

REVIEW \



The Big Brekkie



FOOD \ MARIA HARRIS REVIEWS A DON'T-MISS MISS

MISS MARIE is the newest café on Rosanna's gastronomic scene. The café, near the end of the Beetham Parade shopping strip, opened on January 5 and in just a few weeks has established itself as the go-to place for big breakfasts, brunch, lunch and all-day coffee.

It is a welcome addition to the local pizza and fish-and-chip shops and follows another newcomer, Byzantine, which opened last year.

Step inside Miss Marie and you could be forgiven for thinking you are in trendy Northcote.

The place is buzzing. About 50 people are seated at timber tables and at two tables on the footpath.

On the sound system the Who are belting out *My Generation*, but this generation does not seem to be listening. The diners are simply eating, and drinking coffee in its many styles.

Miss Marie gets its name from Vanessa Marie Laratta.

"My husband wanted to call it after me, but I was not going to use my first name so it became Miss Marie," says Laratta.

Husband Paul Parrella, an accountant-turned-restaurateur, grew up in Blackburn. He spent six years at La Porchetta in Ivanhoe.

Laratta, who, like her husband, is of Italian heritage, grew up in Rosanna. The couple have watched the suburb change and become popular with young families.

"We wanted to bring good coffee and good food to Rosanna. It's like a bit of Northcote in Rosanna," she says.

Or South Yarra. Just ask the woman who recently moved from South Yarra and couldn't believe her luck when she discovered Miss Marie. Now she has coffee there every day.

Miss Marie appeals to all generations.

"We aim to create a 'good-time vibe' for friends and family to enjoy good company, coffee and food," says Laratta. That vibe includes music from the 1950s, '60s and '70s with artists such as Van Morrison, Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding. (I knew this was my sort of place.)

A group of young mums, with babes in arms, pushers or high chairs, sits at the communal table up the front. At the communal at the back of the café, two students are discussing their recent university offers over chocolate and walnut brownies. Mature women are having lunch, along with shoppers, local business people and families with young children.

Miss Marie is surfing the popular industrial-chic

Top and top choice: Chocolate and walnut brownie.

Anyone for coffee? Well, yes, about 200 a day. (DARRIAN TRAYNOR)

retro wave. The two communal tables are made from recycled timber sourced from a South Australian woolshed. Customers sit on 1970s chairs, bought on eBay, from an old church hall in New South Wales. There are polished concrete floors, single light bulbs hanging from cords suspended from the ceiling and green enamel light shades salvaged during a local supermarket renovation. Even the bar is made from recycled timber.

The breakfast menu offers 14 dishes. Eggs can be poached, fried or scrambled. They are served with bread from Noisette, the boutique bakery in Port Melbourne.

The menu runs the whole gamut of breakfast egg dishes from the Big Brekkie, the Veg Brekkie, to Miss Benedict and something called Hey Bloke. With two eggs, bacon, local Italian sausage, potato crush and homemade relish on toast, Hey Bloke is a favourite with ... er, blokes.

Ricotta hotcakes feature prominently, as do muesli and homemade baked beans.

The other side of the menu offers a range of pides and sandwiches from BLT – bacon, lettuce and tomato – through to herb and parmesan-crumbed chicken.

The lunch menu is limited to six dishes. It includes a soup of the day, two salads, slow-cooked beef, pan-seared salmon and a bowl of chips.

I started with pumpkin soup, delivered to the table in a simple white bowl. It was served with a dollop of sour cream in the centre, topped with a sprig of fresh thyme. The smooth, creamy texture of the soup was like velvet. Almost as good was wiping the bowl with the Noisette sourdough.

The pan-seared salmon arrived looking like a piece of art: the salmon on a mound of smashed potatoes, avocado fanned out on one side, roasted tomatoes on the other and salad greens on top of the salmon. Served with dill and caper sour cream, the salmon could have had a crispier skin for my taste, but the flesh was moist and pink.

Sweets lovers can choose from a range of homemade cakes and muffins, which changes daily. I can highly recommend the warm chocolate brownie with cream.

Caffeine addicts are well catered for with Five Senses coffee. Paul Parrella is on the coffee machine and makes up to 200 coffees a day. Nine types of Chamellia organic tea are on the menu. There are also soft drinks and juices.

Miss Marie might be the new kid on the block, but all signs point to it being a stayer in this growing centre for foodies. \

mharris@theweeklyreview.com.au

verdict A hip newcomer. Miss Marie has a limited but well thought-out menu, with generous servings and smooth, friendly service. Chef Luke Dixon makes his own relishes. Hollandaise sauce and muffins are made fresh daily. Miss Marie gets a big tick for sourcing bread and almond croissants from Noisette. The chocolate and walnut brownie is a winner, as are the Fives Senses Dark Horse blend coffee and the moderate prices. Miss Marie is great for a quick coffee or muffin or for a family lunch.

eat this

Miss Marie
45 Beetham Parade, Rosanna

Phone \ 0409 851 486 (Paul Parrella)

Head chef \ Luke Dixon, supported by chef Kristy Daly

Prices \ Breakfast \$5-\$16; pides & sandwiches \$8-\$11; lunch \$5-\$16.50

Open \ Monday-Friday 7.30am-4pm; Sat-Sun 8am-4pm

Miss Marie opened in January and immediately struck a chord with locals who are streaming through the doors. Owners Paul Parrella and Vanessa Laratta did their research well when they figured Rosanna was ready for a funky café. Handmade timber tables on metal legs and old church hall chairs add to the atmosphere. Old-fashioned Italian coffee pots from Vanessa's mother sit on a shelf behind the bar. A timber door, sourced from a junkyard, hangs horizontally on the back wall of the café. The type of coffee and the range of teas being served are listed on a blackboard panel in the door. Watch out for a specials board, which is coming soon.

