

This week we continue our journey around the region's lip smacking food alternatives with a visit to Criniti's, a much loved Italian institution

Dishes you cannot refuse



Samantha Day

FROM the backroom of Criniti's expansive Parramatta restaurant, customers are stared down upon by the likes of Tony Soprano, Don Corleone, Tony Montana and the guys from Goodfellas.

These blokes mean business... and so does Criniti's.

The Southern Italian restaurant has set the benchmark for Church St's restaurants since its doors first opened in 2003. Since then Parramatta's dining scene has transformed dramatically and Criniti's menu has grown and changed to keep up with the pace.

Criniti's pasta menu alone numbers 31, with pages of entrees, pizzas, salads, soups and grilled meats to follow.

There's a huge variety but executive head chef Ike Arimado said the focus remained on Southern Italian specialities.

"Our boss (Frank Criniti) is from Calabria in Southern Italy so we use a lot of seafood, tomatoes and authentic southern ingredients," he said. "These are homestyle dishes and we use basic, fresh produce so that our diners can taste each element of the food."

Italians are proud of their regional cuisine and heritage. Dishes differ in flavour, texture and produce in each of the country's 20 regions but one thing is constant - servings are generous and there is never a lack of flavour.

The difference between Northern and Southern Italian food is obvious to those who have travelled to the

country. Where Northerners indulge in meat, fresh pasta and butter or cream sauces, the South is characterised by seafood, soups and stews, dried pasta dishes and tomatoes.

At Criniti's, menu changes are suggested by Criniti who creates new dishes like the Sofia Loren (see recipe).

Though not Italian, Arimado's passion for what is arguably Australia's favourite cuisine is longheld. He moved to Sydney from the Philippines at 22 and, by 24, decided to pursue a career as a chef and has always specialised in Italian cooking.

"I love the aroma of Italian food and the fresh herbs. It's packed full of flavour but simple to cook. I think that's why people love it," he said.

Criniti's has expanded its empire into Darling Harbour but general manager Gaby Tannous insists it is still a good, old-fashioned Italian family business at heart.

"Mr Criniti's mother still comes in here to make the meatballs and show us a thing or two in the kitchen," he said.

Each week, Tannous said the restaurant goes through 100kg of penne pasta and spends \$35,000 a month on fresh seafood.

Though neither Tannous nor Arimado have been to Italy, they dream of visiting the country one day.

"This restaurant is my little Italy until then," said Arimado.

* Do you have a restaurant whose recipes you want to try? Contact us at parramatta.advertiser@wherelive.com.au

CRINITI'S LINGUINE SOFIA LOREN

SERVES 4

You'll need

- 400g linguine
- 12 scampi
- 4 cloves garlic, sliced
- 20 cherry tomatoes
- 150ml olive oil
- 2 tsp bottled pesto, or make fresh
- Handful Italian parsley, roughly chopped
- Pinch Gourmet Vegeta
- Pinch sea salt flakes
- Pinch garlic salt
- Aluminium foil



METHOD:

- 1: Preheat oven to 200C.
- 2: Bring a large pot of salted water to boil, add pasta and cook 'al dente' or according to packet directions.
- 3: Heat a large pan with half the chilli oil and half the olive oil.
- 4: Add garlic, cherry tomatoes and scampi.

When scampi is cooked add basil pesto and parsley.

5: Add cooked pasta and season with the Vegeta, salts and parsley. Mix well with tongs.

6: Pour pasta from pan on to the aluminium foil and wrap into a bag-like shape.

7: Allow mixture to steam in oven for a minute or two. Remove and serve.

* This recipe has not been tested by the Advertiser.