



palate pleasures

Be my Valentine?

Emerging out of that vortex commonly known as the holiday season (relatively unscathed), my thoughts naturally wandered over to the next significant day on the hospitality industry calendar – that day of cards, flowers and undying declarations of true love.

Having pondered over the meaning of Christmas in last month's column, I now pounce on that day which culminates in utter chaos at your local florist, not to mention causing a bit of a headache and a multitude of crammed in tables for two down at your local restaurant.

Now, not wanting to stand in the way of Cupid's bow and arrow declaring that romance is dead – I must stress that I am not a cynic when it comes to love.

I just happen to be a cynic when it comes down to one day of the year prescribed by society (well, the major corporations of society anyway), in which it is mandatory to declare "I love you", or at the very least "I think you're hot".

And yes, you've probably heard it all before, with the other days involving the declaration of

tired platitudes such as Mother's and Father's Day – every day should be Mother's Day etc etc. By rights – EVERY DAY SHOULD BE! The world would indeed be a better place – and not just because we would be celebrating our most treasured human relationships daily, spontaneously and without the relentless psychological manipulation of global giants.

For starters (on Feb 14), there would be a significantly smaller amount of totally stressed out restaurateurs, florists and not to mention busy ordinary people like you and I who are strong armed into guilty submission by a vapid marketing exercise – into racing around trying to find a skerrick of a remaining rose petal, or a reservation for two at the dodgiest restaurant in town after discovering everywhere else is fully booked.

Why do we do it?? Answer – we feel obliged.

And, specifically citing the example of Valentine's Day – there is ironically – NO BIGGER PASSION KILLER than a sense of obligation. Silly and pointless, isn't it?

Silly – most definitely. Pointless – well in a commercial sense, not quite. Second only to Christmas, Valentine's Day is the biggest day in the greeting card industry. In the USA

approximately one billion cards are purchased for this day a year – one billion! Clearly not pointless – and we have already touched on the commercial benefit for the floristry and dare I say it – hospitality industries.

But I cannot help but hark back to the assertion that every day should be such a day. Quality is always better than quantity, and if every person that did something to signify their love by spending a bit of cash – did it just not particularly on Feb 14, but ideally on dates evenly spread throughout the year in much the same randomness of say, a birthday (but in addition to this other mandatory celebration of course!); if this occurred, all the industries involved would still benefit equally and consumers would be far happier too!

Just think – a trip to the florist on a day where the flowers are lovely, fresh and abundant and the florist is not surviving on under 4 hours of sleep, but happily had 8 last night and has time to help you! Or a lovely, unhurried dinner at your favourite restaurant where you get great service and great ambience – ambience! Did I mention that in a restaurant full of couples, there is none! Couples are either awkward or bored on Valentine's Day

– remember 'obligation'? Not to mention, there are probably two sittings on Valentine's night and you will feel rushed.

So that pretty much covers hospitality and floristry – maybe greeting cards might lose out if we skip the day – but hey, let's face it. Cards are a pain anyway, some would say a waste of paper ...

In the restaurant game there's nothing we hate worse than everyone walking in at once. Even though it happens all the time – you try to space out your bookings, but those who booked for 6:30 come at 7:00, those at 7:00 are on time, and all your 7:30 bookings are early. We do the best we can to get to everyone, but we can only do so much at a time, and often a couple of tables suffer. Chaos occurs, even though we tried to avoid it.

Days like Valentine's Day invite such chaos – everything happens on THAT day, quality is sacrificed for quantity – and with this alone, the true meaning, in fact the true essence of love is lost. For surely, doesn't your beloved deserve a bit of quality? If so, take him or her out on another night!

You can read Lou Perri's previous columns on his blog at www.focusmag.com.au/louperri