



THE RESTAURANT MANLY PAVILION
THE CHEF JONATHAN BARTHELMESS



THE RESTAURANT AD LIB BISTRO
THE CHEF DIETMAR SAWYERE



THE RESTAURANT CHINA BEACH
THE CHEF MAI BUSAYARAT

Manly Pavilion
West Esplanade,
Manly
Phone: 9949 9011

Ad Lib Bistro
1047 Pacific Highway,
Pymble
Phone: 9988 0120

China Beach
Shop 2, 43-45 North Steyne,
Manly
Phone: 9976 0024

Enopizzeria
Shop 5, 21 Grovesnor Street,
Neutral Bay
Phone: 9958 0022



Photography **Jennifer Soo**

GOORTH!

Long regarded as a wasteland when it comes to great restaurants, the north shore is finally delivering the goods, writes **Scott Bolles**.



THE RESTAURANT ENOPIZZERIA
THE OWNER MAURO MARCUCCI

"There are, alas, many great dividers of the human race: politics, sex, religion ... and the Sydney Harbour Bridge." So began a 1981 restaurant review in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in which the author, Louisa Wright, recounted how her father once "commanded" her mother to never again accept an invitation to the north shore.

As a child of the north living in southern exile, I'm used to hearing this line from those whooping it up

on the South Beach Diet. To them, it's the north snore and there's a reason you only pay a toll crossing the harbour in a southerly direction: it's a food tax. Truth is, for a significant time I agreed with them.

The north has long been the underachiever of the Sydney dining scene, although all economic indicators point to its potential. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that it is home to four of the five highest-earning

neighbourhoods in the city. But despite that – and a well-educated and widely travelled population – its restaurant history is patchy.

To be sure, a large Japanese population has long guaranteed a decent showing in that niche and other pockets of Asian culinary strength have dotted its food map. And, of course, there has been the odd high achiever such as The Bathers' Pavilion at Balmoral. But where are its three-hatted gastro

temples? Apart from a blip in the 1970s and '80s, when chef Tony Bilson helped kick-start the seminal Berowra Waters Inn and brothers Peter and Greg Doyle had northside restaurants, it has been an eternity between drinks and amuse-bouches – and each of those talented chefs eventually migrated south.

But restaurateurs are now seeing the possibilities in taking a stake in a northern postcode. When Manly Pavilion (see Hot, page 54) opened →

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BILL #1
COVERS #3

“There’s lots of old money on the north shore. I’ve done private catering and some of those people have better kitchens in their homes than I have in my restaurant.”



THE RESTAURANT PILU AT FRESHWATER
THE CHEF GIOVANNI PILU

in March, its arrival was a milestone not just for Manly but the whole city. In the shadow of the global financial crisis, where austerity ruled our restaurant-opening landscape and even celebrity chefs launched steakhouses and bistros, the \$8 million Manly Pavilion project was brave enough to pitch at diners rather than eaters. “We haven’t gone safe or conservative with the menu,” says executive chef Jonathan Barthelmeß, who earned some excellent notices during his time in the kitchen at Coast at Cockle Bay Wharf.

The 31-year-old chef had heard the oft-trotted-out clichés about northside diners – that midweek trading is dire and that when northerners head out on a big night, they want to go south rather than eat locally. “I didn’t know anything about the market because I don’t live over here,” says Barthelmeß. “But I knew real estate isn’t cheap and if they can afford that, they can afford to eat out.”

The young chef was proved correct. During a busy service, Barthelmeß serves 200 customers at the slick Squillace Nicholas Architects-designed restaurant with views across the harbour. “We have an amazing team. About half are from the other side. To be able to attract them [to work] over here has been a big factor.”

Indeed, Manly is fast becoming the new Surry Hills for restaurant openings. Since the team from Kings Cross stalwart Hugos opened on East Esplanade in mid 2008, a host of restaurants have moved into the beachside suburb. El Toro Loco, the tapas restaurant from Miguel Maestre, who sharpened his skills in the kitchen with the world’s most decorated chef, Ferran Adrià, in Spain, is one high-profile opening. And

when the successful Gazebo wine bar group finally expanded outside the city and the east, it chose Manly, opening Manly Wine by Gazebo in February.

