

# Earning a crust

A Sydney success story finds its way home. By Matt Preston

It's a familiar story. How one of the founders of the successful Caffè e Cucina in Chapel Street leaves his next place, another success in St Kilda, to triumphantly return to Sydney. He then returns triumphantly to Melbourne to open another place.

It is a neat encapsulation of Maurizio Terzini's career with his imminent opening of Giuseppe, Arnaldo and Sons at Crown in March, but it is a tale already told by Mauro Marucci, who opened a Melbourne branch of his successful Sydney casual Italian, Pizza e Birra, at the end of last year on the site of Terzini, the St Kilda restaurant that he opened after e Cucina.

Just as Marucci has tuned down the aspirations of the kitchen, so too has the interior been given a lighter, more casual feel. Terzini's wonderful old distressed mirror remains but designer Chris Connell has added a romantic black-and-white wall of large images of Italian life from a Roberto Rossellini movie. Outside, there's a broad dock under

the old veranda, with tables and a long skinny counter for dining looking down Fitzroy Street to the bay.

Chef Silvana Iacobaccio did her apprenticeship at e Cucina and has a pedigree that includes running her own place - Boccione in Carlisle Street - as well as time at Ladro. Here, her weekly changing menu might have spaghetti with mussels, plates of bresaola with a pickled beetroot salad, or chicken scaloppine covered in a tomato and olive sauce - but the majority of choices are pizza cooked in the wood-fired oven.

These are admirably thin-crust and cooked at such heat that the dough is crisp without drying out. They are also not heavily topped, ensuring the dough becomes as much as part of the flavour as, say, the milky buffalo mozzarella and tart/sweet tomato sauce of the margherita. Other old-school combos such as a capriciosa with olives, artichokes and ham are joined by more unusual toppings like the "lasagne" pizza. It's a mix of hum, creamed



ricotta and parmesan along with the usual tomato and mozzarella that uncannily captures the flavour of lasagne.

Another winner is the thin mozzaluna pizza fridled calzone-style, with the crust enveloping soups of salami, ricotta and mozzarella, topped with cherry tomatoes, mushrooms, mozzarella and, after it is out of the oven, prosciutto.

Those who see the presence of tomato on a pizza as an arriviste 17th century Neapolitan idea, or who just don't like the flavour, will be delighted by five tomato-free, "white" pizzas. Perhaps try the mild, creamy cow's milk cheese, stracchino, that oozes under a veil of

prosciutto, or an intriguing combination of green olives and crumbled Italian pork sausage meat on a bed of melted provolone - a semi-hard Italian cow's milk cheese with a more pronounced flavour than stracchino or mozzarella. The "4 Formaggi" combining taloggio, gorgonzola, mozzarella and parmesan is an old idea - the addition of fresh pear and radicchio is an inspired twist.

There are a handful of salads, such as these bitter radicchio leaves combined with buffalo mozzarella and crispy pancetta for salty porkiness, or a green salad with goat's cheese. There are a few antipasti dishes to get the pizzas going: from warmed olives to

"house-cured" salmon served with a dressing of vodka and Campari (hi!), if you order the melted stracchino with wilted radicchio and the unmistakable whiff of truffle oil, eat it quickly before the cheese melts!

The "birra" part of the name is championed by a light malty house ale (\$6) made by Holgate Brewery in Woodend. This is joined by another nice or so commercial drops such as Little Creatures pale ale and Stella on tap (88) or bottles of Pure Blood, Asahi and Pilsen. Other than Pilsen, it's a largely a big-name list that would be improved by the addition of a few bottles from (smaller) Aussie craft brewing names such as Red Oak, Grand Ridge or those fancy longnecks from Beechworth's Bridge Road Brewers. There is also short wine list with a bias towards Italian reds from \$35 to \$45.

The morphing of Terzini into Pizza e Birra might be viewed as a downgrade that offers little new to Melbourne's culinary landscape, but those of us with our glasses half full might suggest it's another example of pizza being taken seriously as a dining-out option.

If you don't, however, agree with all this trendy, thin-crust malarkey (and the prices to match - the 12-inch pizzas are about \$18) there's always the venerable Topolino's just down the road. **ehw**

The "4 Formaggi" is an old idea - the addition of fresh pear and radicchio is an inspired twist

## Pizza e Birra

80 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. Call 9537 3465

**OWNERS** Mauro Marucci, Silvana Iacobaccio

**CHEF** Silvana Iacobaccio

**OPEN** Tuesday-Thursday, 6pm-11pm; Friday-Sunday, noon-3pm; 6pm-11pm

**COST** About \$75 for two, plus drinks

# Budget beauties

Spend less and still get good wine. By Jeff Gordon

After the holiday splurges, it's back to cheap booze and even cheaper cigars to reify in the spending. I was going to buy the consistent Wolf Blue and label (\$12), which is always fresh and effervescent and very drinkable.

However, I went for the Brown Brothers pinot chardonnay, usually about \$17 and at that price great value, but a steal when on special at under \$14. This bubble gives all but our best a run for their (much more) money. It's a peachy mouthful with a touch of citrus tang that bursts with vitality in the glass.

Oyster Bay is a New Zealand mob that produces a sauvignon blanc ('07, about \$19) typical of the passionfruit/pineapple style. The fruit is abundant, the finish crisp and the wine refreshing.

Ingolby from McLaren Vale has produced an absolute gem from the '06 vintage (about \$18). Peach and nectarine

on the nose and in the taste with a citrus bite underneath, it is full-bodied and rich in flavour. Also worth trying is Gary Crittenden's Goppetto chardonnay ('06, about \$14) from the Alpine Valley in Victoria's north east. Less intense than the Ingolby, this wine has loads of stone fruit on the nose and soft white nectarine flavours.

For a good food wine, Reilly's from the Clare produce drinkable reds, including the Barking Mad cabernet ('05, about \$15). Sweet, ripe fruit, noticeable oak and grippy tannins make it more than just pleasant. **ehw**



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