



italian lessons

AT CASA CARBONI, A MASTER PASTA MAKER IS TEACHING HIS CRAFT IN THE BAROSSA VALLEY.

WORDS FIONA SAINTY PHOTOGRAPHY MARK ROPER

ANGASTON SA COOKING CLASSES

Matteo and Fiona Carboni with their children, Filippo and Sofia.

FACING PAGE Every Saturday morning, two regular customers park their tandem bike outside Casa Carboni in Angaston, SA.





FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT The Barossa Farmers' Market opened Matteo's eyes to the food possibilities in Angaston; market shopping features in this pasta with seasonal vegetable ragu; Fiona borrowed the idea of the hanging bottles from a French wine bar; they specialise in boutique wines from Italy and France; zucchinis look good this weekend; Matteo shapes the pasta.



When it comes to country cooking classes, it would be hard to find someone better qualified to teach one than Matteo Carboni. The chef, who spent more than four years teaching Italians about pasta at Parma's Academia Barilla, now shares his knowledge and enthusiasm in Angaston in the heart of the Barossa Valley.

"It was a great experience at Parma, but the produce here in the Barossa is so good," Matteo says. "When people come, they're often scared of fresh pasta but after three or four hours, they realise they were worried for nothing! And after all, it's not brain surgery: it should be good, but it's just cooking."

Matteo, Fiona and their children — Sofia, five, and Filippo, two — settled in Angaston in 2012 after many years travelling between Italy and Australia.

Fiona grew up in Wagga Wagga, NSW, and Matteo a world away, in Forlì, a city in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy. Their paths crossed early in 2005 when Fiona was employed by a wine exporter in Melbourne, and Matteo had been working at a winery during the vintage while on an Australian holiday.

Conversation turned to travel, food and wine, and they made a plan to catch up to teach Matteo more about Australian wine. "He was clearly interested only in the wines," Fiona says. "It turned out he thought I was married!"

When that little misunderstanding was resolved, Matteo soon whisked Fiona off to Italy to meet his family. They married later in 2005, setting up home in the city of Parma.

Matteo's grandmother taught him to make pasta as a child. He went on to study food science and technology at university, then worked in restaurants throughout Europe. Now he joined Parma's Academia Barilla, a famous culinary institution, where he taught cooking classes. On weekends, the couple travelled in Italy, France and Spain, exploring their love of wine and food.

After five years in Parma, and the arrival of daughter Sofia, the Carbonis decided to move to Australia. On the sidelines, a friend of Fiona's had already done the groundwork for them. "She had moved to the Barossa to manage a hotel the year before... When she needed to fill a chef's position for a month, she offered it to Matteo."

A staunch city dweller, Matteo took the role with one condition — it would be for one month only. That stipulation lasted no more than a week. "My first visit to the farmers' market opened my eyes to what a magical place this is," Matteo says. "It was amazing to see fresh produce sold by the people who grew it. The last time I had seen that was when I was a child with my grandmother. She taught me the importance of food that was *il contadino* — 'from the farmer'. And when I got to know the people, I was sold."

He called Fiona, who was staying with her family in Wagga Wagga, and said, "We have to move here!" Fiona thought he was joking at first, then jumped at the prospect of adventure. The month contract extended to six, and meanwhile they enthusiastically embraced the local produce culture by setting up a stall at the Barossa Farmers' Market on the outskirts of Angaston where they sold homemade pasta, biscotti and nougat. And then Casa Carboni was born.

"It found us," Fiona says. "I was taking Filippo for a walk when he was two weeks old, and saw a 'For Lease' sign on a beautiful old shop overlooking the park."

Matteo is at the market every Saturday, keeping in contact with the farmers that supply him with meat, olives, eggs, bread, and even stinging nettles, which feature in a delicate pasta recipe in spring. Cheese comes from the Barossa Cheese Company, handily located right next door to Casa Carboni.

"Even though we've only been here a relatively short time, we feel part of a vibrant, food-savvy community we're so lucky to call home," Fiona says. *

Casa Carboni Italian Cooking School and Enoteca is at 67 Murray Street, Angaston, SA. 0415 157 669; casacarboni.com.au. Closed during July, reopens August 8.