Despite living locally for 30 years, Steve Anastasiou has only recently felt confident enough in the market to open China Beach, an offshoot of his Woolloomooloo restaurant, China Doll. “I’ve always said Manly would take off one day,” says the restaurateur, who opened the Iain Halliday-designed eatery in May with chef Mai Busayarat, formerly at Darlinghurst’s Rambutan. “The mentality of Manly was more BYO but the demographic has changed. There are less renters. There are a lot of wealthy people downsizing out of places like Mosman to move here.”

“Everyone used to say, ‘There’s no life over there,’” adds Giovanni Pilu, who was one of the north shore’s early adopters, opening his Italian restaurant, Pilu at Freshwater, in 2004. “I’ve always believed in the potential of this side of the bridge. Among chefs, there used to be this feeling that if you haven’t got something south of the bridge, then you haven’t made it. I used to think, ‘Maybe I need something.’ But I don’t think that now.”

Pilu has earned two hats for his restaurant and, rather than open a spin-off in the city, he has pressed further north, opening Cavallino Ristorante Pizzeria last year in Terrey Hills.

“Cavallino is the middle of nowhere,” he says, “but we still do 100 covers on a quiet night.”

Another new arrival is Enopizzeria. Mauro Marcucci, a key figure in Melbourne’s legendary Caffé e Cucina, chose Neutral

Bay’s Lucca development for his third Sydney business, opening his wine bar and pizzeria in May. “The north side of Sydney has always been neglected,” says Marcucci, who launched Pizza e Birra and Mille Vini in Surry Hills before selling to partners. “Neutral Bay has so much potential. It’s like a cross between Armadale and Malvern in Melbourne, with a little bit of South Yarra.”

Enopizzeria will be joined at Lucca later this year by a number of other arrivals from the south. Bourke Street Bakery is opening one of its Central Baking Depot spin-offs there and budding bar tsar Grant Collins is in negotiations to open a cocktail bar. *Ready Steady Cook* TV chef Damian Heads will open a branch of Pony, the restaurant in The Rocks where he is head chef. “There’s lots of old money on the north shore,” says Heads. “I’ve done private catering and some of those people have got better kitchens in their homes than I have in my restaurant. Neutral Bay is going to flourish. It’s close to the city; there are lots of young people. I feel it’s ready for the next step.”

Heads isn’t the first chef to take a punt on an emerging northside hub but it’s a gamble that hasn’t always paid dividends. In 1997, Pier owner/chef Greg Doyle and former Bistro Moncur head chef Colin Holt believed North Sydney was ripe for the picking when



GOLDEN OLDIES

Berowra Waters Inn,
Berowra Waters

Jonah’s, Whale Beach

Kam Fook, Chatswood

Pilu at Freshwater, Freshwater

The Bathers’ Pavilion, Balmoral

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Ad Lib Bistro, Pymble

Cavallino Ristorante Pizzeria,
Terrey Hills

China Beach, Manly

Enopizzeria, Neutral Bay

Manly Pavilion, Manly

Ormeaggio at The Spit, Mosman

they launched Bistro Pavé on Miller Street. Although it snared two hats in *The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide*, it closed two years later. Doyle blames the location, the fact that, at the time, many businesses were leaving North Sydney and the paucity of international tourists in the district.

Holt, however, didn’t give up on the area. In the past 12 months, he has opened branches of his Hudson Meats concept in Cammeray and Lane Cove. “We sell a lot of foie gras over there,” he says, adding that the restaurants that do best in the north tend to be local eateries rather than top-end fine diners. “People in the north go south but people in the south don’t go north.”

Chef Dietmar Sawyere believes that theory is starting to thaw. Earlier this year, he cashed in his chips in the city and closed high-rise diner Forty One to focus on the north. After reviving the fortunes of Berowra Waters Inn, which he snapped up in 2007, Sawyere opened classic French bistro Ad Lib in Pymble in April. “At Ad Lib, we are getting guests from Paddington, Bondi, the Shire, Leichhardt,” he says. “With the freeway, access is much easier than it was before.”

Sawyere maintains the only difference between northern and southern customers is “northsiders tend to dine earlier.”

“The old prejudice against the north is disappearing,” he says. “I believe over the next five to 10 years, it will be fully integrated in terms of food and restaurants.”