

Osteria di Russo & Russo

14.5/20

158 Enmore Road, Enmore, NSW

02 8068 5202 | Italian | \$\$

[all details](#)

3.5 out of 5

Reader ratings (18)

Comments (6)

June 4, 2013



Photo: James Brickwood

Terry Durack

Russo & Russo. It sounds like a funeral parlour in a Mafia film, or an artisanal vermouth manufacturer just outside Turin. But no, Russo & Russo is a tiny osteria in Enmore, an inner-western suburb that, alongside Newtown, is increasingly the Brooklyn to Sydney's Manhattan.

That's not all that's misleading. With its filmy half-curtains in the shopfront window, framed family pictures on the wall, bentwood chairs, marble-topped tables, and faded candle-lit moodiness, it feels like it's been around since the Godfather was a boy, and yet, it's less than two months old.

There should be a floral-aproned mamma in the kitchen doing everything the old way. Instead, there's a tall, white-jacketed young-gun chef fresh from the kitchens of Peter Gilmore, Giovanni Pilu and Ross Lusted named Jason Saxby, awarded Young Chef of the Year in the 2011 *Good Food Guide*.

And really, there is only one Russo present - Marc Russo, who runs the floor with that wonderful ease that comes from being born into hospitality, which he was. The other Russo is his father, Pino, of North Sydney's long-serving Bel Paese, whose main role here, according to Marc, is "authenticity". "And making sure we pronounce things correctly," he adds.

The restaurant is beautifully styled, a la *Big Night*, Hollywood's 1996 Stanley Tucci ode to early Italian/American restaurants. It is, possibly, over-styled - depending on whether you think menus should come pasted into the pages of second-hand books or not - but it's charming with it.

1 of 4
Just don't expect any veal parm or spag bol. Saxby likes turning Italian culinary cliches on their heads, with an attitude that's reminiscent of Mario Carbone and



Go-to dish: Rotolo di farfalle di pasta con cavolo nero, chestnuts, mushroom, puffed spelt. Photo: James Brickwood

Rosso & Russo is the similarly half-curtained Terrace Italian Specialties in New York's Little Italy. The boys argue that their food is totally authentic because it honours its immediate sources; hence their Jamaican-curved cavatelli with goat ricotta and habanero. They call it New Yorkese, as in Calabrese or Genovese. So what's this then - Sydneyese? Very possibly.



Take the pasta. Traditionally, an Italian pasta dish is all about the pasta, with the sauce secondary. Here, the trofie with hare ragu (\$24) is more of a synthesis; the tiny hand-rolled spindles of beetroot-coloured pasta deliberately fused with the hearty, dense, long-flavoured ragu, cleverly bolstered by ham hock and brussels sprouts. It's a great dish, and should be kept on all winter long.

Another first course is devoted to the autumnal charms of beetroot, with a fashionable plating of salt-baked beetroot, beetroot chips, aceto balsamico, Treviso radicchio, cumquat and crunchy rye crumbs (\$16). This autumn-into-winter bent is reinforced by an unusual main course of guinea fowl rotolo (\$29) - a roll of guinea fowl breast and wild mushrooms, cloaked in its skin and served with a forest-floor mix of pine mushrooms, chestnut puree, puffed spelt and toasty hazelnuts. A second bowl holds the confit leg and wing, which are crumbed and deep-fried for a bit of dude-food crunch. It's not an elegant dish but, like the pasta, it has real personality.

Sometimes, there's change for change's sake. Zuppa di pesce (\$26) is no rustic seafood stew, but a composed dish of swordfish, gently poached in olive oil, with a little huddle of mussels, fennel, bottarga (mullet roe) and popped fregola. A thick, bisque-like puree made from red mullet, prawns and mussels is then poured over the top. It's full of drama and flavour, although I'm not convinced it's better than a great zuppa di pesce.

Russo & Russo is due to get its liquor licence this week, the wine list mixing Italian and boutique Australian labels. In line with current trends, there's also a smart cheese-based "segue" course before sweeter desserts, such as a chocolate, hazelnut and milk "Rocher". The parmigiano panna cotta (\$12) is a luscious still-life on a plate, teamed with poached spiced pears, walnuts, and shards of pane carasau crispbread.

Behind the white half-curtain, it's every inch a modern, contemporary restaurant, fitting in snugly with on-trend near neighbours, such as Hartsyard and Bloodwood. Yet Russo & Russo does a fine job of channelling the spirit of osterias past, with a welcoming host, a chef who does things from scratch, and a good-value dining experience that is personal and intimate. Very Sydneyese.

The low-down

Best bit

New Italian food in an old Italian setting.

Worst bit

The bill comes on a page torn from a book.

Go-to dish

Rotolo di faraona of guinea fowl, cavolo nero, chestnuts, mushroom, puffed spelt, \$29.

Terry Durack is chief restaurant critic for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and senior reviewer for the Good Food Guide. This rating is based on the Good Food Guide scoring system.

158 Enmore Road, Enmore, NSW
02 8068 5202 | <http://russoandrusso.net.au>

- **Cuisine** - Italian
- **Prices** - \$110 for two, plus drinks
- **Features** - Licensed, BYO
- **Chef(s)** - Jason Saxby
- **Owners** - Marc Russo, Pino Russo

- **Author** - Terry Durack

close map

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The Italian Bowl

Newtown | Italian | \$\$
4 out of 5
Reader ratings (2)



Sede

Annandale | Italian | \$\$
3 out of 5
Reader ratings (14)



Cafe Sopra

Alexandria | Italian | \$\$
3.5 out of 5
Reader ratings (38)