

## MY BAD... VALENTINE

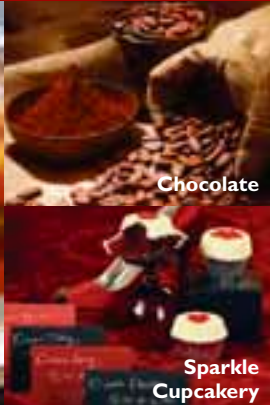
Transvison Vamp sang it best: "I guess it never really ends, it just comes around again." Another year is over and we're back in the lead up to Commercial Exploitation Day er... I mean Valentine's Day. It's not that I'm anti-love - really! I just happen to think that ANY night is a good night to take the one that you love to a restaurant. Truth be told, any night bar Christmas is probably a better one to dine than the 14th February, 2011. However it is on the social calendar, and if you need an excuse to re-energise your love life like a little chocolate/flower envy at the office or a saucy dinner invitation, who am I to dissuade you?



Manly Pavilion



Aperitivo



Chocolate

Sparkle Cupcakery



Helm Bar



Club Intercontinental

Start with half a dozen cupcakes from **Sparkle Cupcakery**. At my office, eyes got wide at the little raspberry flavour surprises at the bottom of the **Raspberry Red Velvet** cupcakes, and even wider at the **Black Velvet** cupcakes with dribbly dark Belgian chocolate topping. Plus they come in silver and black boxes designed to inspire envy. [www.sparklecupcakery.com.au](http://www.sparklecupcakery.com.au)

Fast track to Paris with a top end, five-course **Vive L'Amour Degustation (\$130/head, \$170/with wine)** at the **InterContinental Sydney**. After chowing down on *Avruga Caviar*, a Club InterContinental

room wouldn't go astray. Your \$575 outlay grants you access to the spiffy lounge with deluxe brekky, a variety of tea services and extensive twilight drinks. Sex will be a shoo-in. [www.sydney.intercontinental.com](http://www.sydney.intercontinental.com)

Waterside locations are popular for one very good reason - you can up the ante by arriving by boat. Higher points of course go to boats that don't operate on timetables. All that boating is hot work, so a champagne on the balcony at **Manly Pavilion** will be necessary (and complimentary) before their four course **Valentine's Day Set Menu**

**(\$130/head)**. [www.manlypavilion.com.au](http://www.manlypavilion.com.au)

Another way to inject a little magic might be with the progressive dishes of Tomislav Martinovic. **Tomislav's** balcony also overlooks Kings Cross, which leads me to suggest a little post-dinner shopping at **Risque Boutique** after you've eaten his freshly shucked oysters and gobbled his infamous **Chocolate & Coconut Bar** for \$125/head. [www.tomislav.com.au](http://www.tomislav.com.au) [www.risqueboutique.com](http://www.risqueboutique.com)

If the prices thus far are giving you shivers, head on down to

**Aperitivo** where Head chef Joe Cavallo will give you six-courses of seafood and seasonal produce bang for sixty bucks apiece. Drink from their selection of great cocktails, or explore their wide-ranging wines. [www.aperitivo.com.au](http://www.aperitivo.com.au)

**NOW IF V-DAY FILLS YOU WITH HORROR, HERE'S SOME OTHER SEXY STUFF YOU MIGHT ENJOY:**

Drink wine in hot pants with **Natural Selection Theory** on Saturday 12th February from 4-6pm at The Factory, 2-8 Parsons Street, Rozelle. They're tasting new wines from Tom Shobbrook, James

Erskine, Sam Hughes and Anton Van Klopper whilst wearing hot pants. I do not fully understand the connection between these things, however I do like the idea of Feather and Bone tasting plates, wine, and yes, even hot pants. [www.naturalselectiontheory.com](http://www.naturalselectiontheory.com)

Head on down to a huge **Chocolate Dance Party** on Saturday 19th February at the Royal Randwick Racecourse. Before you get too excited, I need to explain that chocolate will be the only stimulant available. You heard it right folks, no drugs, no alcohol, you'll just be sipping on an elixir made from pure, raw chocolate.

