

HELEN GREENWOOD

OFF THE SHELF



Award winner ... Martino Piccolo's yoghurt with forest berry gelato. Photo: Marco Del Grande

Smooth operator

A former air traffic officer puts a passion into practice.

TEARS well in Martino Piccolo's eyes when he talks about winning the champion gelato prize for his yoghurt with a forest berry swirl. Piccolo received the prestige gong at the 2007 Sydney Royal Cheese and Dairy Produce Show and says, "It was the best moment of my working life".

His love affair with gelato began as a private passion 18 years ago, an after-hours hobby along with his job as a traffic officer for Alitalia Airlines. Perhaps it's the legacy of a grandfather who made gelato in Calabria that makes Piccolo dream about gelato and get up in the night to remake a formula. "It's like being possessed by gelato," he says with an embarrassed laugh.

The time to put his passion into practice came when Piccolo was retrenched in 1989 after the Italian airline quit Australia. His wife, France, urged him to give the gelato business a go. He began with one van, making a few flavours himself, buying others and, by 2001, the couple was running a fleet of Icecream on the Run vans.

They had contracts with sports stadiums and events such as Carols in the Domain but on New Year's Eve 2001, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, no one turned out and Piccolo lost money. By this stage, he was sick of the gypsy life of a travelling ice-cream minstrel and decided to concentrate on manufacturing.

He bought a small factory in Fairfield and for the past five years has worked on his craft skills with the help of a family friend. He has gone from producing 10 flavours to 55, all of them individual recipes, many of them award winners. He shuns the idea of producing a white base and adding fruit and flavourings. Each gelato is its own formulation.

His ideas come from childhood memories of treats such as scorched peanut bars which resulted in a chocolate-and-peanut gelato that had a Canadian colleague swooning.

Piccolo doesn't just recreate tastes. Take his malt and toffee gelato: it sounds like two



Art of Gelato Michelangelo

9 Alan Street, Fairfield, 9755 7899
Mon-Fri 9am-5pm, Sat 9am-2pm

Best buys

Chocolate gelato \$13.20/2L
Yoghurt with forest berry gelato
\$5/500 mL (three for \$13.50)
Hazelnut gelato \$8/1L

simple, strong ingredients coming together but he has composed them into a malty, honeyed, nutty interpretation that brings to mind nougat.

Then there is his chocolate gelato. Most chocolate ice-creams and gelato are fatty and sweet. His is like a fine, frozen hot chocolate, laced with Dutch cocoa, with a smooth, satiny texture.

Though Piccolo is a small-batch, boutique manufacturer, he knows he is in business, so he deliberately concocts gelati to please the Australian palate. That is why you will find choc-orange, cassata, rum and raisin, bacio, caramel and macadamia as well as coffee, mango and blood orange in his range.

He also makes desserts, cakes and logs. Most of his output is for restaurants and gelato bars but if you drop in to the factory shop, you'll get access to the whole range. As the sign says, "No responsibility accepted for ice-cream addictions."