

# The Sydney Morning Herald

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**LP**

cover story

Sydney can't get enough primi, secondi and dolci - and the action is spread across five main hubs.

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Ah, Italian. The food **group** everyone can agree on. **Chinese** has its MSG haters and French can be too, well, French, but who doesn't love a big slice of cheesy margherita or curling up with spag bol in front of the telly?

So where do Sydneysiders go for a pasta fix? Melbourne has Lygon Street with its militia of saltimbocca spruikers and menus the size a Victorian ballot sheet but is there anywhere like that here? A suburb or street so completely Italian that it's impossible to leave without a whole pig's worth of small goods or slurping your weight in sugo?

It used to be Norton Street. Once upon a time the pumping arterial of Leichhardt was a swinging hub of red sauce, shoulder pads, and blokes wearing T-shirts under suit jackets. No longer. A quick walk around The Forum - that optimistic recreation of a traditional piazza - reveals no less than 10 shops up for lease and many more with minimal or non-existent opening hours. Keen for a cheap **commercial** lease with zero foot traffic? The Forum has

you covered.

Little Italy is now fragmented around Sydney into five main hubs but there is amazing stuff out there to be discovered. Some places are as visible as a passata stain on a shirt, others are a tad more hidden. This is a guide to the best each area has to offer.

LEICHHARDT

There's still some bellissimo to be found here - you've just got to look past the endless restaurants auditioning for Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares to find it.

Bar Sport

Winner of the SMH Good Cafe Guide's Lifetime Achievement award in 2012, Bar Sport has been brewing sharp espressos since 1959. A chalkboard occupies a whole wall and is regularly updated with Italian football results. The place to come if you want to complain about aircraft noise or Juventus FC's place on the ladder.

- 2A Norton St, Leichhardt, 9569 2397

AC Butchery

Oodles of speck, sausage and other smallgoods swing from the ceiling, bulging the eyes of first-time visitors. Angela and Carlo Colaiacomo have been providing an authentic Italian macellaio service for

years. Their son Arnie is on front-of-house duties and only too happy to help with all your coppa, pancetta and salami needs.

- 174 Marion St, Leichhardt, 9569 8687

#### Aperitivo

No Hawaiian, Aussie or half'n'half at this pick of the Norton Street pizza joints. Aperitivo is Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana certified, meaning all pizza is cooked according to strict Neapolitan guidelines (i.e. less than two minutes at more than 400C). As the wall of Campari bottles suggests, they also do a respectable Negroni.

- 163 Norton St, Leichhardt, 9564 0003

#### Locantro Fine Foods

Regularly taking home Sydney Royal Fine Food Show medals for their pastries, Locantro is your one-stop shop for cakes, breads, pies and paninis. Oh, and cronuts.

- 9-11 Catherine St, Leichhardt, 9568 3637

#### Bar Italia

A cash-only institution of the Inner West and the most text-book Italian experience on Norton Street. Think cracked paint, charming signage, crammed seating and overflowing ashtrays. Chicken and veal are available in a multitude of creamy and winey ways and there's good gelati for the trip home. A sign on the roof advertises an impending auction for the premises. Here's hoping the new owners don't touch a thing.

- 171 Norton St, Leichhardt, 9560 9981

#### FIVE DOCK

Five Dock bursts with the energy of an Italian marketplace and Great North Road is the main deli and dolci strip. It's a bustling street of gossiping nonnas and hurried real estate agents during the day and sleepy in the evening when families prepare the evening meal with goods purchased from the delis that day.

#### Caminiti Butchery

This butcher has been trading in Five Dock since 1974 when Sicilian immigrant Bruno Caminiti opened a second location based on the success of his Leichhardt store. Sam Caminiti now runs the show, taking over from his late father and maintaining a high standard of sausage integrity in the process. Snags include white wine and garlic, veal and basil, and the ubiquitous pork and fennel - all waiting patiently in the display counter to be taken home by locals and used in ragus and risottos that night.

- 185 Great North Rd, Five Dock, 9713 7027

#### Delis

There are two main delis in town - Rizzo's and Ranieri's (better known as Peter's). These aren't your fashionable inner-city delis stocking pheasant pate and artisan passata bottles. Instead, they're functional and brilliant. Both have windows filled with panino bread from local bakeries and the scent of olive brine, mortadella and parmesan wheels fill your nostrils on entry. If you're after a hard-to-find pasta and can't locate it within the walls of these two then you're not looking hard enough.