Confused? The event's part of David Wolfe's Australian tour. Think superfoods and associated food mania. [www.davidwolfeaustraliantour.com](http://www.davidwolfeaustraliantour.com)

I'll end with a bit of cheese (just in case Valentine's Day isn't cheesy enough) - head on down to **Helm Bar** on Tuesday 8th March at 6.30pm for a fun night of wine and cheese. Aided by the personable Claudia McIntosh you'll get the opportunity to experiment with four premium Australian farmhouse cheeses and a bunch of wines for \$35/head. It'll be more fun than V-Day - promise! [www.helmbar.com.au](http://www.helmbar.com.au)

### Helm Bar & Bistro \*NEW\*

With the school holidays in full swing, the Darling Harbour precinct was packed with families! The beer garden bistro on the lower level of Helm Bar seems just the spot to combine a spot of 'please-everybody' lunch with a visit to one of the neighbouring attractions - Sydney Aquarium, Wildlife World and the National Maritime Museum are all within cooee. The daily specials represent the best value - Saturday's Prawnastic (\$25) delivers a kilo of prawns. The hot and sweaty work of peeling them necessitated a bottle of Blue Pyrenees Luna NV (\$43) - I suspect the branded shade umbrellas influenced our selection! The Seafood Stand for Two (\$70) is hugely popular, though I'd prefer to see it carried like an expensive lunch rather than a bucket! The straight-up Wagyu Beef Burger (\$12) will win fans with a two-inch patty, melted cheese and a rasher of bacon - I'm a pickles girl myself. The fireworks came with a slightly risky pot of Australian Black Mussels in Blue Cheese and White Wine (\$19.50). Apparently the combination is common in Belgium, but it's the first time I've tried it here. It's a knockout! While they do come with fries, I strongly recommend Garlic Bread (\$6) to do the crazy-good sauce justice. Aquarium Wharf, 1 Wheat Road, Darling Harbour (02) 9290 1571 [www.helmbar.com.au](http://www.helmbar.com.au) *Modern Australian/Seafood/Burgers* \$\$\$-\$\$\$



### Charlie & Co. Burgers @ Opera Kitchen

Finally the Sydney Opera House gets the food it deserves - fast, casual dining suited to a pre-theatre dinner or a post-theatre snack. Venture to the lower concourse to order at the counters of a range of dining options spanning Japanese, Vietnamese rice paper rolls, fish, decadent sweets, pastries and quality burgers. Your meal is conveyed to the table by a team of impossibly handsome staff, accentuated by flimsy white t-shirts. I cornered Michael who jokingly explained he "just had to send in a photo" to get the job - clearly untrue, as he was competent as well as pretty. Plonked squarely between two of the country's most iconic structures, this is premium real estate. While prices keep this in mind, they're still unlikely to break the bank. Justin North's Wagyu & Co. Burger (\$21.50) with beetroot relish, pickled gherkin and aged cheddar comes on a nice-looking, tasty brioche bun. His Hand-Crafted Chilli Crab Burger (\$21.50) is delightfully crabby, with Asian greens and a splash of lime. My only quibble - take the fries off the burgers, because after trying both, everyone needs the better Parmesan and Truffle Fries (\$10). You can even get a beverage; my *Ketel One Vodka* (\$9.50) went down a treat. Fast food has never looked so inviting! Lower Concourse Level, Sydney Opera House, Sydney (0450) 099 888 [www.operakitchen.com.au](http://www.operakitchen.com.au) *Burgers* \$\$



### Café Giulia \*NEW\*

This popular Chippendale entry attracts students, locals and workers from the trendy designer businesses located in the vicinity. The large blackboard menu is the only hint that all ordering is done at the counter. For breakfast I recommend the Tuscan Toast with Ricotta, Honey and Cinnamon (\$9.90) and a Latte (\$3.50). I will warn though, the coffee here is variable - it's best when the handsome Ryan Jace is behind the machine - use this fact wisely, and don't be afraid to select an excellent Banana Smoothie (\$5.90) instead. The fresh juices including my personal favourite, Pineapple, Apple, Ginger and Mint (\$5.90), make a nice accompaniment to lunch. My usual options include the Chicken Coriander Mayo with Fresh Lime and Chilli Casa Roll (\$9.90) and the Lamb with Marinated Beetroot, Fetta, Roasted Peppers and Yoghurt Sauce Casa Roll (\$9.90). If it's cold and your thoughts turn to pasta, the Chicken, Mushroom, White Wine and Cream (\$16.90) scrubs up best. Bear in mind, all the pastas are penne - which suits the Tiger Prawns with Pesto, Roast Tomato, White Wine and Cream (\$18.90) treatment too. Specials like Corn Cakes with Poached Eggs, Spinach, Hollandaise and Bacon (\$18.90) are both generous and filling, but could change more often to keep regulars like me interested. 92 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale (02) 9698 4424 [www.cafegiulia.com](http://www.cafegiulia.com) *Café* \$-\$\$



