

PENDALINO'S

TUCKED AWAY IN A CORNER OF THE HISTORIC STRAND ARCADE IS SYDNEY'S NEWEST GASTRONOMIC GEM, PENDALINO.

Starting up a restaurant in the heart of Sydney is no easy feat; the stakes are high when it comes to finding that unique edge, the perfect chef and the crème de la crème of locations. Nonetheless, with a background like Nino Zocalli, who opened up his restaurant, café and wine bar Pendolino last year, success was inevitable.

It is a bizarre but welcome position for a restaurant – tucked away in Sydney's historical Strand Arcade, amidst the hustle and bustle of fashion muggies and Sydney suits on their lunch breaks. Having been crowned Australia's Best New Restaurant in 2008 by Restaurant & Catering Australia, Pendolino has quickly become one of Sydney's most acclaimed restaurants, serving as a café for lunch and a restaurant for dinner. It boasts an eclectic mix of history, with the Strand Arcade being one of Sydney's oldest standing Victorian buildings; and modernity, with a contemporary concept of incorporating an olive oil gift store. L'Olioteca, the specialty store that

translates from Italian as "Oil Library", features a range of world-class Australian and Italian extra virgin olive oils. The space serves as a store but can also extend to become a larger room in which olive oil masterclasses, food and wine matching events, and cooking demonstrations are regularly held.

It is no surprise Zocalli has ended up in the restaurant industry. With his mother's side of the family being third generation dairy and beef farmers and his father managing a vineyard in Western Australia, "It's not hard to imagine that there was a great deal of emphasis on quality produce and food whilst growing up", Zocalli says. His rapid rise to the top of the Sydney restaurant industry since he moved here a mere ten years ago has been exceptional. After being appointed Executive Chef to open Sydney's Otto Ristorante Italiano in 2000 and Pizzeria Nove, in 2001, Zocalli quickly became respected in the community for his culinary achievements. He has spent an extensive amount of time in Europe, exploring an abundance of restaurants, food and wine producers, whilst also researching the manufacturing of olive oil, something he is truly passionate about. So acute is his love for olive oil and the industry that Zocalli sits on various olive oil judging panels around Australia.

Pendolino boasts a soothing ambience. Whether this is a result of the comforting background jazz music, the candlelit room or the rustic interior of brick walls and wooden chairs, the perfect mood is set for enjoying good company and superior hospitality. A collection of wine cabinets line the brick wall veneer like eyelashes; an appealing and complementary design. Whilst the interior is kind on the eye and the olive oil gift store makes for a distinctive added feature, Pendolino is a prime example of the 'less is more' theory. The core focus remains on what it's all about: a sensational meal complemented by a fine drop. The seductive menu, printed in Italian (with an English afterthought), consists of regionally inspired cuisine fused with opulent and mouthwatering Italian flavours.

The Carpaccio – southern yellowfin tuna with tuna dressing, rocket cress, baby chard and Sicilian capers – is not to be missed. Cooked in the restaurant's own 2008 Victorian Argumato Limone Extra Virgin Olive

Oil, it is the ideal starter, conditioning the taste buds for the superb cuisine to come. As a main meal, to say the Quaglia Alla Griglia Con Olive Nere doesn't disappoint, is an understatement. Char grilled quail, served with an assortment of Mediterranean herbs, sautéed spinach and dried black olive sauce, is most definitely a crowd pleaser! For those who find it obligatory to listen to your inner sweet tooth, the nougat with Ligurian honey and almond milk semifreddo with candied almond is a compulsory selection for dessert. Not only does it taste like heaven, the presentation takes the meaning of 'eye-candy' to a whole new level!

Pendolino is a refreshing option for a good time and a great meal. It is not bombarded with the overtly who's who, nor is it a place to see and be seen. It is a genuine restaurant that provides top service and serves fantastic food in an understated manner, the way only Italians know how.

BOX BRIEF

PENDOLINO ■ Upstairs at The Strand Arcade, George Street Sydney Tel 02 9231 6117

CHEF ■ Nino Zocalli

VIBE ■ Relaxed, unique and not too noisy

PRICES ■ Entrees \$19 - \$26; mains \$27-\$36; desserts \$12-\$15

HOURS ■ Lunch: Monday-Friday 12.00pm – 3.00pm
Dinner: Monday – Saturday 6.00pm – late

WORTH ■ IT This is the ideal venue for an inner-city meal. Whether it be on your lunch break, a meeting with work colleagues or a relaxing dinner at the end of a hard week, Pendolino is appropriate for an array of occasions

NOT SURE ABOUT ■ The concept of a flourishing restaurant in the midst of a retail building takes some getting used to. You may have to go back a few times to make up your mind