

SYDNEY'S gastro pub frenzy, with its epicentre in the Inner West, shows no signs of fizzling out. The Salisbury Hotel in Stanmore, heritage-listed as one of the city's finest Art Deco pubs, was sold for \$8.5 million before Christmas. But while we wait for its trendy revival, courtesy of the operators of The Tilbury Hotel in Woolloomooloo, there's plenty of new choices close by. Publican **Tim Condon**, the pubpreneur behind the hugely successful gastro pubs - The Three Weeds in Rozelle and the Riverview and East Village hotels in Balmain - has added another dazzler to his empire - **One Ford Street** - also in Balmain.

Condon bought the former Monkey Bar last March and resurrected the property's original name - **The Cricketers Arms**. But you don't have to walk through a bar to get to the 50 seat Italian restaurant in the back. Named after its side street location, One Ford Street boasts a separate entrance away from the pub's main door in Darling St. It's something of a chameleon in other respects, too. On my first visit, I attended a degustation lunch with matching champagnes and the sophisticated vibe was enhanced by the interior backdrop of blonde wood walls and polished concrete floor. Dinner on a hot summer night was more in keeping with the regional Italian menu. The outside courtyard with its lush greenery and overhanging plant pots was packed as everyone tucked into their meals with brio.

No wonder. The head chef is **Sam Bennett**, formerly of two of my favourite eateries - Glebe Point Diner and Fix St James - who has returned from a year-long sabbatical in Italy to dish up a tightly edited regional menu overlaid with sharp technique and reliant on first-rate fresh produce. Better yet, **Fabio Dore**, ex-Popolo and former winner of the Gourmet Traveller magazine Maitre D' of the Year award, governs front of house. His stint at Fratelli Paradiso is also plain to see in the boutique wine list, ranging from an earthy trebbiano from Abruzzo to fresh whites from Sardinia. There's a great Italian craft beer selection up for grabs, too.

Some days making up your mind can be a task too far. One Ford Street offers a sharing menu for \$65 for the whole table. Maybe another time. It was peak tomato season, so I honed in on the multi-coloured heirloom tomato salad with farinata, cipollini onions, goat's cheese and balsamic. Fang-fresh



and intensely flavoured, it was a refreshing hot weather starter. As was the market fish carpaccio, spiked with oil and fresh lemon juice. Other entrees worth coming back for were: quail, cabbage and barley panzerotti and fried swimmer crab arrabiata.

We skipped over the trio of pastas on offer, including cheese mezzalune, nettles, kale and zucchini. My main of bass groper, chickpeas, chicory, mussels and tarragon was easily one of the best seafood dishes I have enjoyed in a long time. The fish was meaty and cooked just so to play off the fat, juicy mussels, bitterness of the chicory and the hummous-like smoothness of the chickpea puree. My fellow diner was in a red meat mood and was more than satisfied with the grass-fed angus tagliata, potatoes, parmesan and rocket.

Recipes for tiramisu can vary enormously and that's a good thing at One Ford Street. Bennett's riff on the Sicilian theme is a featherlight choux pastry eclair wrapped around a smooth-as coffee custard. For those who wanted to keep things simply good, there was the Neopolitano - a parfait which amped the traditional flavours of chocolate, vanilla and strawberry to the max. Curiosity prompted me to order the dropped cheesecake, cinnamon, chocolate and berry. Gluttony made me eat the lot - a crumbled biscuit cake topped with whipped ricotta cheese and bursting with fruit and chocolate flavours. Fit it in or regret the omission. One Ford Street, 1 Ford St, Balmain; phone (02) 9818 4232.

The White Cockatoo hotel in Petersham was famous for its dinner plate-sized schnitzels. A major reason the historic boozier was often packed with Year 12 sports teams from nearby Newington College and Fort Street High School. There's little of the stuffed-to-the-gunwhales ethos left at the property's successor - **West Village**. In December 2014, **Lucky Paech** of the Good Time Hospitality Group, and business partner **James Bodel** paid \$4.5 million for the White Cockatoo and refitted the premises to cater to a more gentrified clientele. The one reminder of the old days is the veal schnitzel with caper butter.

**Sam Thomson**, formerly of Catalina in Rose Bay, helms the ranges and offers seasonal fusion dishes with Asian, North America and European overtones. The outdoor eating area was designed by Alexander & Co, who also razzed up The Morrison in the CBD, and is a swish setting in which to order reasonably priced specialties such as kimchi poutine, a Korean inspired take on the Canadian speciality oozing with French fries, melted cheese and mounds of creme fraiche. Smaller appetites should consider salmon fillet with soba noodles and sesame dressing or char-grilled squid fragrant with fresh coriander, chilli and lemon. My favourite? The seafood pot pie baked in an artistically crimped foil tray. Great wine list and beers on tap. West Village, 30 Terminus St, Petersham; phone (02) 9569 4675.

**Cho Cho San** has a culinary pedigree that's hard to beat. In the kitchen is **Nic Wong**, ex Billy Kwong and Rockpool. Also on hand are **Jonathan Barthelmess** and **Sam Christie**. Yes, the names behind the Apollo, Longrain and Subcontinental. Restaurant design maestro, George Livissianis, has conjured up one of the most striking restaurant interiors in town. An aesthetic blend of Scandinavian and Japanese elements, including polished concrete floors, white bricks and birchwood furnishings.

Both Barthelmess and Christie are avid Japan fans and there's something of a refined izakaya feel to the menu. There's a steady stream of takers for the king prawns cooked over hot coals with kombu butter, the snow crab omelette and teriyaki beef short rib. Arrive a little early for cocktails such as the Nippy Rockshop, basically a Negroni made with sake. Choose the rice spirit or one of the great bottlings on the wine list to match your food choices. The most popular dessert is the green tea soft serve - a silky ice served in a cone. Cho Cho San, 73 Macleay St, Potts Point; phone (02) 9331 6601. 🍷

Above: food from One Ford Street.