

# sydney's inner west



Clockwise from left: The Anzac Bridge; The Boathouse; Bistro Ortolan's salt cod brandade; Bistro Ortolan; chef Alex Kearns of Glebe Point Diner; his Coorong lamb dish; Natalie Keon and George Hatzis (with Harley and Paris) of Vicini; downstairs at Vicini; wok-fried mud crab at The Boathouse.



Just west of the CBD, we discover a vibrant food culture pulsing through some of Sydney's oldest suburbs, from exotic eats and family-friendly bistros to funky bars and smart diners.

WORDS **ALISON PICKEL & SARAH MACDONALD** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN DENNIS**

Drawing on a rich history, Sydney's Inner West has a culinary scene that's as varied and colourful as its inhabitants, melding a bohemian vibe with savvy dining. Though the area extends beyond what's here, we've zoned in around the main eat streets.

Stretching from Sydney University to Blackwattle Bay, Glebe Point Road moves from great cheap eats to relaxed fine diners; in the other direction, Newtown's King

Street offers plenty of global gems. Erskineville's village atmosphere means you'll be competing with the locals for a seat in their cafes and pubs. Leichhardt's Norton and Marion streets are Sydney's Little Italy; while those in the know head to Petersham for the city's best Portuguese chicken and pastries. And friendly neighbourhood eateries make Annandale, Enmore and Stanmore a family affair.

## glebe GLEBE POINT DINER

This is the kind of neighbourhood eatery you'd happily cross the city for. In the smart, tight, black-and-white dining room, Alex Kearns serves pared-back dishes that speak of the season, from heirloom tomato and buffalo mozzarella salad to steamed mullet with peas and spring onions. If too many Sundays have passed since your

last roast, start your own weekend ritual and order the Coorong lamb with borlotti bean puree, broad beans and olives. **407 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe, (02) 9660 2646.**

## THE BOATHOUSE

Only in Australia could a hatted restaurant build its reputation on a pie, and that's just what The Boathouse has done (albeit a decadent snapper and truffle oil version). In this funky industrial space jutting out over Blackwattle Bay, all diners' eyes are on the view of dragonboats and the neon CBD, until everyone turns to watch the trolley ferry a steaming pie to the next lucky

punter. An encyclopaedic oyster menu, stellar fish dishes such as bouillabaisse or blue-eye with nettle butter, and a heavy-hitting wine list round out the experience. **End of Ferry Rd, Glebe, (02) 9518 9011.**

## RESTAURANT ATELIER

This cute cottage is home to Darren Templeman's astute French-leaning fare. Among burgundy walls, heavy drapes and gilt-edged mirrors, dine on a caramelised onion tart with olives, piquillo peppers and pan-fried sardines or roasted rabbit with gnocchi, wilted mâche and a jumble of broad beans and garlicy snails. Sommelier

Evan Mitchell knows his stuff, so take his tip when he steers you towards a glass of Muscat de Beaumes de Venise with dessert – this benchmark muscat is a beauty. **22 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe, (02) 9566 2112.**

## FLYING FAJITA SISTAS

With its rainbow-hued walls, Frida Kahlo portraits and cute smocked waitstaff, this quirky Glebe eatery is one hot tamale. Come for tortillas filled with pulled pork or chipotle chicken, turn up the heat with the staggering range of hot sauces, then knock it all back with a killer margarita. Ole! **65 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe, (02) 9552 6522.**



the guide.

DIFFERENT DRUMMER BAR

This bar achieves a Sydney rarity: a cool, locals’ scene, funky tunes and cocktails prepared with a smile. Come for happy hour (the summery Passionfruit Collins is our pick), then stay for tapas of mussels with tomato and chilli, blue-eye croquettes and the retro deep-fried camembert. **185 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe, (02) 9552 3406.**

With a cool Old World feel, **Badde Manors** (37 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe, (02) 9660 3797) has been dishing up good vego cafe food since 1982. Try the Moroccan vegie tagine or the corn, capsicum and coriander cakes. Another Glebe stalwart, **The Mixing Pot** (178 St Johns Rd, Glebe, (02) 9660 7449) has been drawing crowds to its vine-shrouded courtyard for close to 30 years. The gnocchi gorgonzola, linguine with prawns and scallops, and fried zucchini flowers are perennial favourites.

A few doors down, **Yuga Café** (172 St John Rd, Glebe, (02) 9692 8604) is a pretty spot for salads with a Japanese twist, such as green tea noodles with smoked salmon.

