

# A drop of gold

A local liqueur producer has won international acclaim at the prestigious International Wine & Spirit Competition in London. **Lindy Hughson** spoke to Domenico Cece, founder of Cello Liqueurs, shortly after the award was announced.

**'LIQUID GOLD' IS** how Domenico Cece describes his company's Limoncello, a traditional Italian style lemon digestivo (digestive liqueur) produced in a humble facility in Sydney using Cece's mother Franca's recipe. The judges at the International Wine & Spirit Competition (IWSC) 2010 in London were a little more descriptive about the drop, their notes reading: "...bright lemony colour with an opaque appearance. Cracking nose, bursting with juicy Sicilian lemon aromas which follow through in the mouth, vibrant acidity, a slight pithy bitterness and succulent lemon flavours, with very good distillate. A serious product, beautifully made".

Small wonder, then, that the liqueur was awarded Best in Class, beating limoncellos from Italy, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

Cece, founder of Cello Liqueurs, said he and his mother were both very proud of the international recognition for their labour of love. He said his mother had been making 'home-made' limoncello for decades, but earlier this year he took the plunge and started producing the liqueur commercially. He got the idea after observing how well his mother's limoncello went down with customers at the family's Italian wood-fired pizza restaurant in the Sydney suburb of Bargo, called 'The Local Italian', where Franca is head chef.

It took two-and-a-half years to obtain a liquor production licence, but with this in place things started moving quickly. Cece set up production facilities, purchased the Cello trade mark from Foster's and drew on his brother's graphic design skills to craft the label. They both agreed that a photograph of Franca on the back label was warranted as dedication to all her hard work at the restaurant and in honour of her original recipe. This was achieved in secret from their mother.



Cece relates the brand's unveiling: "Finally, Cello Limoncello was born. I couldn't wait to show Mum the finished product because she was still unaware of what I had been doing. I asked her to take a look at the Limoncello bottle, saying I had purchased it from a bottle shop in Leichhardt. After looking at the label, Mum said, 'Nice looking bottle'. I told her to look at the back of it. There was a pause and complete silence, then tears began to roll down her face. She was extremely happy and proud. She couldn't believe we had kept this secret from her."

With Franca's blessing and support, Cece started adapting his mother's recipe and began working on other flavours in the Cello range. Today the company promotes three variants besides Limoncello – Arancello (orange), Limecello (lime), and Passioncello (passionfruit). The Passioncello, the only one of its type worldwide according to Cece, is his best seller after the Limoncello.

All of the liqueurs took silver or bronze medals at the IWSC.

By mid-March 2010, the first Cello Liqueur bottles landed on the shelves of Cece's local bottle shop in Horsley Park, NSW.

"At that point I decided it would be great to en-

ter the Cello range into a competition. After speaking to industry experts I decided it had to be the International Wine and Spirits Competition in London, it being the biggest, most prestigious and most stringent competition in the world. My philosophy was if the products were good they would win awards and if they didn't I would have to go back to the drawing board to improve them.

"Over the next four months, while I was waiting for the competition results, I took a trip to Italy to learn more secrets and then came back to start pushing the products in bottle shops, restaurants, bars and function centres. As of today I have approximately 30 clients on board," Cece enthuses.

What gives Cello Liqueurs their point of difference? According to Cece it's the use of first grade fruits, which are carefully peeled so that only the outer skin of the citrus is included to make best use of the fruit's natural oils to flavour the liqueurs.

Cece Liqueur has also started producing Cello Jam including a small percentage of Cello Limoncello, and in September 2010 will be launching, in conjunction with Serendipity Ice Creams, a Cello Alcoholic Sorbet range for adults.