

A city detour finds food that is fast, yet surprisingly fabulous

# Chain reaction

HOW IT RATED

## VAPIANO

The food .....14/20  
The staff .....6/10  
The drink .....2/5  
The X-factor .....3/5  
The value .....3/10

The total out of 50

28

### Address

Albert Lane, 191 Albert St, Brisbane; ph 3221 4933

### Food

Italian

### Drink

Fully licensed

### Hours

11am-11pm 7 days

### Chef

No head chef, all cooks, manager Tim Johnson

### Owner

Will Cooke

### Wheelchair access

Full amenities

### Parking

Parking stations nearby

### Price Guide

Entrees: \$6-\$17

Mains: \$13-\$19

Desserts: \$7

### Green guide

Organic olive oil and range of juices

### Snapshot

Speedy service and hearty food make this the perfect pit stop either in the middle or at the end of the workday. And it won't break the bank.



**I**N the interest of full disclosure it should be noted that I am not a fan of the chain restaurant. I also resent the term "restaurant" being applied to a fast food outlet. Filling station? maybe. Restaurant? I don't think so.

But there are exceptions to every rule and, last week in the city, I found one, twice. Shopping in Queen St can be harrowing; navigating the corner of Albert and the Mall especially as hordes of youths seem to congregate en masse outside one such filling station, creating a raft of humanity that can be almost impenetrable.

Enter Albert Lane, a fresh new detour that bypasses the trouble spot and is also home to a couple of new eateries, Little Singapore and Vapiano, a plucky little Italian with lots of quirks and some good food. It's a branch of the US and European chain and a first for Australia, although owner Will Cooke has plans for several more in the near future.

With a rapid retail therapy session complete we headed in for a quick bite while the car racked up a parking fee that would end up more than the bill for lunch. Upon entry you are given a briefing about how the place works and a charge card to use when ordering at the various stations.

The room is light-filled and energetic with a bar, a glassed-in pasta-making station and several short order cooking stations lined around the room.



The menu begins with three starters – a bruschetta, carpaccio or antipasti then moves into salads, pizzas and pasta dishes and ends with four main courses making sure there is plenty of choice.

Tables are high with a strip of marble running down the centre that contains iron lamps and a terracotta pot of young basil. Seating is on padded stools every one of which, on my first visit, was taken.

It wasn't until my second visit a couple of days later that I discovered upstairs.

An open-air bar occupies one corner and two other dining spaces means the place can seat 235 people. There's also a walk-in space with shelves of pots of various types of basil with tags sticking out saying "eat me".

And here's what sets this

franchise apart from others – ingredients are sourced locally not bought through some price-driven consortium and they're from quality producers like Vannella Cheese Factory in north Queensland, olives from South Burnett and eggs from the Darling Downs.

On our first lightning visit, we shared a pizza and a bowl of carbonara which was made in front of us. It was light, al dente, creamy and salty. For such a well-worn staple, it's surprising how often it's done badly but this is balanced and moreish. Ditto the pizza with a thin crust topped with salami, peppers, mushrooms and mozzarella.

Our second visit was specifically to review so we started with carpaccio and the antipasti platter quickly finding out how generous both were. Ready in minutes, we made the

mistake of ordering everything at once so ended up with our mains as well.

Antipasti consists of shaved parmesan, prosciutto and salami, roasted vegetables, a marinated ball of soft mozzarella and two slices of crusty bread topped with tomato and basil.

The wafer-thin carpaccio covered a large plate topped with shaves of parmesan, rocket and a mayo-like dressing that lacked the tang of a good dressing or the traditional splash of vinegar, olive oil and sea salt.

Plump, meaty ravioli con carne has a fresh tomato sauce and a bolognese filling but it was the pizza on this visit that stood out – prosciutto e funghi has one of those bases you dream about. Fine, chatty and chewy, it stays firm under its topping of ham, mushrooms, mozzarella and tomato base – no sagging or drooping, making it very easy to eat.

Desserts include vanilla-scented rice pudding and tiramisu layered into a glass but the presentation prize goes to the cute little vacuum-sealed pots of pannacotta.

This is a formula restaurant and it suits the location, especially in a CBD almost devoid of quality mid-range food. It is so much better than the overpriced fare in the mall and friendly staff give the place its quirky personality – not unlike a Virgin Blue flight with better food.

**Perfect pit stop:** The generous antipasti starter, top, and the light-filled energetic interior at Vapiano.

**Picture:** Mark Cranitch