

GOURMET

A U S T R A L I A N

ANUARY 1999

TRAVELLER

Australia
coast to coast
where to go
what to eat

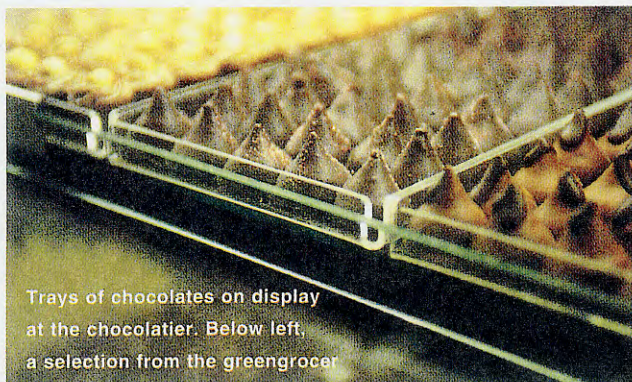
Lemon and ginger iced tea

\$6.25 NZ \$8.25 UK £3



extra

1999 NATIONAL
RESTAURANT GUIDE



Trays of chocolates on display at the chocolatier. Below left, a selection from the greengrocer

LET'S EAT

Australia's first food and wine emporium offers just about every option imaginable for dine-in or take-home meals



WONDERING WHAT TO HAVE for dinner tonight? At let's eat, you can pick up pre-cooked and chilled homemade gnocchi, gourmet pizza, pasta or caesar salad, or prepared vegetables ready to cook. Or chef Yoshi could prepare your favourite sushi.

Order customised takeaway or eat-in by touch screen at the store's open kitchen while you enjoy a glass of wine at the bar – a pocket pager will notify you when your food is ready. Take a quick video lesson on this week's recipe for vegetarian rice-paper rolls or sweet-potato doughnuts. Or log on to the let's eat website, choose from the menu, give them a call and they'll have it all ready for you to pick up in minutes.

This unique concept in food and wine retailing is designed with the time-conscious person in mind. And with a staff of 160, including 60 chefs, 12 bakers, three butchers and a fishmonger, and open seven days a week from 7am-10pm, the service is appropriately professional and slick. In fact, the entire staff had two months' special training at Box Hill TAFE in preparation for the new style of trading.

The store is at once a fresh-food market, florist, bakery, chocolatier, sushi bar, delicatessen, cheese larder, butcher, greengrocer, classic wine cellar with wine bar, cafe, snack bar, kitchenware shop, cooking school, cookbook shop and more, all wrapped into one elegant package.

From the first step inside the sliding-glass door customers are dazzled by displays of long-stemmed exotic flowers. Central glass display cabinets are filled with mouth-watering, handmade chocolates. There are rows of the store's own-label bottled milk – organic, skim, plain, low-fat and biodynamic. Nearby, a home economist is available for food and dietary advice. Opposite, an excellent range of smallgoods and cheeses is displayed, with salamis and maturing cheeses held in special temperature-controlled cabinets along the rear wall. Behind the stylish wine bar that serves boutique beers and wines by the glass, a humidified cabinet displays Cuban and Dominican Republic cigars, alongside a stock of auction wine including a range of Grange, Château Latour and Mouton Rothschild.



Clockwise from above, freshly baked bread; chopsticks to accompany prepared meals; pasta salad ready to go; let's eat-ware; sushi chefs at work

Sushi chefs slice, mound and roll to order, while customers perch on padded stools sipping a glass of wine. Next door, seafood is kept fresh in ice-lined showcases. On a presentation table, an ice carver chisels and shapes a handsome fish. Butchers trim, marinate, skewer and prepare exceptional cuts of meat and poultry.

The bakery's ovens run 20 hours a day producing loaves – some with red-hot chillies on top, or bacon, others with potato and rosemary or pumpkin, and large, mushroom-filled brioche.

In the fresh-fruit section, tropical jackfruit sit next to custard apples, pepinos, sapote, mangoes, tamarillos, green and ripe papaya, guavas and Fijian pawpaws. Nearby, wing beans line up beside snake beans,

asparagus, butter beans and broad beans. Below are fresh banana leaves, gai lan, chinese broccoli, white and shanghai bok choy. There are baby coconuts, husked, ready to drink, bitter melons, furry melons, silk, loofah and winter melons.

Near assorted fresh herbs is a colourful range of fungi: pink, white and yellow oyster mushrooms, fresh morels, slippery jacks, shiitake, shimeji, enoki, swiss-browns and the seaweed-looking black fungus or pig-ear mushroom.

There are baby beets, baby turnips, baby cauliflower and fennel and a full range of organic vegetables; red and yellow vine-ripened tomatoes, fresh asian herbs and any number of chillies and peppers.

Forty per cent of fresh-produce stock is bought from the Footscray wholesale market, the rest is sourced direct from growers. In total, the store boasts some 15,000 fresh and non-perishable products, a database of 1600 recipes, 1400 wine and liquor products, with cafe-seating inside and out for about 130.

It has taken a specialised Melbourne team two years to develop and implement the concept, which is a product of the Coles Myer group. Store manager is Brendan Millett, a chef with 15 years' experience in hospitality, who began his apprenticeship at Mietta's restaurants in Melbourne, and more recently was the director of food and beverages at The Hyatt in Sydney. He has been involved in every aspect of the store's development and says, "With let's eat, we are creating retail history. It is not a supermarket or a department store. Basically, we had to start from scratch, working to a brief to provide top-quality gourmet meals that could be eaten on-site or taken away, gourmet groceries and liquor in an informative, entertaining and interactive environment."

He insists the bottom line is the enjoyment of food and wine. "The staff at let's eat are unique, they all have an individual character and attitude that will turn the heads of guests. We have 60 chefs – Australian, Malaysian, Russian, Japanese, Danish and African – all wanting to cook sensational food and have fun doing it." TRICIA WELSH

let's eat, Elizabeth St, Prahran Market, Vic 3141,
phone (03) 9520 3287, fax (03) 9520 3297, or website:
www.lets-eat.com.au