- Rizzo Deli, 107 Great North Rd, Five Dock, 9712 2700
- Ranieri's Continental Delicatessen, 97 Great North Rd, Five Dock, 9713 6886

#### Cremeria De Luca

This Leichhardt favourite has moved to Five Dock and continues to do some knock-out gelato flavours including petali di rosa (rose petals), te alla pesca (peach ice tea), and zabaione (Italian custard). Grab a scoop or three and take a seat in a room resembling a nonna's kitchen from the 1950s. The traditional hot chocolate here is also brill.

- 84 Ramsay Rd, Five Dock, 9712 4606

#### Pasticceria Tamborrino

Across the road from Cremeria de Luca, is Vincenzo and Cristina Tamborrino's patisserie. The husband-and-wife team have the best selection of dolci in the street - zuccherati (custard-filled donuts), marzipan fruit, and macaroons all look too good NOT to eat. I can only imagine the skill it takes to create the sfogliatelle - shell-shaped sweets with millimetre-thin leaves of pastry chock-full of ricotta and orange peel.

- 73-75 Great North Road, Five Dock, 9712 1461

#### Gatto Matto

Not a whole bunch of great restaurants in Five Dock, so grazi to Gatto Matto. "Chef Paolo" is passionate about creating honest food with quality ingredients and the locals can't get enough. Hidden behind Five Dock library, Gatto Matto has a flashy, modern fit-out and black-clad waiters that panther around making sure no Chianti glass is empty. Arancini stuffed with bolognese, mozzarella and pea can please any age **group** and the pizza is satisfyingly chewy on the inside while crisp at the edge.

- 2/4-12 Garfield St, Five Dock, 9712 7770

#### HABERFIELD

Flashier than neighbouring mate Five Dock (restaurant Il Locale has a red carpet entrance, you know) but still not as **commercial** and Anglo-fied as Norton Street. Haberfield is the big-night-out suburb for Italians of the inner west and chirps along during the day as a shopping hub.

There's much to love on Ramsay Street. Frank's Fruit Market, homemade pasta at La Pasteria, a travel agent advertising papal pilgrimages, and the chattering of Italian men inside the old Mama Magnifico - a cafe at southern end with no signage and a flat-screen tuned to Sky Racing.

#### Pasticceria Papa

This is the home of torta di ricotta - aka Sydney's best cheesecake. The recipe is guarded closer than the Vatican treasures and creates queues at the counter each day. Who doesn't want a piece of buttery short-crust pastry encasing sweet and creamy ricotta?

- 145 Ramsay St, Haberfield, 9798 6894

#### Rino Saffioti's Chocolate Shop

After creating the gorgeous loose chocolates at David Jones food hall for 18 years, Rino opened his own store with wife Marisa in 2012. Some of the shiny DJ's flavours are recreated on premises - both the mint and cherry flavours will make you never want to **purchase** a box of commercially made chocs again. There's also cannoli, pate de fruits, and excellent gelato.

- 129 Ramsay St, Haberfield, 9716 7671

#### La Disfida

The pick of Ramsay Street's restaurants, this warmly lit enoteca is full of sweet and smoky aromas. The wine list teems with lesser-known Italian grape varieties so a salsiccia e funghi pizza (tomato, mozz, pork sausage, and wild mushroom) can be perfectly matched with a Valpolicella.

- 109 Ramsay St, Haberfield, 9798 8299

#### Paesanella Cremeria

The retail face for the famous Marrickville cheese factory. Here you'll find plenty of Paesanella's boccocini, burrata and fluffy ricottas. There's also a large range of imported cheeses like Cacio di Bosco (pecorino studded with truffles), saracino (a young, mild sheep's milk cheese) and provolone in both dolce (sweet) and piccantino (sharp) varieties.

- 88 Ramsay Rd, Haberfield, 9519 6181

#### EAST SYDNEY

There are no delis and cake shops in this pocket down the hill from Hyde **Park** but there is a diverse range of restaurants all within a stone's throw of each other. Stanley Street was Sydney's first Little Italy back in the '50s and it remains a melting pot of coffee and culture. Among the pasta joints today you'll also find sushi, students and the uber-cool Kubrick's bar, but with Bill and Toni's still holding court, the spirit of the Boot is strong.

## Bar Reggio

Gazing in the windows of Bar Reggio on a rainy autumn night, it's clear that no one in here is having a bad time. It's a knees-up, cheap-and-cheerful BYO with gallons of red-sauce and a surprisingly tender octopus salad. Leave both umbrella and nit-picking at the door.