Turning out some of Sydney’s finest loaves, **Sonoma Bakery** (215a Glebe Point Rd, Glebe, (02) 9660 2116) is a temple to good bread. At this neat little cafe, choose from domes of soy and linseed (a favourite among Sydney’s top restaurants), nutty spelt and the giant miche loaf – a dense, dark round with a caramelised crust. They do a fine range of pastries, too.

newtown & erskineville  
OSCILLATE WILDLY

Oscillate Wildly hasn’t skipped a beat since wunderkind Daniel Puskas moved on, as new chef Karl Firla’s been quick to pick up the tempo. His eight-course menu is well-paced and perfectly balanced, peppered with the kind of excitement and flourish we’d come to expect from this petite bistro. On our visit, stand-outs included seared scallops with foie gras and hazelnut picada (garlicky fried breadcrumbs), slow-cooked egg with rye noodles and dried parsley powder, and an ingenious blend of poached pear, dark chocolate chantilly and celery sorbet for dessert. Clever stuff. **275 Australia St, Newtown, (02) 9517 4700.**

SUMALEE THAI AT THE BANK HOTEL

The backyard at the Bank Hotel used to be a ramshackle affair of teak cabanas and lush tropical gardens. Following a multi-million-dollar overhaul, fans feared Sumalee had lost its rustic charm. Now, a few years on, lanterns and bougainvillea have recaptured that holiday mood, and the food’s as fabulous as ever. If the panang beef is on, order up. Otherwise, opt for scallops with nahm jim, or the no-holds-barred heat of the jungle curry with cluster bombs of peppercorns. It’s packed on weekends, so sit out the wait in the hotel’s **Public Bar**; nab a stool by the window and watch King Street’s passing parade. Or venture upstairs to the **Velvet Room** for a cocktail in sleek surrounds. **324 King St, Newtown, (02) 8568 1900.**

THAI POTHONG

The menu, like the vibrant dining room, is massive, offering excellent staples such as massaman beef. It’s not on the menu, but ask for the choo chee snapper and you won’t be disappointed. And if you fall in love with that little elephant statue, you can buy one for yourself in their gift shop. **294 King St, Newtown, (02) 9550 6277.**

DELHI ‘O’ DELHI

In a town that’s known for its cheap-and-cheerful global flavours, Delhi ‘O’ Delhi stands out from the pack. Settle in to the smart dining room for aloo tikki chaat (potato and lentil patties in a yoghurt and tamarind sauce), excellent tandoori lamb, and the rich, spicy specialty of nehari goat. To finish, desserts of kulfi and gulab jamun (condensed milk dumplings) are fragrant with rose and cardamom. **3-13 Erskineville Rd, Newtown, (02) 9557 4455.**

For casual Indian, Malaysian and Sri Lankan bites, head to lively **Kammadhenu** (171 King St, Newtown, (02) 9550 2611) for generous dosai plates, authentic hoppers (Sri Lankan pancakes) and copper pots of blue swimmer crab curry or beef rendang.

**Faheem Fast Food** (196 Enmore Rd, Enmore, (02) 9550 4850) is a favourite with Sydney’s cabbies for Indian and Pakistani classics, such as fish tikka and the thick haleem (slow-braised lamb and lentils).

Other gems include **Tre Viet** (152 King St, Newtown, (02) 9516 5500) for roll-your-own rice paper rolls of prawn or chargrilled pork, and slender cha gio (crisp spring rolls served with fresh herbs, lettuce and pickled carrot). For Mexican, the informal **Guzman Y Gomez** (175 King St, Newtown, (02) 9517 1533) offers some authenticity with soft tacos and imported chillies, while you sip on a Smokin’ Hot margarita made with chilli-infused tequila. Alternatively, wait until dinner when the **Chocolate Dog Cafe** (549 King St, Newtown, (02) 9565 2526) heads south of the border and serves up a great chicken molé.

MADAME FLING FLONG

Hidden above **Soni’s** restaurant, Madame Fling Flong is Newtown’s best-kept secret. The decor sits somewhere between student pad and bordello chic, while the cocktail list offers plenty to delight – we love the flirty Madame’s Passion with vodka, lychee liqueur and passionfruit pulp. Downstairs serves tapas-style bites such as patatas bravas and roast polenta topped with goat’s cheese. Book on \$20 Tuesdays for a mezza plate and glass of wine or beer, before heading upstairs for a retro movie. **169 King St, Newtown, (02) 9656 2471.**

THE HIVE

It’s only been open a few months, but there’s already plenty of buzz about The Hive. Based on sustainable and community ideals, there’s nothing mainstream here. Boutique establishments pepper the wine and beer lists – their wonderfully hoppy E’ville Pilsner is brewed just down the road at the St Peters Brewery. Morsels to share include barbecued kangaroo skewers and ricotta-stuffed mushrooms. **93 Erskineville Rd, Erskineville, (02) 9519 9911.**