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

### ROCKS & CBD

#### Chefs Gallery

Clever restaurateur Kaisern Ching takes the Northern Chinese dumpling craze one-step further, allowing you to watch your noodles hand stretched before eating a simple, satisfying bowl of Snowflake Chicken with Noodles and Pumpkin Soup (\$13.90). Numbing Sichuan spice makes the Tataki Wagyu Beef (\$12.90) fun; delicate golden pastry shines on Guo Tie (\$11.90) whole-prawn filled dumplings; and pork floss helps take the Chinese Roti

(\$6.90) to within cooee of *Mamak*. Pick the hidden Aussie ingredient in the Sweet and Dark Pork Ribs (\$18.90), but save space for dessert - the cute 'Piggy Face' Buns (\$5.90) and stretchy little Pumpkins (\$5.90) are delightful. Shop 12, Ground Floor Regent Place, 501 George Street, Sydney (02) 9267 8877 [www.chefsgallery.com.au](http://www.chefsgallery.com.au) *Chinese* \$-\$\$

#### Wharf Teppanyaki

Upmarket teppanyaki at Australia's largest teppan table, a deluxe 46-seater theatre of food. Inhale the mouth-watering aroma of sizzling King Prawns (\$41.50/4 pieces) expertly peeled on the grill by your personal chef. From Spicy Seafood Salad (\$18) to Alaskan Crab (\$75/300g) and Western Rock Lobster (\$50/

half, \$85/whole), seafood is well represented, and well handled. Set menus show it off well, ranging from \$88 to \$180. If you go a la carte it's hard to beat the tender Wagyu 8+ Roll (\$69.50/300g) and the flaming Number One Special (\$21/2 piece). Executive Chef Stephane Jegat's (ex-Fauchon, France) Crepe Suzette (\$45/2 people) is one of Sydney's most credible. 21 Lime Street, King Street Wharf, Sydney (02) 9299 5290 [www.kobejones.com.au](http://www.kobejones.com.au) *Modern Japanese/Seafood* \$\$\$-\$

### DARLO, KINGS X & SURRY HILLS

#### Jazz City Diner

Dan McGuirt's (*Vue du Monde*) neo-diner 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 jazz movies on tableside screens, retro uniforms & table rails. 238 Crown Street, Darlinghurst (02) 9332 2903 [www.jazzcitydiner.com](http://www.jazzcitydiner.com) *Modern American* \$\$

#### The Norfolk

Thomas Lim's (Duke Bistro) 'other'

hang has a comfy South of the Border feel with Mission lights, stucco walls and a leafy green courtyard. Ponder pithy writing as you work your way down the clever cocktail list including the Warhol inspired soup-can Sunday Bloody Sunday (\$15). The Mexican influence extends to the menu - definitely explore the Soft Shell Tacos (\$5.50/1, \$20/4). The Pork Belly and Slaw Roll (\$7.50) is essential, as is the White Fish and Prawn Ceviche (\$12) with coconut. Vegetarians will enjoy Chipotle Mayo, Queso and Lime (\$5). Deep-Fried Pickles with Ranch (\$5) are genius; punctuate everything with them. 305 Cleveland Street, Surry Hills (02) 9699 3177 [www.thenorfolk.co](http://www.thenorfolk.co) *Pub Bistro/Mexican* \$\$\$-\$\$\$