- 135 Crown St, Darlinghurst, 9332 1129

## Sagra

Sagra is the newest capretto on the block. A constantly changing menu looks to seasons for inspiration and not in the same Food Marketing 101 way where terms such as "seasonally driven" and "locally produced" are thrown around willy-nilly. The pasta is rich and ribbony and one night you might score a tagliatelle with bottarga (cured fish roe) or a pappardelle with rich pork neck ragu. A warm room, warming wine and excellent value make this a winner all round.

- 62 Stanley St, Darlinghurst, 8307 0430

## Beppi's

"Mr Boys! We've been expecting you!" exclaims the maitre d'. Beppi Polese has been trading at the same location for more than 57 years - some feat in an industry where surviving even one year is considered a cause for celebration. Beef medallions and veal scaloppine are hardly cutting-edge cuisine but who else is rocking second-to-none service, customised bill clips and valet parking these days?

- 21 Yurong St, Sydney, 9360 4558

## Verde

Directly opposite Sagra, Verde churns out hearty southern Italian fare and lets you BYO Monday to Thursday.

The heritage-listed building also doubles as something of a gallery for owner/chef Antonio Ruggerino's vintage poster collection. With a couple of grand handy you can even take one home that night.

- 115 Riley St, Surry Hills, 9380 8877

## BONDI

A flick through a copy of the 1999 Good Food Guide tells me that Bondi was an Italian dead zone 15 years ago with not a single Italian entry for the beachside 'burb. Cut to today and Bondi is coniglio crazy.

There's the backpacker friendly pick-your-pasta-pick-your-sauce joints dotted around (Gelbsion provides the best beach views for a slice of capricossia) and of course the twin-toqued Icebergs, but new precinct "the Hub" is causing all the fuss.

There's the latest venture from Icebergs Maurice Terzini, a branch of A Tavola by the sea, and Haberfield's Pasticceria Papa set to soon open. Not to mention Gelato Messina, which is close to needing a security guard to control the sozzled crowds on Saturday nights.

## Da Orazio Pizza + Porchetta

Staff as chiselled as the marble bar, white-on-white uniforms, and music in the loo louder than some nightclubs. Restaurateur Maurice Terzini knows his market and the beautiful people of Bondi are loving it. Head chef Orazio D'Elia knows his pig, too and the porchetta sandwich is something else. Juicy meat, cos lettuce and grilled eggplant between slices of focaccia. It's so big I expect a free Ksubi T-shirt on completion.

- 3/75-79 Hall St, Bondi Beach, 8090 6969

## A Tavola

More marble at the Hub. After all, it is a fact that Italian food looks and tastes twice as good when placed on a white marble tabletop. A Tavola's communal table has the warmth of a Tuscan family meal and the slick style of modern Rome. The pappardelle with wagyu beef shin, red wine and horseradish makes a serious bid for best bolognese in town.

- 75-79 Hall Street Bondi, 9130 1246

#### Pompei's

There's a more popular gelateria (which shall not be named) that heaps its gelato into big colourful mountains for all to Instagram. That gelato's good but this is better. Pompei's keeps its flavours, such as blood orange and fresh fig, down deep and cold. In other words, how gelato should be kept. Also, there's no queue ...

- 126-130 Roscoe St, Bondi Beach, 9365 1233

#### La Piadina

This one's a few blocks back from the Speedos and sunburnt Brits of the beach but worth the stroll. Piadina is flat bread from the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. There are 11 different filling combos on the menu but my money's on the pancetta, provolone and baby spinach number.

- 106 Glenayr Avenue, Bondi Beach, 9300 0160

So where can we safely hoist the Tricolore and announce the area as Sydney's Little Italy?

Nowhere really. Not because there isn't one but to do so would be a discredit to the other suburbs, all of which have their own identity and purpose. Bondi has style, East Sydney has diversity, Haberfield has history and Five Dock has the delis.

Leichhardt has Bar Sport.

We haven't even mentioned the many other great Italian restaurants we can proudly call our own. Lucio's, Buon Ricordo, Berta, Vini, Pulu at Freshwater, and the Cafe Sopras to name just a few.

As Chef Paolo rightfully attests, Sydney can't get enough primi, secondi and dolci. As the traditional cultural zones created in the '50s and '60s disappear, and diners hunger for something more than egg on a pizza, we can only expect to see Sydney's Big Italy continue to grow.

See our how-to guide for Sicilian hot chocolate and recipes for an Italian-themed dinner at [goodfood.com.au](http://goodfood.com.au)

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