THE ROSE OF AUSTRALIA

Welcome to the local. The Rose is a pub without pretence, and just a little bit extra. Sit in the main bar for beer on tap and something from the all-day bistro (the hefty Rose burger is one of our favourites!) or head to the back bar for a fine range of tempting cocktails. **1 Swanson St, Erskineville, (02) 9565 1441.**



Clockwise from top right: Karl Firla and Ross Godfrey at Oscillate Wildly; Karl's poached pear, chocolate chantilly and celery sorbet; Oscillate's dining room; cocktails in The Bank Hotel's Velvet Room; a cool resort vibe at Sumalee Thai; Glebe Point Diner.





the guide.

CARLISLE CASTLE

Why can't all pub grub be like this? Set back from the hubbub of King Street, the Carlisle's bistro is run by Oscillate Wildly owner Ross Godfrey, providore Chris Sharp and former Pier chef Michael Carter, yet the food is honest – think pan-fried hapuka with potatoes, chorizo and watercress. **19 Abermarle St, Newtown, (02) 9557 4852.**

Around the corner, **The Courthouse Hotel** (202 Australia St, Newtown, (02) 9519 8273) has a lovely leafy beer garden, perfect for summer afternoon drinking.

SOUTH END CAFE

Down the Princes Highway end of King Street you'll find this bustling cafe. The menu hints at sisters Claudine and Mary's Middle Eastern background, so eggs are scrambled with mint and feta, fry-ups come with za'atar-roasted tomatoes, and the breakfast couscous with fruit makes a regular appearance on the specials board. **644 King St, Newtown, (02) 9517 1344.**

Score a seat in tiny corner cafe **Vargabar Espresso** (10 Wilson St, Newtown, (02) 9517 1932) and you'll be rewarded with excellent coffee and mocktail-style drinks, such as cranberry juice with lime and mint and a sprinkling of brown sugar.

Nearby, **Cafe Sofia** (7 Swanson St, Erskineville, (02) 9519 1565) is a popular weekend spot for BLTs, bircher muesli and good coffee. If you're a caffeine fiend, chances are you already know **Campus Coffee** (193 Missenden Rd, Newtown, (02) 9516 3361), so if you want a primo latte, or beans straight from the source, join the queue at this pint-sized shopfront.

BLACK STAR PASTRY

Christopher The's weaving a special kind of magic at this Newtown bolthole. The one-time pastry chef of Claude's opened this petite patisserie a year ago, and has been turning out delightful creations ever since. Come for a loaf of sourdough or flaky sausage roll, then leave loaded down with cute ginger ninjas, choc-caramel tarts with a little crown of sea salt flakes, or delicate elderflower cheesecakes with a stained-glass topping of grape jelly. **277 Australia St, Newtown, (02) 9557 8656.**

Newcomer **Buppa's Bakehouse** (482 King St, Newtown, (02) 8065 0681) bakes all of its North American-style goodies on site. Try the "drunk man's" muffin spiked with vodka and Kahlua, or a "death by chocolate" cookie with a gooey caramel heart. Enjoy them with coffee from a shiny red espresso machine called Roxy.

For a bargain feed you can't go past the sweet and savoury Maltese pastries at the **Pastizzi Cafe** (523 King St, Newtown, (02) 9519 1063). Buy them hot for \$1.80 each or grab a frozen bag to cook up at home.

**Fiji Market** (591 King St, Newtown, (02) 9517 2054) is a one-stop spice shop, with a huge range of curry pastes, pickles, chutneys, pulses, flours and exotic fruit and veg. Or cross the road to **Vinayak** (642a King St, Newtown, (02) 9550 6681) for Indian sweets from Maya in Surry Hills.

Small, but well-stocked, **The Deli** (110 Erskineville Rd, Erskineville, (02) 9557 2685) meets all your gourmet needs, with Hank's Jams, Udder Delights cheeses and organic loafs from Brasserie Breads.

annandale & leichhardt BISTRO ORTOLAN

From Leichhardt's Italian heart emerges this two-toqued French fine diner. Chef Paul McGrath's Michelin-star training is evident as he balances rich and light in dishes such as salt cod brandade on a fennel salsa, and seared scallops with caramelised sweetbreads and truffled potato. With crisp service and a strong wine list, Ortolan shines bright in its suburban location. **134 Marion St, Leichhardt, (02) 9568 4610.**

