

DINING DILEMMAS

CONQUERTHE CO-OP

I don't know about you, but I fancy myself as a bit of an ethical shopper. I buy ethical produce; I care about provenance; I shop at Farmers' Markets; and I even remember my canvas bags every now and then. Why is it then, that the humble co-op is such a sticking point for me? I have walked past **Alfalfa House Community Food Cooperative** on Enmore Road so many times, but somehow I've never entered. For some reason it felt intimidating cliquey, not really aimed at me...

Last week I finally gathered the guts to go in and see what makes

this place so successful. To my relief Co-op Coordinator Adam Taylor and the hemp-dressed women shopping inside didn't look at me as if I was yuppie scum! Adam took me around the wide range of products on offer, showed me where to wash my hands before touching them, and reminded me to bring my own containers next time I come to stock up!

As Adam explains, the team at Alfalfa House work to "become part of the community because they don't want people to feel that this is just a store." One of the ways they encourage this is by offering a 25% discount for a couple of



hours of your time - stocking shelves, designing flyers, recycling whatever takes your fancy

As Adam points out, at first buying their mostly organic products "might cost a bit more than conventional produce, but with the discount it might even work out to be cheaper!" Definitely a good way forward if you're one of those folk who'd like to buy organic but feel you can't afford to. For me, I'm happy to pay more for guaranteed provenance, and at Alfalfa House, "there's always a connection made with the farm." You might even meet one of those farmers in the store! www.alfalfahouse.org

DITCH DIP DODGING

With the financial screws still

reasonably tight, if you're anything like me, some of the tasty extras have dropped out of the trolley during your weekly shop. Dips were among the first thing to go. In terms of price, they're up there with the Kohu Road Golden Syrup Ice Cream gone but not easily forgotten! When you think about it, dips are expensive, considering they rarely constitute a whole meal, and a few scoops into most tubs I usually wish I'd chosen better.

With Paradise Beach **Purveyors** dips though, you can ditch dip dodging forever! Each tub is devoured in this household from beginning to end. Their very sensible flavours even compliment meals - try the Pesto Swirl tossed through pasta. Plus they've taken

out the Most Successful Dib Exhibitor 2011 and Champion Dip categories for the third time at the **Sydney Royal**. I'm totally obsessed with their *Caramelised* Onion Swirl. www.paradisebeach.ws

DON'T RUIN ROO

Roo

By now we've all eaten a bit of 'roo in a restaurant, but it seems not all that many of us pick it up when we visit the butcher. For me, part of the problem is not having a cultural memory of kangaroo favourites, like I do for lamb, pork and beef. While my mouth is always going to water over a pork roast with crackling, I need some good ideas and a bit of reassurance that I'm not going to just ruin a nice bit of roo.

You'll find both in the glossy magazine-format Roocipes. Not only does it contain an easy list of how long to cook each cut (kangaroo fillets are only three or four minutes each side for medium rare), there's also a bunch of great recipe ideas. There's even some surprising applications which I managed to try at a kangaroo luncheon at Bondi's Kam Fook. The eye-opening meal, which was dubbed by one participant as What's Up Skip? Want to Be A Wonton? really showcased how well kangaroo lends itself to Asian cuisine. It's so lean, there's no more furry tongue after wonton noodle soup! You'll find Chef Darren Ho's excellent Kangaroo Char Sui Bao recipe in the book. www.rirdc.gov.au

ROOCIPES

Tokonoma *NEW*

Sink into an intimate booth in this lush. organic womb with a view. The earthy tones and clever wall of lentils art piece inclined me toward a deep brown Rockin Expresso Martini (\$19) with salted caramel liqueur and espresso rock candy With that itch scratched, it was easy to



leave myself in the hands of the sake sommelier for an educational exploration of sake matching; the best being the Shirakabegura (\$11/60ml) with the robata grilled Scallops with Pickled Apple, and Jalapeno Garlic (\$18.80). The neighbouring kitchen at Toko turns out equally good hot and cold offerings, so create your own degustation alternating between standouts like fluffy pillows of Morton Bay Bug Tempura (\$22.80) and sensuous morsels of Scampi Nigiri with Foie Gras and Truffle Óil (\$16.80). Zingy (and pleasantly bite-sized) Wasabi, Kingfish, Ikura and Coriander Maki Rolls (\$12.40) help avoid that awkward moment when half your roll lands in the soy bowl. Even menu stalwarts like the Duck Breast with Sansho Pepper and Pickled Nashi Pear (\$28.80) have benefited from the modern Japanese expertise of new chef Regan Porteus; who cut his teeth with Rainer Becker at the hyper-trendy, internationally famous Zuma. Incredibly, Tokonoma's more stylish dining room avoids its sibling's no-bookings policy, so line up your own secluded alcove today!

