

# Italian inside out

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**A restaurant in a busy city laneway offers creative cuisine that's far from a passing fancy.**

MOST restaurants would kill for a view: over water, a skyline perhaps, awesome mountains, down a block or two of bustling city streets. It's a horizon thing. An outlook.

Then there's the flip side. The restaurant you look into. From the street. Passing by. Open front, shutters off, tables full. The action is all internal.

That's the first impression at Pranzo restaurant smack in the middle of the city's old finance sector close to the former stock exchange building.

It's laneway address is narrow but perennially busy with CBD workers scurrying between office and the Christmas retail honeypot of Rundle Mall and neighbouring arcades and streets. Pranzo is great for gazing outwards into the milieu and wonderful as well as a good perv inward, where smart-suited business and bureaucratic cliques gather to move their days and duties along over a breakfast, brunch, lunch or afternoon tea.

Two months ago, the restaurant suddenly branched out into the laneway, with a row of 10 tables under umbrellas - held down with huge cans of tomatoes and associated cooking products. These will be gone during this month while a permanent awning is built; the reality is that, just like on the television renovation shows, Pranzo, with its huge open-front windows, has nailed the trick of bringing the restaurant outdoors, and vice versa.

With the laneway expansion has come a genuine buzz to this Italian bistro - it's on the go from 7am every working day and positively hums for about two hours in the middle of the day before relaxing a bit over coffee and afternoon tea.

It looks and acts like a serious Italian bistro, with modern white-shirted, neck-tied and black-aproned waiting staff buzzing between close-set tables. The pace is snappy, assistance and delivery mature - many of the staff have done good years around the traps and give Pranzo a proper sense of prosperity and fine-tuning.

The same translates to the menu and wine list.

Pastas include pork ragu, pure whey ricotta and baby squid, and the exotic crabmeat, cognac, zucchini flower and black truffle. Risotti include baby pea, house cured pancetta and gorgonzola, and prawn, leek and saffron.

Pizzas stretch from pork and fennel sausage to medium-density, fresh tomato, basil and buffalo mozzarella margherita. They're good, tasty and fresh, and sit perfectly in a casual, pacy bistro vibe.

Specials are a triumph of blackboard brevity: they read as one-word triggers - pesce, agnolotto, pollo and the like so the waiters can explain their intricacies. There also are a dozen or so chalked-up wine specials, all interesting, by glass and bottle and well priced. The main drinks list is clever, well set out, with plenty of tempting boutique and artisan labels, lots by the glass, from light-bodied to full, and is particularly satisfying in the beer, aperitivo and digestivo departments. Table-set glassware is smart for serious wine appreciation.

Chef and co-owner Haydyn Fyfe has set up his menu for flexible and speedy lunchtime enjoyment, pasta, risotto and pizza sitting comfortably beside entrees like soused tommy ruff fillets on bruschetta with garlic aioli and piles of rocket. Apart from the daily specials and the Italian staples, three mains give the bigger eater extra choice: a half-kilo T-bone, cuttlefish with a couscous, rocket, lemon and olive salad, and char-grilled quails which come on a generous bed of braised radicchio and dressed with a fig vin cotto. The little birds are pink and tender, their gamy flavours well suited to the bitter braise underneath - it's full-on, earthy and well achieved.

Pesce - from the blackboard - is a char-grilled salmon, asked for and delivered rare on top of chunky pasta pieces known as fregola. All good.

Desserts, in the traditional Italian fashion, are simple and good. Digestivo Braulio Amaro and Averna Amara, served with ice and a marinating orange slice, are bracingly bitter - but with the cake make a magic marriage. That kind of synergy is the real skill at Pranzo - in an ambience that is natural, relaxed and completely satisfying.