

FOODIES' DIARY

A Chef At Your Abode

It's not every day you're given the opportunity to have a two-hatted chef like Thomas Johns in your kitchen, but with his latest venture, **Dining Abode** www.diningabode.com.au that's exactly what he's offering. Gather a group of friends together for a big night in and you'll be joining the likes of "Frank Lowy, Elizabeth Garbacz and architect husband Yap Limsen (responsible for QVB restoration and Capital Theatre), Wolfie Pizen (respected restaurateur and previous owner of Wolfie's Grill, Italian Village etc in Circular Quay), John Hemmes (father of Justin Hemmes) and the Mayor of Woollahra." Customers from his old East Sydney restaurant Pello have also joined the client list, including a lucky group of twenty he took a "four hour trip down South to cook for". So why not try your luck with any special requests!

It's an entirely different experience than cooking in the same restaurant kitchen night in, night out. In recent times Thomas had cooked at everything from "a very mellow setting playing classical music to a lively bunch jumping around to Justin Timberlake and Jay Z." He has



fond memories of "a surprise fortieth at a Penthouse Hotel Room." So far he hasn't been propositioned, but he has been asked "to dine, check out an internet bid, been given house tours and plenty of alcohol offers during the course of the night." Whatever happens, Thomas says he "always make a point of sitting with guests and chatting after all the food has gone out" – but only if he's invited of course. Once you've gathered a bunch of



friends to enjoy restaurant quality food in your own home, the toughest part will be choosing your menu. Thomas is understandably proud of all of his dishes, but he did let on that the most popular mains "are the snapper with bouillabaisse sauce and the five spice duck with bitter orange". So far the most popular dessert is the "coconut pannacotta with passionfruit foam and lychee sorbet for a light and tangy tropical end to the meal." I think that looking over at my kitchen and knowing Thomas Johns was in there cooking up a storm would be sweet enough for me.

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

INNER WEST
(Pyrmont/Balmain/
Leichhardt/Glebe)

Le Pain Quotidien
I frequent this cafe on sun-drenched afternoons for their Toasted Ham and Cheese Croissant (\$7.95), perched on an artist's palette with a trio of mustards. I'm also partial to Banana Bread (\$5) and a well-made Iced Coffee (\$5.50). When hungry but indecisive, I have grazed across their platters - the Board of Fine Cheeses (\$19.95) includes Gruyère, mild brie and a Fourme d'Ambert blue; the Charcuterie Platter (\$19.95) involves pate and a good assortment of cold meats. Both came with a generous selection of rustic breads and suited a surprisingly accessible Hunter Valley Rosemount Show Reserve Chardonnay (\$8/glass, \$36/bottle).
54 Norton Street, Leichhardt (02) 9564 0099 www.lepainquotidien.com French/Café \$\$\$

The Balkan Grill
Climb the stairs from Norton Street to this (much needed) cultural interloper with a wide covered balcony and reasonable prices. Sasha Aleksander (Taste of Brazil) helps ensure grilled meat like tender lumps of skewered lamb Raznjici (\$19) are a highlight. Mushroom Dumplings (\$8.50) topped with sour cream and onions

NEW
Fujiyama
One of the first things I seek out after changing suburbs is a local sushi place - I'm a sucker for a raw fish fix at least once a week. This tiny restaurant has been my local for the past three years, and I am pleased to say their quality has improved during this time. I've not had a tastier tempura than their King Prawn Tempura (\$9.00/5 pieces) - I put it down to the quality of their prawns rather than anything extra in the light, crunchy batter. A Salmon Sashimi (\$8.00/5 pieces) stands you in good stead; though of late it's all been about the tuna. A Large Sashimi Box (\$22) is a lovely lunch - no exotics, just Kingfish, Salmon and deep red, super-fresh Tuna. As the sun sinks lower in the sky, this tiny restaurant ramps up, so expect a short wait for a table. Well-intentioned Japanese staff always try to do their best; apologising profusely if they spy you waiting for something. My dining companion and I (confirmed sushi fans) struggled to finish a nicely presented Family Sushi Boat (\$35) of California rolls, prawn, inari (tofu), kingfish, crab, tuna and salmon nigirizushi (hand-formed sushi) with our BYO before walking home - the joy of eating local!
123 Norton St, Leichhardt (02) 9518 1918 Japanese \$\$



are surprising, add a refreshingly simple Cabbage Salad (\$4.50/small) for balance. If you like to graze, the Balkan Antipasta Platter (\$12.50) of dips, salads and cevapcici (skinless sausage) is great. Drink exclusive beers like Hoegaarden, Asahi or Fat Yak (\$4-\$6.50) on tap, or a decent Cape Campbell Pinot Gris (\$8/glass, \$45/bottle).
The Zoo Bar, Level 1, 55 Norton Street, Leichhardt (02) 9564 1777 www.thezoobar.com.au Central European \$\$

Revolver
Rod Jones (Cafe Niki) has opened the hip, local cafe of my dreams in the genteel surrounds of a quiet Annandale back street - think

refitted general store, antiques and a great young chef, Rebecca Chippington. I enjoyed her gently cooked Scrambled Eggs with Avocado, Tomato and Fetta Salsa (\$12); her lean and lovely Ultimate Cheeseburger with Dijonaise Potato Salad (\$14); and her fabulous House-Made Granola (\$9.50) with fruit, orange reduction and Evia gelatine-free yoghurt. Enjoy one of Rod's Mum's sublime Choccy Melting Moment (\$3.50) with a well-made (Morgan's) Coffee (\$3.20) or a lovely house-blended tea like Carnival (\$4) with papaya and coconut.
291 Annandale Street, Annandale (02) 9555 4727 Cafe \$

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