

## s y d n e y g r a p e v i n e

ELISABETH KING

ON a chilly Autumn evening a crowd of Italian senior citizens wearing flat caps sit outside their favourite bar, as they have done for years. **Stanley Street** straddles the two dominant moods of Darlinghurst - traditional and hip. Two doors up from the scene that could have been air-freighted from any town in Italy, you'll find the post-industrial interior of **Lazy Suzie**. Neon hoop lights by Studio Ham stretch from the door to the bar, and the funky blend of brickwork, wooden beams and subway tiling showcase the design talent of Matt Wood. The biggest surprise is that the food is Malaysian hawker-style. Chef **Zachary Tan** and his team from the popular Devon Cafe and Devon on Danks are the guiding lights behind Lazy Suzie. The menu is a sophisticated take on street food with a strong Penang vibe. There's a heavy emphasis on cocktails to lure Millennials and hipsters, including Tequila Malacca, a swirl of tequila, yuzu, pomelo, pomegranate, sage and fennel, and Penang Blazer, a hot toddy blend of spiced rum, botrytis riesling and bitters. Teetotalers don't miss out on the fun, thanks to an outstanding selection of small batch sodas from Sydney-based P.S. Soda. There's something for every appetite from tiny to ravenous. The absolute musts on the snack list are the lobster thermidor and yuzu mayo spring roll and the longevity bao, a taste explosion of a soft bun filled with crispy soft shell crab, curry leaf and salted egg yolk. For more intense hunger pangs, the Not So Big offerings range from crispy pig tails to pie tee, pastry cups packed with braised shiitake, carrot and spanner crab. The standout of the Strictly Hawker trio is the kerabu chicken salad, a chilli-dominated melange of shredded poached chicken, green mango and cucumber served with betel leaves. I'm a big fan of rendang but Lazy Suzie's interpretation ditches the rule book. Aunt Yulia's version is more of a modern riff on the theme - Rangers Valley wagyu beef cheek served with a light coconut and lemon grass curry. Tan is dedicated to ridding Sydneysiders of their preconceptions about Malaysian food. He succeeds big time with the Ayam Percik, a speciality from the Malay charcoal grill. A huge leg of chicken cooked to a Goldilocks



degree of tenderness - just right - the intense spiciness will have you reaching for a glass of water. But not because you feel that you have swallowed the bar of an electric fire. Manager **Michael Bornie**, a trained sommelier, has put together the proverbial eclectic wine list. Beer is often the best choice with any Asian cuisine and there's a tightly edited list ranging from Cooper's Brewery "Dr Tim's" to Koshihikari, a Japanese rice lager. The wine list has a similar global feel, veering from gruner veltliners from Austria through a French viognier and a tempranillo from Spain. Lazy Suzie is a new direction for the group and underlines the fine dining expertise of Tan and head chef **Berron Kim**. A clear departure from the breakfast fare of the Devons, which gained deserved fame for combos such as taro Scotch eggs and azuki filled cronuts. There is a brunch menu with a point of difference on weekends, including roti BLT with egg. A hint that even if you are merely peckish, it's smart to order one or two of Lazy Suzie's freshly made rotis with anything you choose from the menu. Lazy Suzie, 78 Stanley Street, Darlinghurst; phone (02) 7901 0396.

**Nathan Sasi** first came to widespread public notice at **Nomad** in 2013, where his contemporary take on sharing plates attracted the trendies and kept them coming back for more. Sasi has teamed with veteran restaurateur **Steve Anastasiou** (China Doll, China Lane) for his latest pack-'em-in hot spot - **Mercado**. The underground cellar premises really give the Spanish theme a strong dose of authenticity. Forget dingy dives reeking of Rioja, the slick Ash Street hideaway gleams from the marble bar to the whirring rotisseries. Sticking to the template he established at Nomad, Sasi continues his commitment to handmade at Mercado - from the bread through smallgoods and vinegar. There's a lengthy

tapas menu - 'natch'. The "fish 'n' chips" is a standout - housemade chips with tarama dip. But leave plenty of space for whatever meat is being cooked to perfection on the rotisserie - chicken, lamb, pork, Blackmore wagyu beef blade and tripe for the more adventurous. My favourite? The snapper fillet served with spiced eggplant. As befits Mercado's CBD location, lunch is served from Monday to Friday. Mercado, 4 Ash Street, Sydney; phone (02) 9221 6444.

**Folonomo** is an acronym of For Love Not Money. The brainchild of financier **Matthew Byrne**, all of the restaurant's takings are donated to not-for-profit organisations. There's nothing hair shirt about contributing to the common good when you dine out, though. Chef Jo Ward has worked her culinary magic at Vincent in Paddington, Bloodwood in Newtown and Claude's, Sydney's sorely missed temple of gastronomy. Located in a classic terrace, Folonomo's interior belies its giving back philosophy. Brushed metal, ornate cornices and trendy lighting sound just the right pared-back note. Sharing plates are the main game and excellence is the sole standard. The lamb on smoked eggplant is as much of a visual as a taste treat. The rabbit croquettes have become a go-to dish for regulars, as is the slow-cooked chicken in white wine with harissa, coriander and hazelnuts. If you think that vegan is synonymous with bland, the sunflower seed risotto will readjust your thinking - a nutty mélange of rice, bean sprouts and charred asparagus. Meatlovers will find it impossible to go past the hanger steak. Tender and rare, the meat is a perfect foil for the rich mushroom flavoured sauce and contrasting bed of healthful farro. Yes, Folonomo is licensed. Folonomo, 370 Bourke Street, Surry Hills; phone (02) 8034 3818. 🍷

*Above left and right: Food from Lazy Suzie Restaurant.*