490 Crown Street, Darlinghurst (02) 9357 6100 www.toko.com.au Modern Japanese \$\$\$\$

\$ - mains less than \$15 \$\$ - mains between \$15-\$22 \$\$\$ - mains between \$22-\$30 \$\$\$\$ - mains over \$30

DARLO, KINGS X & SURRY HILLS

Glistening Brazilian passadores man the *churrasco* before a backlit image of Christ the Redeemer, Rodizio (\$39.50/head) includes a range of sides like tasty black beans and the super-sweet bananas, and a steady stream of skewers. My highlights were the tender chicken hearts, tasty pork neck, beef rib and the amazing mushrooms, as well as the newer entries, which include golden hunks of haloumi and beef with Gorgonzola sauce. Salty food makes cocktails necessary, so throw down a Passionfruit Caipirinha (\$14) or a fresh lime Caipiroska (\$12). Wrap up with tiny balls of condensed milk
- Beijinho (\$2) - so good they must be illegal.

219 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst (02) 8084 2151 www.churras.com.au Brazilian \$\$\$

Jazz City Diner Dan McGuirt's (Vue du Monde) neodiner serves up exciting New Orleans inspired, deconstructed modern American cuisine. As well as the requisite burgers and sliders (mini-burgers) you'll find texturally exciting

New England Clam Chowder (\$15) and a quartet of Creole Starters (\$16) with smoky seafood jambalaya, classic French onion soup, a fried oyster and a banana milkshake. Have a *Jackie Brown* moment with the Chicken and Waffles (\$16), or eat cheesy grits under Coca Cola Braised Beef Short Ribs (\$22). Dan keeps the gooey Banana Cream Pie (\$6) nicely intact. Picturesque setting with classic iazz movies on tableside screens. retro uniforms & table rails.
238 Crown Street, Darlinghurst (02) 9332 2903 www.jazzcitydiner.co

ROCKS & CBD

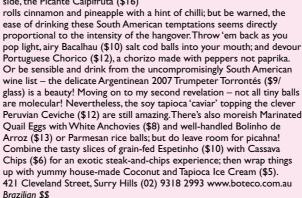
China Doll

Scottish-born Chinese chef Frank Shek dishes up playful contemporary Asian food at this undeniably popular Finger Wharf entry. There's thick, fatty BBQ Lamb Ribs (\$22) against tangy chilli lime, and meaty Fremantle Octopus (\$18). Best of the lot is the Sashimi of Hiramasa Kingfish and Ocean Trout (\$26) speckled red with blackened chilli, and the incredible Penang Curry of Wagyu Beef Shin (\$36). The Steamed Dumplings (\$20) may not have the thinnest skin in town, but they certainly pack in the most flavour! For refreshments try a clever Ling Ling (\$17) or a 2009 Peter Lauer Fass Trocken Riesling (\$13/

glass). 4/6 Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo (02) 9380 6744

Boteco *NEW*

It may come as a surprise, but not all Brazilian has to be an endurance test in protein consumption. Petiscos or 'tasty foods' at this small bar accentuate an excellent list of cocktails including Sydney's best Pisco Sour (\$16). On the sweete side, the Picante Caipifruta (\$16)



www.chinadoll.com.au
Pan Asian \$\$\$\$

INNER WEST (Pyrmont/Balmain Leichhardt/Glebe)

Deus Cafe

At night the broad communal tables house a mix of locals and families of the ill, looking for convenience and comfort. The Lamb Back Strap, Potato Gratin, Peas and Broad Beans (\$30) provides this in spades. Equally good is the Pork Medallions (\$28) set on a fine white onion puree. Serves allow for three courses with sides like a Rocket. Pear and Fennel Salad (\$10). I'd skip the paltry four Scallops with Pernod Eschallot Butter (\$18) in favour of a more satisfying Charcuterie with Terrine (\$18). Wine list is small and easy-drinking, exemplified in a 2008 Flametree Chardonnay (\$42/bottle). 98-104 Parramatta Road, Camperdown (02) 9519 3669 www.deus.com.au
Café/Breakfast/Modern Australian \$\$\$

NEWTOWN & ENVIRONS (Marrickville/Petersham/ Dulwich Hill/Waterloo)

