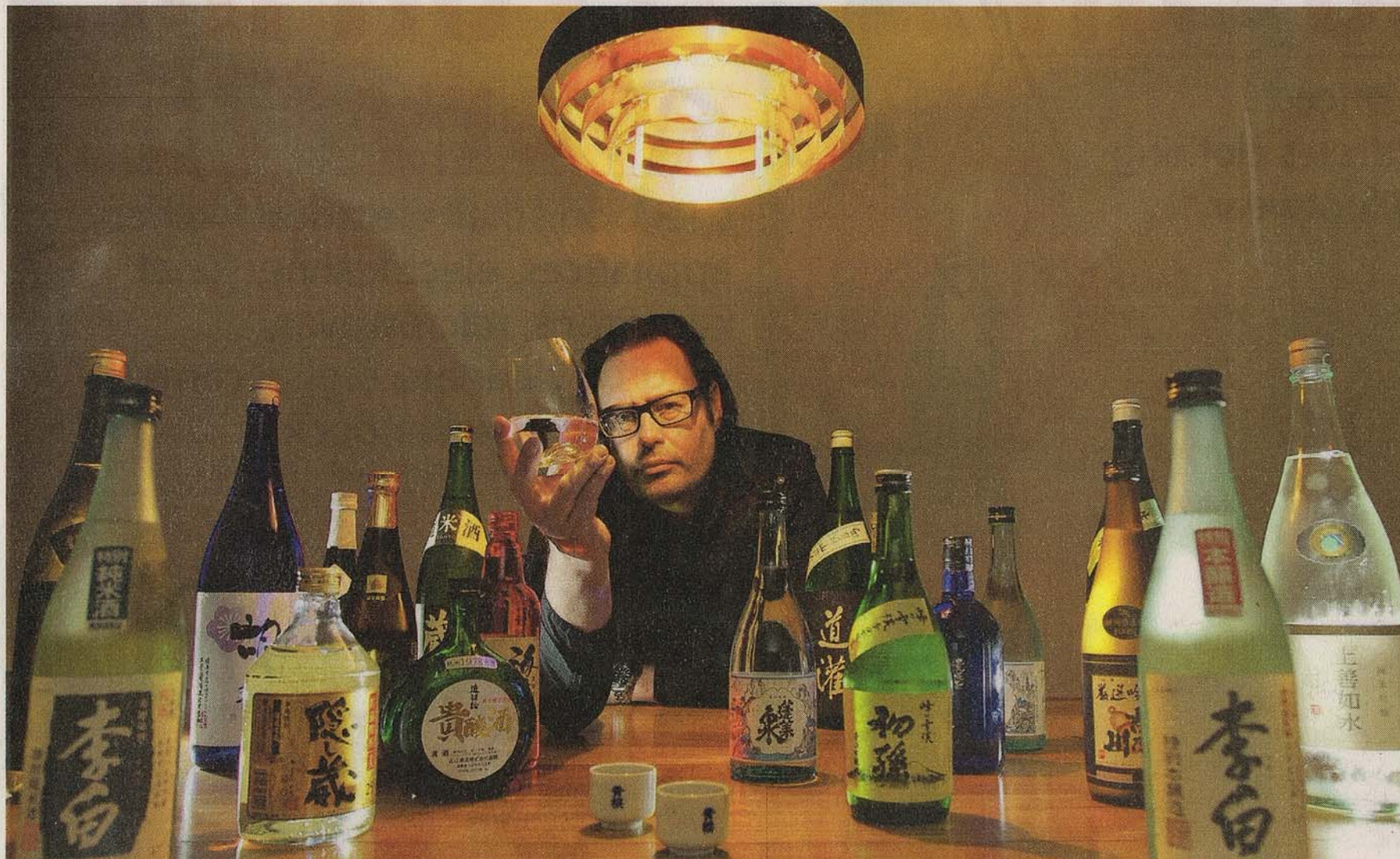


HIGH SPIRITS 'It is the realisation of a long dream to create a temple to sake.'



Kanpai: Andre Bishop, sake enthusiast and owner of Kumo Izakaya in Brunswick East, is one of the specialists enlivening Melbourne's bar scene.

PICTURE: WAYNE TAYLOR

City's new bar code reads: let's give it a shot

BY MICHAEL HARDEN

FOR Andre Bishop, it all started with Saturday morning TV.

"My fascination with sake really began with watching Japanese cartoons on TV when I was a kid," he says. "I then moved on to all the other cool stuff coming from Japan, the gadgets and technology, when I was a teenager, so by the time I hit my 20s I was thoroughly obsessed. Then I actually went to Japan for the first time and had my first experience of sake in the izakaya there and that sealed the deal."

That deal — and obsession —

now has its best expression at Kumo Izakaya, Bishop's Japanese bar/tavern in Brunswick East with its 80-ish varieties of sake and impressive lists of shochu and umeshu, served alongside izakaya-style bar food. It is, "the realisation of a long dream to create a temple to sake".

It is also part of a trend in bars around Melbourne where the owners, obsessed or savvy or both, choose to narrow the focus of their businesses and take on the role of specialists.