#### House

If you're bored with Thai, come try spicy chillies, fermented anchovies and sour tamarind notes of authentic Isaan food at Suet Saenkham's (Spice I Am) newest restaurant, in a Bangkok market setting. Unwrap Mok Gai Hua Plee (\$12), a gentle, chicken curry before plumping your lips with the fiery Larb Ped (\$18) minced duck salad. Steamed rice noodles Sen Loak (\$5), sun-dried pork strips Moo Daed Deaw (\$8) and chewy Ping Lin (\$10) ox tongue provide necessary relief. The protein-rich Egg Embryo Spicy Soup (\$16) is intensely hot and sour, making my eyes water and my nose stream. It's challenging food - exciting and entirely unfamiliar! 202 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills (02) 9280 0364 *Thai* \$\$

## The Restaurants @ 3 Weeds \*NEW\*

What a difference a year makes! Leigh McDivitt has come into his own in this tucked-away Rozelle gem; so well hidden that it escaped the notice of the SMH milliners! His Galantine of Quail and Foie Gras with Sweetcorn Puree and Basil Jelly (\$24) hung together effortlessly. The jelly was bouncy, the puree fine, the tidy rounds of quail and foie gras moist and tasty – making it an utter pleasure to playfully combine. Leigh's Bouillabaisse (\$23) gives the classic dish a much-needed update - a 'seashore' foam sits on silky squid ink gnocchi speckled with beautifully cooked WA marron. The momentum is maintained by the mains – the Thirlmere Duck (\$27) presents as a roasted breast accompanied by a crazy pink rhubarb gel, a puy lentil, ham hock and cuttlefish salad, and a duck liver and confit duck leg sausage that steals the show. As for the Tortellini of Porcini, Raisin and Leek with Cavolo Nero Puree and Porcini Veloute (\$28) it's easily the best vegetarian dish I've eaten in the last year. Add to this Nicholas Luhman's mastery of the wine list – beginning with a glass of Louis Roederer NV (\$22) then rising to the vanilla oak of a cracking 2008 Dog Point Chardonnay (\$59) – and you have one amazing meal.

197 Evans Street, Rozelle (02) 9818 2788 [www.3weeds.com.au](http://www.3weeds.com.au)  
Gastro Pub \$\$\$



## Braza Churrascaria \*NEW\*

The maddening aromas of charcoal and meat captivate me every time I drive past. It's taken me a while though, because Brazilian places are often a festival of meat without much else going on. I will now eat humble pie. The sides here are amazing – from intensely garlicky Couve (Kale) to the Salada Dois of beetroot, blue cheese, brazil nuts and orange segments, to the palm hearts and heirloom tomatoes of the Salada Tres – you need to request them all. They're free with the Traditional Churrasco (\$42/head) – it's the same price for everyone, yes, even if you're vegetarian/pescatarian. The rotating skewers come out according to a detailed whiteboard, ensuring each wave of diners gets the full shebang. Pace yourself - beyond a butcher's shop of meat (the best being the *Picanha* or rump cap) there's also grilled prawns, moist fresh Basa wrapped in banana leaves, cheese bread, polenta fingers, banana, cassava and tasty poultry. The only thing more exciting is the drinks! Amongst pages of cocktails you'll find the quaffable creamy coconut and vodka Batida (\$13) milkshake. Indulge in a flight of Caipirinhas (\$36/3 x 240ml), or sample pleasant pear and lemon sours in the Luciana (\$15), named, according to our personable and handsome Brazilian waiter, for a waitress with a pear-shaped bottom. 13 Norton Street, Leichhardt (02) 9572 7921 [www.braza.com.au](http://www.braza.com.au)  
Brazilian \$\$\$



## Revolver \*NEW\*

Until I find a better place to while away the hours of a lazy afternoon, I'm going to keep returning to this Annandale gem. Besides, I got order envy when I saw a sizzling skillet of Revolver Big Brekkie (\$16) delivered to a neighbouring table. However today's Lime Marinated Tofu Salad (\$15.50) was littered with interest – from hunks of sweet pumpkin baked in the skin, to cashews and well-cooked oyster mushrooms – it was so compelling I finished all the leaves. A Grilled Chicken Salad (\$15.50) was equally engaging. Why is it that whenever I add pickled beetroot to a salad at home I get something resembling a slaughterhouse, whereas here, mixed with free-range chook, Cypriot haloumi, candied walnuts, baby spinach and lemon tahini dressing, it looks and tastes mighty fine? If the last golden rays of sunshine are inspiring you to stay put, investigate the cakes made by owner Rod Jones' Ma. You can expect your Melting Moment (\$3.50) to be just that – an epically good instant of softly crumbling biscuit and glorious, sweet cream. An equally excellent Iced Coffee (\$5.50) will wash the last dusty fragments down, leaving you with just the compelling desire for another. Never fear – they come in chocolate too. 291 Annandale Street, Annandale (02) 9555 4727  
Cafe \$