The Eathouse Diner

Despite attracting the instinctively hip, this organically kitsch diner decked puts out a come-as-you-are vibe.
Throw back a fruity and rich Espresso

Martini (\$14.50) or an even better Pine Mint Margarita (\$14.50), before an Oyster Shot with Chilli Salsa (\$3.50) to get things started. Move on to the generous Duck Liver Pate (\$18) with sweet'n'sour onions and charred *Sonoma* bread. For pleasing Caribbean comfort, try the Jerk Spatchcock with Bean'n'Rice (\$27), or share a bowl of chewy Caramel Pork Hock (\$22) with hazelnuts, watercress and apple. Save room for the excellent Banana Split (\$9) with hidden blobs of wicked dulce de leche. 306 Chalmers Street, Redfern (02) 8084 9479 eathousediner.com.au World \$\$-\$\$\$

Let's Eat Thai

This small, unassuming Marrickville restaurant boasts food that's anything but. Chef Polawat Danphasukul has Thai mover-and-shaker Spice I Am in his pedigree. Begin with an all-natural blended ice beverage - Lime Refresh (\$4) - and superbly tender Grilled Pork Skewers (\$5.90/4) marinated overnight. Exciting house specialities include a textural Nam Khao Tod (\$13.90) crispy rice salad and tenderly stewed beef shin in a house-made curry paste called Neu Pad Cha (\$15.90) resplendent with pea-sized baby Thai eggplants. Great produce continues with juicy lime-green beans in the Pad Prik King with Crispy Pork Belly (\$15.90) and a wonderfully seasonal dessert of Sticky Rice with Mango (\$7.50). Under-priced, over-

Chophouse *NEW*

It shouldn't surprise that the restaurant that dished up Michael McGurk's last meal, is a men's meat and greet club. Stellar waiter Adrian Chambers hints Thursday lunchtime is the preferred timeslot for tableside wheeling, dealing, and bloody good steaks - the 400g Dry Aged Delmonico 2+ (\$48) being a particular beauty. It



just melts in your mouth with all the complexity of a great red wine. If you've managed to slip in at night wearing a skirt, the Dark Ale Marinated Wagyu Flank (\$26) is a manageable proposition, weighing in at 200g. Whilst the cut itself is chewy, it's also packed with flavour and enticing notes of Little Creatures White Rabbit, piri-piri and chimichurri. The accompanying lemon is overkill. Despite being a temple of meat, entrees are surprisingly delicate, suiting a top 2006 Foxeys Hangout Chardonnay (\$68/bottle). The pretty lil' Fig and Jamon Salad (\$18.50) outperforms the Ceviche of Hiramasa Kingfish (\$18) dotted with Avruga caviar by a whisker. Neither kill your appetite, though a chopped salad of Crisp Pork Belly and Sea Scallop (\$19.50) might, so densely dotted is it with nicely-cooked proteins! Despite bursting at the seams, the Alpine Strawberries and Cream (\$8.50) verrine makes me smile before I back slowly out of bloke's world – alive.

25 Bligh Street, Sydney (1300) 246 748 www.chophouse.com.au

Steakhouse \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

352 Illawarra Road, Marrickville (02) 9558 9508 Thái \$-\$\$

EASTERN SUBURBS & BEACHES

Vacanza Pizzeria

Despite the all-round excellence of Nick Gilbert's pizzas, I'm going to remember this spot for the ripper Roma Baked Lasagne (\$18) and the Tiramisu (\$10) made with Italian Mascarpone and Single Origin Coffee. As for the pizzas, the dough here leaves most pizzerias for dead. Crunchy, chewy, tasty and charred in an *Amalfi* stone oven. Toppings take the sparing Italian route – try a fiery red Diavola (\$19) with chilli, olives and hot Calabrese Salami, or a white base De Matteo (\$23) bearing Italian sausage, fior di latte and porcinis. Well priced wine including a bone-dry Babo Pinot Grigio (\$39) from Italy by an Aussie winemake 261 Bronte Road, Charing Cross