ELIO

For refined Italian, try Elio's smooth service and Australian-Italian vibe – think spaghetti marinara made with SA clams and WA prawns, or yoghurt pannacotta with fresh berries. The *tris di maiale* (trio of pork) is a star: juicy pork belly, a pork and fennel sausage and smoky scamorza cheese wrapped in speck. With parking at a premium on Norton Street, Saturday is a good night to dine here – Elio reserves free spots at a nearby garage; ask when booking. **159 Norton St, Leichhardt, (02) 9560 9129.**

Across the road, buzzy trattoria **Osvaldo Polletti** (148 Norton St, Leichhardt, (02) 9560 4525) is known for its rustic housemade pasta dishes, potato and ortica (stinging nettle) gnocchi with a sage butter sauce, and the exemplary tiramisu.

A few blocks away is busy **Frattini** (122 Marion St, Leichhardt, (02) 9569 2997), a Leichhardt stayer. Owner Tony Sama has been here for 17 years, and it's a family business – several sons can be seen manning the floor, and his wife, Anita, works in the kitchen. *Nonna*-style favourites include whitebait fritters, tender veal meatballs in fresh tomato sauce or spinach and ricotta dumplings; several desserts feature a light, dreamy, made-in-house mascarpone.

Hidden at the back of a car park, **Caffé Moretti** (47 Norton St, Leichhardt, (02) 9568 1354) may not be the most obvious eatery in Little Italy, but that doesn't stop crowds queuing for a spot in this noisy pizzeria. The woodfired oven pumps out fabulous thin-crust offerings, such as the Isabella with pork sausage, ricotta and spinach, or the diavola – order it with a side of chilli oil for a truly devilish kick.

**Zenobia** (102 Norton St, Leichhardt, (02) 9560 4131) is a favourite with groups for its belly dancers, cushion rooms and generous Lebanese banquets. Off the a la carte, the lamb mansaf is a stand-out.

For pre-prandial drinks or casual bites, pay a visit to the intimate **Vanilla Room** (153 Norton St, Leichhardt, (02) 9569 9411) for a sour apple martini and tapas plates of chorizo, olives or garlic prawns.

While you're in Leichhardt, stock up on pastas and sauces, Italian-style cheeses, salumi and olives (both cured and raw) at **Norton St Grocer** (Norton Plaza, Norton St, Leichhardt, (02) 9572 7511).

**AC Butchery** (Norton Plaza, Norton St and 174 Marion St, Leichhardt) offers a cracking range of snags, from classic pork and fennel to chicken with goat's cheese and rocket or duck, orange and pistachio.

Just up the road, **Glacé** (27 Marion St, Leichhardt, (02) 9569 3444) creates cool ice confections, from tubs of hokey pokey or cinnamon ice cream to adults-only sorbets of Campari and grapefruit or gin and tonic. They do wicked ice cream cakes, too.



Clockwise from top right: The Codfather; orange cakes with poached quince and Turkish figs at Black Star Pastry; South End Cafe; Black Star Pastry's Christopher The; local favourite Cafe Sofia; Deus Ex Machina's warehouse-like cafe.





## the guide.

### DA GIANNI TRATTORIA

Giovanni and Cinzia Spinazzola's dining room scores points for its smart setting of polished wood floors, clothed tables and vintage posters, and honest Italian fare. Come for the pancetta-wrapped quail, caramelle di zucca (lolly-shaped pasta filled with mascarpone and pumpkin), and chocolate semifreddo with blueberries. **127 Booth St, Annandale, (02) 9660 6652.**

### VICINI

The name, which means 'neighbour' in Italian, says it all really. Whether you're lingering over a brunch of pancakes with berry compote, popping in with kids for an early pizza dinner downstairs, or dining on smart Italian fare in the upstairs restaurant, this neighbourhood haunt fits the bill. **37 Booth St, Annandale, (02) 9660 6600.**

### REVOLVER

Rather than risk being labelled as just another funky Inner West cafe, newcomer Revolver's eclectic decor and antique crockery capture the history of the 116-year-old converted corner store, setting it aside from the rest. Morgan's Organic coffee blend is top notch, and sweet porcelain tea sets arrive with old-fashioned egg timers to ensure the perfect cup. For a real treat, try the wicked hot chocolate. Food-wise, 'Bec's awesome pan-toastie' lives up to its claim, and the just-baked muffins are outstanding. **291 Annandale St, Annandale, (02) 9555 4727.**