## INNER WEST

### La Grande Bouffe

From a fine garlic snail amuse-bouche to a quartet of nicely ripened Assiette de Fromage (\$19), the kitchen didn't miss a beat. Wild Hare Rilletes (\$18) let the bunny do the talking. Bacon Wrapped Scallops (\$18) juxtaposed an intense foie gras jus with a fine pea puree. And don't get me started about the lovely layered Dauphinoise with the Poached Fillet of Beef (\$32)! The food is decadently rich, so order some Peas with Braised Onions (\$8.50) to balance your

Kurobuta Pork Chop with Potato Rosti and Calvados Jus (\$32). The wine list provokes joy in the Francophile – our 2007 Vire Clesse Chason Chardonnay (\$60) was impeccable. Shops 1 & 2, 758 Darling Street, Rozelle (02) 9818 4333 [www.lagrandebouffe.com.au](http://www.lagrandebouffe.com.au)  
French \$\$\$

## GREATER SYDNEY

### Manly Pavilion

Watch white sails dance against the imposing backdrop of South Head from this elegant, coastal space. Start with a refreshing Sgroppino (\$17) with house-made

lemon sorbet and lovely Prosecco. Jonathan Barthelme's dishes are nicely pared back - from a funky salad of Crisp Pig's Tail with Toasted Bread and Mushrooms (\$24); to a rich, signature Pepper Risotto (\$22/\$26) dotted with Taleggio. Definitely try the Ricotta Gnocchi (\$24) served in a restrained mixture of burnt butter, olive and purslane; and the Roast Suckling Pig (\$44). The battalion of staff lead by Graham Taylor have evolved a warm style of service that suits the space. West Esplanade, Manly Cove (02) 9949 9011 [www.manlypavilion.com.au](http://www.manlypavilion.com.au)  
Italian \$\$\$

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

### New In Town

Owner Angelika Kapys explains: "We Polish, we love to have a lot of food." Her modern Polish menu includes perennial favourites like potato pancake Placki (\$12.90) and excellent house-made Pierogi (\$11.90/\$17.90) in three flavours. It's a dead heat between the roast pork and the sauerkraut and mushroom dumplings. Pork's also the hero of the mains - Żeberka (\$24.90) achingly tender ribs cooked in goulash and Golonka

(\$29.90) a pork knuckle that made my dining companion's eyes boggle. Refresh your palate with Kompot (\$8/jug) sour cherry cordial before continuing the cherry theme with more toothsome dumplings - Pierogi z Wisniami (\$12). BYO! 549 King Street, Newtown (02) 9565 2526  
Modern Polish \$\$-\$\$\$

### Delhi 'O' Delhi

Enjoy slickly redesigned street food, like the summery Khasta Raj Kachori (\$12) a puffy besan and semolina pastry with curried potato and chickpeas. Plus twists and turns incorporating Aussie produce, like the healthy Salmon

Charminar (\$16). Include a fragrant clay oven cooked spatchcock, Tikka Kukkad (\$13) and the beautifully balanced chicken curry, Mopala Murgh (\$18). Chef shows skill in retaining the protein's integrity despite an avalanche of flavours in both the creamy coconut Duck Karuval (\$19) and the tomato and Kashmiri chilli rich Goat Aloo (\$20). Coconut with Green Peas and Beans (\$8) is an inspired and essential side. Wines like the Finke El Origen Torrentes (\$40) are cleverly chosen. 3-13 Erskineville Rd, Newtown (02) 9557 4455 [www.delhiodelhi.com.au](http://www.delhiodelhi.com.au)  
Indian \$\$