almonds out of their skins. Janni uses Greek filo pastry and provides a recipe for this in his book. We amended the above recipe using bought filo, so the finished dish will have a different texture. You can use the zest of ½ orange instead of 1 lemon if you like. The tubes can be assembled and refrigerated the day before they're needed and then baked just before serving. →

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BLOOD PLUM AND BLACKCURRANT PIES WITH CASSIS SAUCE

When plums have been out of season, I've made these pies using half a sliced pear per pie. Fresh blackcurrants have a very short season, so thawed frozen blackcurrants can be used. I learnt to make this type of shortcrust pastry using the bramble cake recipe of Stephanie Alexander's grandmother. The original pastry was made with self-raising flour and lard, and seemed indestructible. I have changed it over the years, and now use butter instead of lard and a combination of plain flour and baking powder instead of self-raising flour.

Serves 6

- 6 blood plums, each cut into 6 wedges
- 6 tbsp blackcurrants
- 1 tsp pouring cream
- 2 egg yolks, beaten
- 6 tbsp double cream

Self-raising shortcrust pastry

- 200 gm (1½ cups) plain flour
- 1½ tbsp caster sugar
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- 100 gm cold butter
- 60 ml (¼ cup) iced water

Marzipan

- 100 gm whole almonds, blanched and skinned (see note), and toasted
- 50 gm butter
- 2 tbsp pure icing sugar
- 1 tbsp amaretto (see note)

Cassis sauce

- 125 gm blackcurrants
- 125 ml (½ cup) crème de cassis (see note)
- 100 ml sugar syrup (see note)

1 To make the pastry, sift flour, sugar and baking powder together into a mixing bowl. Grate in butter, add water, and knead into a smooth ball – don't overwork it. Rest pastry for 30 minutes. Roll out half the pastry on a lightly floured surface to about 2mm-thick. Cut out six 10cm circles, preferably with a fluted cutter, and refrigerate until required. Add off-cuts to the remaining pastry, divide into 6 balls and refrigerate until required.

2 To make the marzipan, combine all ingredients in a food processor until the mixture forms a smooth paste.

3 Make the cassis sauce by thoroughly blending all ingredients in a blender or food processor and straining through a fine sieve. Keep at room temperature.

4 Remove one of the 6 pastry balls from the fridge and roll into a 15cm circle. Place on a baking tray lined with baking paper. Divide marzipan into 6 then flatten 1 piece in the



BLOOD PLUM AND BLACKCURRANT PIE WITH CASSIS SAUCE

palm of your hand and place in the centre of the pastry. Lay 4 pieces of plum on the marzipan to form a square, then 1 tbsp blackcurrants on the marzipan in the centre of the plum square. Place 2 plum pieces on top of the blackcurrants, skin-side up. Neatly fold pastry over the top of the filling, pleating around the plums to form an open pie. Combine pouring cream and egg yolks, then brush lightly over the edges of the pastry. Place a 10cm pastry circle on top of the pie, pressing it lightly over the pleats. Brush lightly with egg yolk mixture and refrigerate. Repeat with remaining ingredients, so that you have 6 pies. Leave them to rest in the fridge for 30 minutes before baking.

5 Preheat oven to 200C. Bake pies for 12-15 minutes until golden. Ladle a little cassis sauce onto each plate, place a pie in the centre of the sauce and double cream on the side.

Note Janni prefers to blanch his own almonds because it results in a better flavour, than using commercially skinned ones. Plunge almonds into boiling water for 30 seconds, then drain and rinse under cold water. Squeeze almonds out of their skins. Amaretto is an Italian almond liqueur. Crème de cassis is a sweet, red, blackcurrant-flavoured liqueur. To make sugar syrup, bring 250gm sugar and 1 cup of water to the boil, then remove from heat immediately. Makes about 400ml. Sugar syrup keeps almost indefinitely in the fridge. ✱

WILD WEED PIE

Wild Weed Pie (Lantern) by Janni Kyritsis and Roberta Muir is on sale 25 September. Available from select bookstores for \$59.95.

