

# Keeping the fires burning

Secolo Dining moves into a historic space and adds authentic pizza

*Jacqui Taffel*



Secolo means century in Italian. It seems a rather odd name for the new restaurant next to the ANZ tower, off Castlereagh Street, but manager and owner Anthony Arienzale



clears up the mystery. The restaurant is tucked underneath Legion House, which was a hostel for the Young Women's Christian Association from 1903 to 1920.

Clockwise from main: Secolo's bar overlooks the open kitchen; wood-fired pizza from the oven imported from Naples; classic tiramisu; and beef carpaccio.

The young women who stayed there could hardly have imagined that a century later, people would gather to eat pizza made in a ferocious oven imported from Naples.

When we arrive, the room is already filled with whatever the Italian equivalent is for joie de vivre, with groups of young professionals downing cocktails with their pizza at the

larger tables in the middle of the room.

Smaller tables line the caramel-coloured leather bench seat along two walls, and more diners sit at the outside tables which will be popular in summer.

The casually stylish design is by Renato D'Ettore Architects based at Rushcutters Bay — the smooth concrete bar has high stools overlooking the open kitchen, with the pizza oven squatting in one corner. In charge of it is head pizzaiolo Francesco Spataro, a proponent of the Vera Pizza Napoletana movement championing the traditional pizza of Naples.

The patata pizza has the thinnest of bases, covered in paperthin slices of desiree potato, crumbled chunks of pork sausage meat and rosemary with generous grindings of black pepper, encircled by a puffy, soft, lightly charred and completely delicious crust.

The beef carpaccio demonstrates the chops of head chef, Mario Izzo, who worked in Naples, Sardinia and London before landing in Sydney four years ago.

Bright, velvety slices of beef are topped with rocket, shaved parmesan and balsamic vinegar. It's a study in simplicity, using a few high quality ingredients to great effect, and is perfect with the pizza. A glass of Fiegl Villa Dugo sauvignon from Italy's Friuli region, fresh and dry with plenty of character, completes the meal.

The only downside is the usual Sydney dining complaint: the noise level. With the concrete floor and bar and whitewashed industrial ceiling, the sound bounces around merrily.

Still, it doesn't stop us from chatting long after the pizza, carpaccio and wine have disappeared. Then Arienzale delivers a bowl of tiramisu to share.

It only takes one spoonful to realise this is the real deal — creamy but light and not too sweet, with the fine balance of flavours and textures so often missing in this classic dessert.

Secolo also does breakfast, opening at 6.30am, Monday to Friday. The menu stretches to dishes beyond the usual, such as burnt fig, almond and cinnamon muesli with

sheep's milk yoghurt; ricotta and nduja bruschetta; and the breakfast panino with chargrilled Italian pork and fennel sausage, egg, capsicum and provolone. The La San Marco espresso machine looks serious too.

As we stroll out into the evening, I feel a bit sorry for those young Christian women, who probably never got to eat pizza, or tiramisu. A century later, we are the lucky ones.

Head pizzaiolo Francesco Spataro is a proponent of the Vera Pizza Napoletana movement, championing the traditional pizza of Naples