(02) 9090 2089 www.vacanzapizzeria.com.au Pizza/Italian \$\$

Mamasan

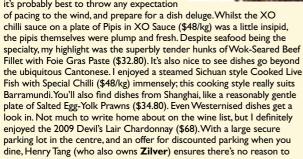
Bondi's only venue for yum cha gets it spot on, day and night, serving up a form of Asian Tapas with new flavours given to old recipes. Try King Prawn and Mint Spring Rolls (\$13) – lightly deep-fried and using the whole prawn. Traditional Yum Cha specialties like BBQ Pork Buns (\$8) ooze with flavour, while leafy steamed Chinese Broccoli (\$9.80) comes covered in Oyster sauce. Taiwanese Beef and Chive Dumplings with Sichuan Sauce (\$15) are so fresh you can smell the sesame oil from the kitchen. Drink from an adventurous list of Asian fusion cocktails like the lychee and sake punch, Lychee Sau Wau (\$16). 57-59 Beach Road, Bondi (02) 9130 5066 www.mamasan.com.au Yum Cha \$-\$\$

Klaus's Brasserie

The menu at the Paddo RSL is splattered with Germanic delights. Weiner Schnitzels, liver, brains and sauerkraut are amongst the choices, all served in a modern, Western manner with pub-style chips. Eschewing the Germany-meets-New-York-City creation that is the Rueben sandwich, I tried the Pan Fried Crumbed Lamb Cutlets (\$26.00/4) served with a salad of shredded carrot and cabbage reminiscent of coleslaw. My dining partner went for the healthy sounding option of Grilled Fresh Saltwater Barramundi Fillet (\$28.50). To me, health is relative to size and since this fish was relative to size and since this hish was as big as a shoe, it didn't matter that it was only lightly grilled in oil.
Paddington RSL Club, 220-232
Oxford Street, Paddington (02) 93312833 www.paddorsl.com.au
Pub Bistro/European \$\$\$

The Eight *NEW*

The number eight symbolises luck and wealth to the Chinese, so expect to find it woven into the carpet, twisted into screens, and repeated in the menu and phone number of this barn-like 750-seater. With the kitchen serving so many people, it's probably best to throw any expectation



eat bad suburban Chinese ever again.
Level 3, Market City, 9-13 Hay Street, Sydney (02) 9282 9988 www.theeightrestaurant.com.au

Chinese \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Ruby L'otel *NEW* **By Alex Harmon**

A working-class pub with a feminine touch: this Rozelle 'local' had a suffrage movement makeover. I dived into the Soft Shell Tacos (\$20/4) choosing chicken, beef, fish and lamb, but wanting more. Mental note: aim for *Taco*Tuesday when they're a mere \$3 each. They're fresh, open and look like a floral median strip waiting to be demolished. Reach for the Salsa Picante (which literally means 'to sting')

for a true taste of South-East Mexico. And washed down with a Hahn Superdry (\$5.20) for that fire-blanket in your mouth experience. The Thai Beef Salad (\$17.50) is a pyramid of flavour with succulent, rare beef slices stacked with cherry tomatoes, cucumber slithers, chilli and peanuts. For something off the beaten track (most likely off the *Texas Turnpike*) I tried the Deep Fried Pickles with Ranch Sauce (\$9). Ugly food that is surprisingly tasty - although it will probably fade into the 'where are they now' food group where deep-fried Camembert and Mars disappeared. If the menu is sounding familiar it's because it's the same brains behind the uber-trendy Norolk in Surry Hills. I dare say this is their less popular cousin, but with its stunning outdoor atrium and chilled patrons, it could stand the test of times

68 Victoria Road, Rozelle (02) 9555 1900 www.rubylotel.com.au Pub Bistro \$\$

Big Brekky *NEW*

There's no denying the popularity of this inner west breakfast specialist; so if you dine on the weekend, you should come prepared for a wait. The locals come for heaving plates o good produce, like the signature Big Brekky (\$18). Perched like a mountain on Sonoma bread are scrambled eggs, whole cherry tomatoes, an



undercooked slab of potato gratin, tasty mango chutney, bacon, and chicken and rocket chipolatas that are so good I suspect they come from local standout AC Butchery. A plate of Corn Fritters (\$16.50) is also abundant. The fritters themselves are bursting with juicy sweet kernels of corn, but could have benefited from seasoning – in fact both plates could have. An errant coffee order eventually resulted (after questioning) in a Campos Latte (\$3.30) that tasted burnt. Juices, like a vibrant Carrot, Mint and Ginger (\$6) fared much better. Venturing back on another occasion to try the sweeter offerings was similarly hit-and-miss. An over-sweet plate of French Toast with Banana, Caramel Sauce and Caramel Pecans (\$14) came dotted with large, sugary clumps. Further investigation revealed they disguised pecans. Do us a favour: if an element doesn't work in the kitchen, don't put it on the plate. 316 Stanmore Road, Petersham (02) 9569 8588