

SPECIAL REPORT SURRY HILLS

Our own funkytown

This inner-city suburb has become one of city's most varied and urbane food destinations, writes John Newton

SURRY Hills is a glorious jumble of fine and funky restaurants, specialty food stores, trendy pubs and neighbourhood cafes. Yet you have to wonder how such attractions sprang up in the network of one-mean streets mandering downhill to the gritty end of the city.

In the early days of the colony, its breezy slopes were home to the mansions of the upper classes. As they moved out at the end of the 19th century, the working classes moved in. By the 1930s it was full of noisy pubs and sly grog shops, with the food industry centred on counter lunches, cafes and fish and chip vendors.

In Ruth Park's 1948 Surry Hills novel *The Harp* in the South Dolour Darcy looks out the window of the house to "three crammed and hideous backyards full of garbage cans, tomcats and lavatories with swinging broken doors..."

The big change to the suburb came with the diversion of heavy traffic from Crown Street, according to Chris Hazell, whose Chef's Warehouse has been fitting out the kitchens of the eating houses in the area since 1986. It was a suburb that was cut in half by heavy transport", he says. "Once that went, it blossomed".

The other influence on today's Surry Hills (apart from the general drift back to the inner-city, which began in the 1970s) was the early influx of migrants. The Cleveland Street end of Crown Street was the centre of the Turkish Community. Bill Saracoglu's father opened the bakery Erciyes 23 years ago. A Turkish mosque is still in Commonwealth Street.

At the Taylor Square end, Christopher's Cake Shop and the almost adjacent Greek Orthodox church are about the last remnants of a sizeable Greek population. The Chinese Temple next door to Chefs' Warehouse is a reminder of the Chinese who lives in the area to be close to the wholesale markets in the Haymarket.

Then there's the strong Lebanese presence - still there today - around the intersection of Elizabeth and Cleveland Streets. In a review in the 1977 edition of Leo Schofield's *Eating Out in Sydney*, he wrote this part of Sydney "could pass for a suburb of pre-civil war Beirut".

Several good restaurants have served foreign cuisine in Surry Hills since the 1950s. The Orsati family *Gastronomia Chianti* on Elizabeth Street and the archetype for every Sydney french bistro since, *L' Aubergade* in Cleveland Street are just two of them.

And then, kapow. From the early 1990s fine diners and interesting eateries have exploded all over the suburb. Janni Kyritsis in *MG Garage*, Prasit Prateprasen over the road in *Prasit's Hans Mohr* (briefly) at *European Continental*, which was replaced by *Tabou*, Anne and Bill Taylor's *Taylor's* - lots of openings, lots of closings.

"My fortune", Hazell says "is based upon the dynamics of these restaurants".

The latest wave to wash across the Hills kicked off about the time Cabramatta refugees Luke and Pauline Nguyen opened *Red Lantern* seven years ago. "As soon as we opened



Freshly baked... Christopher Panayi of Chirstopher's cake shop in Surry Hills

our doors, we did 60-70 people - total chaos", Luke says. "And this is the bottom end of Crown Street. There was no one here then but a lot of kebab stores".

Nguyen's nearby neighbour Hugh Foster opened *Mint*, a middle Eastern Moroccan cafe, five years ago when he moved from Fez in *Darlinghurst*. "I always like to go to slightly edgy areas", he says "and it was like returning to the source" I remember sitting in *Habibi* [in Cleveland Street] years ago and loving it".

The latest migrants to Surry Hills are the hig-end food shops. Colin Holt opened his first *Hudson Meats* in Crown Street last year and in January *Carmelo* and *Sogna Ocello* opened *Formaggi Ocello* in Bourke Street. When Holt was asked why he'd chosen Surry Hills, he said "because I've lived here for 20 years" - I remember the Portugese deli in Oxford Street with the bacalao hanging in the window.

Now, Holt says, it's the little off-the beaten-track places that give the suburb its cachet, "places like that give the suburb its Commonwealth Street".

Park's Dolour Darcy wouldn't recognize the place today.

Article from the Sydney Morning Herald

First case of child botulism

A 3-month-old baby was recovering in an intensive-care unit at a hospital in Rio, near Patras, yesterday after becoming one of only a handful of children in Europe to contract infant botulism during the last decade.

In the first reported case of the potentially fatal disease in Greece, a special drug, which is a human-derived botulism antitoxin, was flown in from California on Sunday.

Infant botulism is caused by eating the spores of a bacterium called *Clostridium botulinum*, or poisons produced by the spores. The most common way of getting botulism is from poorly processed foods that are vacuum sealed.

Scientists from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (KEELPNO) have visited the home of the baby to collect samples of food so they could be sent to a laboratory in England. They are also examining the possibility that the baby was given honey, which is a potential source of spores and should not be given to toddlers under 12 months old.



The Acropolis, Obama and body paint

Performers who have had their bodies painted stand in formation to depict the face of US President Barack Obama during 'The Fall of Athens,' a performance by Swiss artist Dave on Philopappou Hill in Athens yesterday. The ceremony was part of the Art Marathon, which will be traveling around the world until December 2050. Dave is planning to create the world's biggest book, measuring 14 meters by 3 meters, as part of the Art Marathon.