For Brooke Hayman, co-owner of the CBD's Chez Regine, it's all about whisky. At present, Chez Regine stocks about 250 varieties, mostly from Scotland

and Ireland. By August when the bar is renovated and renamed Whisky & Alement, more than 400, some extremely valuable and rare, will be on the list. In fact, Hayman says, the reason they've decided to renovate is "we can't actually fit all the whisky we have on the shelves".

Her fascination started when she was living in Ireland and it is the amazing number of "flavour profiles" that keep her travelling regularly to tiny distilleries in Britain and Ireland.

"With whisky you get a lot of different flavour profiles compared to any other spirit. I think it's more interesting than any other spirit," she says. "Depend-

ing on how it's aged or what barrels it's stored in, something is always moving and changing. It's like wine in that way."

At Fitzroy's Kodiak Club, co-owner Nathan Debritt is not only specialising in American whiskeys — bourbon, rye, Canadian and corn — but recently opened a small bar atop the Kodiak called Little Blood that is pouring a selection of nearly 90 tequilas.

Debritt's experience working in bars in the US and on cruise ships in Mexico has given him a well-rounded education in his product, but while he admits to being a fan of American whiskey (he stocks more than 100 of them, most from Kentucky), his

decision to specialise was pragmatic. "We were looking around for a point of difference for our bar, a way to make it stand out and be noticed and American whiskey seemed to be a glaring omission on the bar scene."

Given Melbourne's packed bar scene and its increasing specialisation, one might surmise that bases are pretty covered but Andre Bishop begs to differ.

"I've just got back from a five-day tour of shochu distilleries in Japan and it was amazing, a whole different world," he says. "It's going to become more and more popular in Australia I think. I see a shochu revolution in the next couple of years."

More refugees rounded up after ASIO security checks

BY DANIEL FLITTON and BIANCA HALL

THREE more Sri Lankan refugees who fled the country's bloody civil war have been rounded up across Australia in the past week having been branded a security threat by intelligence agencies.

Two men were taken into custody in Melbourne and Sydney while a woman was detained in Perth.

None are allowed to know the reasons the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation has labelled them a threat to national security nor to appeal the assessment.

The latest cases come as the High Court prepares to hear a challenge to the ASIO assessment regime on June 18, brought by the same legal team that scuttled the government's planned people-swap deal with Malaysia.

The legal challenge is compounding Labor's difficulties in the politics swirling around border protection after reports this week that a people smuggler fooled immigration authorities by claiming refugee status and set up criminal operations in Australia.

Yesterday, Immigration Minister Chris Bowen's office confirmed that the man, known as "Captain Emad", still holds a valid Australian visa, despite fleeing the country on Tuesday night 24 hours after ABC's *Four Corners* alleged he was a people smuggling kingpin.

The opposition fuelled the political storm, saying Mr Bowen should have known



Alleged people smuggler Captain Emad has fled the country.

about a two-year federal police investigation into Captain Emad before the allegations were aired on television.

Police said they could not prevent Captain Emad departing Australia as there was insufficient evidence to lay charges.

The government is refusing to say when, or if, it was told police suspected Captain Emad had lied about being a refugee and was fraudulently living in Canberra in taxpayer-funded housing.

The three blacklist refugees join 51 others now held in indefinite detention — recognised to be too much at risk to return home but not permitted a visa for release into Australia.

The woman, believed to be in her early 30s, fainted after being told on Thursday that ASIO had put her on a blacklist and had to be taken to hospital.

She had been living in Perth since late last year after being released from detention, but is expected to be eventually transferred to a Sydney detention centre.

The government has been rebuffed by the United States and Britain in attempts to send some of the refugees to join family overseas.

Adverse assessments are given to fewer than 1 per cent of all asylum cases but the issue is a growing headache for Labor, with the surge in people seeking refugee status in recent years increasing the number of people trapped in what one MP has dubbed a "legal blackhole".

Backbenchers are agitating for a review mechanism for the ASIO findings, in line with a pledge made at the ALP national conference in December. But the government has so far failed to change the rules.

Corby row augurs ill for Bali pair

BY MICHAEL BACHELARD INDONESIA CORRESPONDENT

A POLITICAL and legal backlash in Indonesia against Schapelle Corby's clemency may make it tougher for two Bali Nine inmates to have their death sentences commuted.

Anti-drugs body Granat has launched a challenge in Jakarta's administrative court against Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's recent decision to cut Corby's sentence by five years to 15 years.

The lawsuit comes after a furious campaign of opposition

by judges, ministers and the media against the clemency decision.

Critics have accused Dr Yudhoyono of bowing to Australian political pressure, of ignoring the country's strict drug laws and of being inconsistent, after he said in 2006 he would not grant clemency in drugs cases.

Australian academic Tim Lindsey said the backlash would mean Dr Yudhoyono "will have to think twice in future about offering clemency for drug offenders, and also to Australian offenders".

Australians Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran face the death penalty for their role in a 2005 attempt to smuggle heroin out of Bali.

Lawyers have already lodged Chan's appeal for clemency with Dr Yudhoyono, and the deadline for Sukumaran's appeal is next month.

An Indonesian lawyer agreed it would make a successful clemency appeal for Chan and Sukumaran less likely.

Lawyer Julian McMahon had earlier said Dr Yudhoyono's granting of clemency to Corby was a good sign for his clients because it showed his flexibility.