### DEUS EX MACHINA

East of Annandale, down Parramatta Road, you'll find this warehouse-like space, which started as an espresso counter at a motorcycle shop, but has turned into a cafe destination. Helmets compete with prams at communal tables, where huge breakfasts include dill-cured salmon with scrambled eggs and brioche, and slow-cooked Boston baked beans served with AC Butchery sausages. Lunch moves on to salads and roast meat ciabatta, while steak with red wine sauce is popular at dinner. It's no wonder Deus was just crowned Best Cafe in the *SMH Good Food Guide*. **98 Parramatta Rd, Camperdown, (02) 9519 3669.**

## enmore, stanmore & petersham

### THE CODFATHER

This neighbourhood diner rounds out the trinity for Ross Godfrey of Oscillate Wildly and Carlisle Castle, so you know you can expect clever, reasonably priced fare in comfortable surroundings. Chef Javier Carmona's short, seafood-focused menu plays joyfully with colour and texture – think barramundi with rocket, beetroot, citrus powder and pomegranate and a side of crispy polenta chips. Desserts range from classics, such as chocolate fondant, to exotic Turkish delight with sesame crunch and a cherry and rosewater snow cone. **83 Percival Rd, Stanmore (02) 9568 3355.**

### EMMA'S ON LIBERTY

Yes, it's hectic and loud, and it can be a tad tricky to squeeze onto the communal table, but once you try Emma's fab Lebanese fare (that's the matriarch herself in the kitchen) you'll understand why this eatery gets so cramped. Share plates of creamy dips, fried cauliflower with tahini, spicy sujuk sausage and the wicked Moorish chicken (sumac-dusted chicken in toasted Lebanese bread with garlic sauce). Finish with halva bouza – ice cream studded with sesame halva. **59 Liberty St, Enmore, (02) 9550 3458.**

Enmore's best woodfired pizzas are at **Melinzana** (289 Enmore Rd, Enmore, (02) 9516 1781). Try the namesake Melinzana with roasted vegies, feta, basil and semi-dried tomatoes. Gluten-free bases are available for a small extra charge.

### BUS STOP ESPRESSO

It's early days for Bus Stop Espresso, but all signs indicate that Donny Flaherty is on to a good thing. This family-friendly cafe fills a need for relaxed, yet switched-on dining down this end of town. Kids will love the toy section and chalkboard, while we'll be back for the top-notch coffee, newspaper-friendly tables, and the awesome bacon and egg toastie. **297 Enmore Rd, Enmore.**

If it's eggs you crave, travel up the road to **Scrambled** (205 Enmore Rd, Enmore, (02) 9519 5181), where you can have them poached, fried and, of course, scrambled, in every imaginable way.

### BIG BREKKY

Groovy cafes with good food aren't that plentiful in Petersham – but lack of competition isn't the only reason there can sometimes be a queue at Big Brekky. Friendly service, a menu that ticks all the boxes and great Campos coffee keep a 20-to-30-something crowd coming back for more. Try the pancakes with passionfruit butter and strawberries or challenge your appetite with the full breakfast fry-up. If you're just popping in for a coffee, it may take some willpower to resist the housemade slices and muffins. **316 Stanmore Rd, Petersham, (02) 9569 8588.**

### PETERSHAM CHARCOAL CHICKEN

This renowned take-away joint in the heart of Little Portugal lays claim to being the city's original charcoal chicken shop. You only have to see the hundreds of birds stacked like bricks to know this unprepossessing shopfront does a roaring trade. Bypass the tired looking salads in the glass display – the charcoal chickens with peri peri sauce are where it's at. The burgers, dripping with mayo and peri peri, aren't half bad either. **98 New Canterbury Rd, Petersham, (02) 9560 2369.**

If you want to dine in for Portuguese chook or pork belly, your best bet is to head a few doors up to the roomier **Silvas** (1/82 Canterbury Rd, Petersham, (02) 9572 9911). There's also the *espada a Madeirenses* – cubes of juicy beef served at the table on a dangerous-looking sword.

For divine desserts, pop across the road to **Sweet Belem** (35B/C New Canterbury Rd, Petersham, (02) 9572 6685), where Portuguese-born pastry chef Joao De Almeida creates fine pasteis de nata (custard tarts), white chocolate and praline slices and a stunning strawberry rose cake.

Just around the corner, modern Greek taverna **Perama** (88 Audley St, Petersham, (02) 9569 7534) is a popular choice for David Tsirekas' legendary pork belly baklava and flavoursome slow-braised meats.

For traditional bistro fare, **Blancmange** (1 Station St, Petersham, (02) 9568 4644) is a friendly corner spot that's good value for three courses at \$55 – choose the perfectly cooked fish and a classic brulee. **d.**