

RESTAURANT Vapiano, 191 Albert Lane, Brisbane | Alison Walsh

Italy may be the birthplace of the globally expanding slow-food movement but Brisbane's newest, very expensively fitted out Italian restaurant is a fast-food joint. Sure, we're used to takeaway pizza and pasta but Vapiano, just off the Queen Street Mall, is an unusual hybrid that marries a current restaurant trend – using ingredients sourced from within a 150km radius, if possible – with swipe cards, queueing and wait staff who don't take orders but simply clear plates.

This restaurant is the first Australian version of a rapidly spreading international chain that had its genesis in Germany in 2002. Customers are given a charge card and menus when they arrive, they then order at one of several food stations and wait while their meal is prepared (pizza orders yield a beeper). Diners then pick up cutlery and settle into one of 225 seats.

I ordered bruschetta at the antipasti bar and asked how long it would be. "It won't take a minute," said the woman who served me as she snapped on latex gloves, placed a mound of chilled, diced tomato, garlic, herbs and olive oil on two slices of pre-toasted bread and passed it over the counter. Very speedy, as long as you don't mind cool tomato clad in slightly viscous chilled oil.

Most seats in the sprawling two-level restaurant – \$2.4 million buys acres of blond wood, an olive tree sprouting in the middle of one large table and a couple of big, comfy lounge areas near the bars – are stools pulled up to high tables. We sat upstairs next to an indoor greenhouse laden with pots of basil and rosemary that are placed on tables with



oils, vinegar, and salt and pepper grinders. After a brief period of listening to the foghorn-voiced woman at the next table detail her disappointingly tedious relationship history to a potential new beau, the pizza buzzer rang. A trot downstairs and we had a Toscana, which sported a good thin, crunchy base. On top was what seemed to be more of the same unattractive tomato mix that was on the bruschetta, a sparse amount of thin pepperoni slices and a few olives.

I returned downstairs and ordered pasta, spelt fusilli with *gamberi e spinaci* – prawns, pesto, baby spinach and chilli in a cream

sauce – and enjoyed it, if not the standing in front of the chef watching it being cooked. The pasta, made that day, was light and fresh.

We finished with *crema di fragola* (a strawberry and cream confection), and a slice of freshly made chocolate cake.

Visiting Vapiano is not a personalised dining experience, and your willingness to stand waiting for food to be cooked and fetching each course will depend on your mindset. But it's an attractively designed oasis in the city heart, the food is indeed fast and there's the feelgood factor of chowing down on largely local produce.

setmenu

PH 3221 4933
WEBLINK www.vapiano.com.au
HOURS Open daily 11am-11pm.
LIQUOR STATUS Licensed.
PRICES Antipasti \$6-17, salads \$7-13, pizzas \$13-19, pasta \$13-19, desserts \$7.
NEED TO KNOW Street parking and parking stations, air-conditioned, all major credit cards accepted, wheelchair access to ground level.

THE VERDICT
 Hi-tech Italian.