

RESTAURANTS

WORDS FOOD EDITOR DAVID SLY

Pranzo

EXCHANGE PLACE, ADELAIDE



A SWIFT LUNCH IN THE HEART OF ADELAIDE'S BUSINESS district doesn't have to mean munching a baguette on the run. Pranzo, a smartly dressed Italian bistro on the ground level of a sober office block on the corner of Pirie St and Exchange Pl., appreciates that the modern city worker doesn't linger over lunch, but also wants a quality plate accompanied by a decent glass of wine. Hence, Pranzo's owners, Abdulla Daher and chef Haydn Fyfe, have made this their focus, only opening for daytime trading during the working week, from 7am to 5pm, for breakfast, lunch and good coffee in between.

Even amid the busy city bustle, the eatery looks inviting with its dark chocolate timber furnishings and clean, open frontage. In late 2006, the bistro took a giant leap by obtaining permission to place tables in the laneway it fronts – the realisation of a dream that many previous owners of this site had long harboured. It finally happened after intensive lobbying of the Adelaide City Council. The result is a smart extension of what already existed, though despite the café's full-length bi-fold glass windows allowing plenty of fresh air, Pranzo always had the feeling of being cramped for space. Now there's seating at 10 al fresco tables beneath a large canvas awning, separated from the passing pedestrians by large planter boxes. Spreading out the dining patrons has also ensured that the noise level inside – which had reached unpleasant heights – has calmed.

The menu covers the staples of Italian bistro food – bruschetta, pasta, risotto, mains, pizza and salads – but there are surprises, especially on the daily specials board. Diners can choose plain options, or exotic derivatives – pasta garganelli has crab meat, cognac, zucchini flowers and black truffle (\$19.90). Similarly, the pizza options rise above the ordinary – the carciofi combines artichokes, goat curd and roasted peppers (\$13.90).

The flavours are robust and the portions are generous. This becomes especially apparent in a range of Italian classics, including potato gnocchi with gorgonzola and spinach, or rigatoni with veal ragout. Risotto is plump and abundant, with the rustic flavours of braised rabbit, pancetta and sage making a deeply satisfying meal, while chargrilled quail on a braised radicchio salad with fig vincotto (\$22.90) has an appealing balance of rich and sharp flavours. Check the specials board for other Italian niceties such as pan fried chicken livers in pappardelle (\$22.90). Desserts include the favourites such as house-made panna cotta but a smart alternative is a cheese platter (\$15.90 for two) that the kitchen is brave enough to serve in perfect ripe condition – soft, oozing and with pungent odours and intense flavours.

While the café name translates to 'lunch' in Italian, Pranzo also does superior breakfast offerings; try Italian fruit toast with grilled banana, ricotta and orange blossom honey (\$9.90), bircher muesli (\$8.50) or ricotta hotcakes with poached berries, double cream and maple syrup (\$8.90).

The key to satisfying its time-poor city customers is slick service. The waiting staff look professional in their waistcoats and starched aprons, and act professional – with comprehensive knowledge of the menu and ingredients being used in the kitchen, and similar familiarity with the wine list, they are able to make appropriate recommendations and are prompt in taking orders and delivering plates without making the meal feel like a frantic rush. This very complete dining picture has been a smart work in progress for Abdulla over the past five years, working in partnership with Haydn since 2004. They realise that customers want quality, especially when time is tight – and they get the balance right. 