

Alvise Perosa, a first generation Venetian, is no stranger to living and studying abroad. At five he was in Princeton where his father was teaching English and American Literature. He later returned to the USA as an exchange student, and again for his PhD as a Fulbright Fellow. It was an experience he wanted his children to know.

"I had the desire for my young children to spend some time abroad in a school in an English speaking country," he explains, "and my wife, a trained lawyer, was able to take a leave of absence."

When it came time to take a sabbatical from his post in the Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems at University Ca' Foscari in Venice, it was not the USA however that he chose. Instead, he contacted a colleague from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia who put him in touch with Professor Thomas Maschmeyer at the University of Sydney.

"Australia's people, lifestyle, climate and beauty attracted me and my family because we had never been there before," he says.

But it was science, and chemistry in particular, that drew Alvise to Sydney. Securing an Endeavour Research Fellowship, an Australian government award allowing for postgraduate or postdoctoral research to be undertaken in Australia in any field, he moved his family from Venice.

"We had a flat next to the university. It was close to everything, just a short walk to the park, to the pool. My family was happy," he says.

The University of Sydney, and Professor Maschmeyer, proved a fortuitous choice for the Italian scientist. **"We developed a whole new area of research,"** says Alvise.

"We were very much into the development of fundamental chemistry, transforming renewable feedstocks into bio-based chemicals," he explains. "A move away from oil and coal to sustainable biomass, in order to use bio-based agricultural residue to make chemicals."

Alvise says the network, the research and the connections developed in Australia were instrumental to him in reaching his present position as Associate Professor of Organic Chemistry at Venice's Ca' Foscari University.

"We established a cotutelle (joint degree) scheme for PhD students that still thrives and that contributed to my scientific reputation," he says. Three Italians and two Australians have so far graduated from the program.

In Venice, Dr Perosa leads a group on Green Chemistry, which focuses on designing, and redesigning, chemical processes to create non-polluting, safe chemical products.

He is keen to build yet another Australian connection, to set up and couple this green technology with Australian companies working in Italy.

Alvise admits that he was "very sad" to leave Australia, and that returning to live there is a thought "we haven't abandoned".

Why Australia?

"The lack of any hierarchy and stiffness between colleagues and people in general, coupled with the openness and the excitement for the future that seems to permeate Australians," he says.

"In Australia one can speak to the highest ranking professor and a new student as equals," he says. "A boss will guide and teach but there is no sense of it coming from above."

As well, he loves the "fantastic" nature and the fact that it is an ancient land. "Uluru, the Olgas are so completely different to anything we've ever seen," he says.

"My kids very much enjoyed feeding a lorikeet on our terrace," he adds. "By the time we left we had a pandemonium of these lovely, albeit invasive, birds coming to breakfast, lunch and dinner at our place."

"On a winter afternoon they saw a lovely cat staring intently at them through our third floor window. Of course it wasn't a cat, but a possum!"



ALVISE PEROSA

COURSE COMPLETED in AUSTRALIA:

Post-doctoral research

INSTITUTION:

University of Sydney, School of Chemistry

CURRENT POSITION:

Associate Professor of Organic Chemistry,
University Ca' Foscari, Venice

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