

lunch at leisure

CAFE | ben groundwater

If there's a better day than Friday for going out for a long lunch, then I'm yet to discover it. Friday has got everything – the sense of relief at the impending end of the working week, the satisfaction of (hopefully) having finished work for at least two days, and the anticipation of leisure. It's the perfect excuse to catch up with friends for a few glasses of wine and a meal.

Admittedly, Friday lunch can sometimes turn into Friday-afternoon drinks, which morphs into Friday-night drinks, which then becomes Saturday-morning sore head. Miss Chatty and I were open to all options when we visited Pane e Vino for a Friday lunch.

Turning up at about 1pm, we were surprised to find the city cafe and wine bar without a single spare table, so we chose to prop up the bar and wait to be seated. We passed the time by checking out Pane e Vino's ample wine list and ordering a bottle of Fermoy Estate Sauvignon Blanc-Semillon (\$30).

The crisp, fruity flavours turned out to be the perfect match for a warm spring afternoon, not to mention the pasta and

salads we were about to be served. A table was found for us after 10 minutes and we looked over the food menu in comfort. Pane e Vino (which translates as "bread and wine") is owned and run by the D'Arienzo family, with brothers Gino and Tony at the helm, and its large menu reflects their Italian heritage.

For a light lunch, sandwich combinations like the insalata (mascarpone, artichoke, capsicum, tomato and mesclun) and the tonno (tuna with spanish onion, tomato and olives topped with chive mayonnaise) sounded appetising. But, in our usual style, Miss Chatty and I flipped straight to the pasta and mains pages. Here we found authentic dishes such as gnocchi boscaiola, ravioli alla funghi, and fettuccine con granchio.

Blanching at the richness of the pastas, Miss Chatty decided on the insalata di popli (\$10.90), or octopus salad to we antipodeans. It was a great choice: perfectly marinated, tender baby octopus dressed with lime and balsamic vinegar, and mixed with fresh cherry tomatoes, spanish onion and gourmet green salad.



Authentic Italian ... insalata di polpi (grilled baby octopus salad), from Pane e Vino, top right

The pasta special was my choice, and on the day of our visit it was cherry tomatoes, mushrooms, potato and pumpkin in a cream sauce tossed through spaghetti (\$15.50).

Specials can be a way for enterprising chefs to get rid of excess food scraps, and this could possibly have been the case with my choice. The vegetable combination seemed a bit haphazard, not following a standard Italian recipe. However, it did taste good, so



pane e vino burasq.mt

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rating: 8.5/10

food: well-priced, authentic Italian

wine: good selection for budget drinkers

service: helpful and fast

ambience: busy European street cafe

RATING GUIDE

1-4: woeful; 5: disappointing; 6: passable;

7: good; 8: very good; 9: excellent; 10: perfect

no complaints from me. Once we were done with the meals, we polished off our bottle of wine, and hung around for some top-notch lattes (\$3.30).

We reflected that, although the place was absolutely jam-packed, we'd still managed to be seated and fed in a reasonable amount of time, and the food was great. In fact, considering it was a Friday, we would have been happy to wait around for a whole lot longer.