



Fish tales: Canley Heights Fresh Seafood's Lena Vo (inset, left) and produce from the Sieu Thi Hong Fat supermarket (inset, above)
Pictures: Katrina Tepper

passport to flavour

Canley Heights is the new dish on our food landscape, writes **Vanessa Keys**

GASTRONOMIC goldmines are a little like slow cookers. You start off with a daggy facade that's seen better days, a smattering of ingredients and tepid heat. But give it time and slowly but surely, all the components that are bubbling away under the surface magically meld together, creating an explosive taste sensation that awakens the tastebuds and fires the belly.

Foodies, take note: Canley Heights has just exploded. Lift the lid off this seemingly quiet south-western suburb and visitors will discover a multicultural melting pot-teaming with serious epicureans.

Produce stores brimming with fresh Asian greens spill out on to the footpath, barbecue shops stacked high with gleaming roast ducks elicit hungry murmurs from passerbys and along the main strip, punters wait patiently for a coveted seat inside sophisticated fusion restaurants.

"Five years ago, the majority of Canley Heights businesses were mum-and-dad-operated shops, with traditional fare and a simple fit-out," says Tona Inthavong, the

front-of-house manager at Thai and Laos restaurant Holy Basil.

"A lot of the kids who have now taken over their parents' business or have a say in how it's run know the importance of creating a dining experience that ticks all the boxes."

The strip to visit is Canley Vale Rd that runs between Derby and Cambridge Sts.

Here it is possible to sample delicious Hong Kong-style yum cha, Laos, Thai, Vietnamese, Italian and Chinese cuisines or pop into one of the many produce stores to stock up on greens galore, market-fresh fish and Asian groceries.

To keep up with its new epicurean image, Canley Heights is undergoing an attractive makeover, starting with a new town square, dedicated spots for al fresco dining and additional car parking.

"Two years ago you could cross the road without looking left and right," Tona says. "Now you can't walk a metre without bumping into friends and locals that you know. It's really such a great community to be a part of."

HOLY BASIL THAI AND LAOS RESTAURANT
233A Canley Vale Rd, 9727 7585, holybasil.com.au

Family-operated Holy Basil boasts a sophisticated fit-out that begs for long lunches and relaxed dinners with friends. Its dishes fuse the refined, creamy flavours of Thai cooking with the more "peasant style" of Laos dishes.

"Laos food is fresher and spicier," says Tona. Must-try dishes include massaman curry and head chef Tony's famous tiger beef salad.

They also do cocktails and mocktails such as a watermelon and lychee (pictured below). Just make sure you save room for the speciality dish: homemade coconut ice cream wrapped in light filo pastry and smothered with caramel sauce.

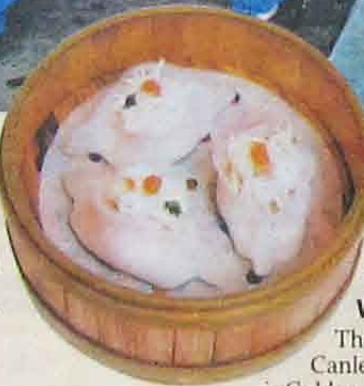
SIEU THI HONG FAT SUPERMARKET
264 Canley Vale Rd, 9725 6767

Wander the aisles of Sieu Thi Hong Fat and there's a good chance your eyes will quickly become bigger than your stomach.

Shelves laden with brightly packaged Asian groceries beg for attention, the heady scent of fragrant herbs wafts from fridges and usually expensive delicacies tempt with low-price points.

Cooks will not only be able to locate unusual vegies and spices unheard of in Western-style stores but they can stock up for half the price.

Keep your eyes peeled for their authentic coconut water a bargain at \$2.50.



GOLDEN HARVEST SEAFOOD RESTAURANT
Level 1, 239 Canley Vale Rd, 9728 3338

The new kid on the Canley Heights block is Golden Harvest, a Hong Kong-style yum cha restaurant that has attracted a loyal local following in the six weeks since it opened.

Head chef Charlie Chen hails from internationally acclaimed hotels and has even cooked for the White House. The huge banquet room buzzes as carts laden with dumplings (pictured above) and crispy morsels constantly circulate the room.

"The individual peking duck pancakes, tofu in ginger syrup and mango sugo dessert are really popular," says waiter Brendon Huynh.

CANLEY HEIGHTS FRESH SEAFOOD AND TIEM THIT THANH-PHAT QUALITY MEATS
225 Canley Vale Rd, 9734 1955

"Silver snapper and coral trout are beautiful steamed. Beautiful! Ling is great for stirfry because it has no bones. Curry? You want a firm fish, like blue-eye cod or barramundi."

What Lena Vo doesn't know about fish isn't worth knowing. At least, that's the word among locals; Lena, herself, is much too modest to be making such declarations.

She and her husband have owned Canley Heights Fresh Seafood and the adjoining butcher for more than a decade. He's up at 2am every day



Sophisticated: Tona Inthavong (seated left) with Holy Basil restaurant staff

to snare the catch of the day at the Sydney Fish Markets, while she imparts her encyclopaedic knowledge to customers.

GUAN AN BAU TRONG VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT
250 Canley Vale Rd, 9755 7099

The gleaming surrounds of Lena Lam's family-run restaurant is packed with locals who swear by her famous pho beef noodle soup (pictured above).

The kitchen, which uses waterless woks to lessen its carbon footprint, reduces and clarifies its stock over an extensive time to increase its medicinal properties. Indeed, a steaming bowl of this fresh yet hearty soup immediately soothes the soul.

SANTOS ITALIAN RESTAURANT
Shop 4/231 Canley Vale Rd, 9727 0580, santoscafebarpizza.com.au

When you've been running a successful restaurant for 23 years, other local business owners tend to ask your advice.

Santos owner John Mellino is more than happy to impart advice.

"It's fantastic that we can act as a benchmark for businesses who are thinking about opening here," he says.

"The modern Italian dishes are big hits with the locals." "Our steak grande, an eye

fillet topped with calamari and a balmain bug, walks out the door," John says.

MINH TAM BBQ PORK AND DUCK
258 Canley Vale Rd, 9754 2888

The smoky scent that wafts from this restaurant hits you long before the shop comes into view. Inside, surrounded by glistening morsels of pork and duck, the senses go into overdrive.

Owner Lu Huynh has run this shop for nine years, and her nearby Cabramatta BBQ for 20. She and her family slow cook the pork on the bone, which "gives it more flavour and a strong, smoky taste," she says. Whole ducks are also available, and an inexpensive way to enjoy restaurant-style duck at home.

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Ever tasteful: Hue Lam at the Minh Tam BBQ Pork And Duck restaurant

close to home

Erskineville is revealing its artistic side, writes **Melissa Matheson**

RESIDENTS of Erskineville woke up this morning to find their suburb has become a makeshift art gallery, with installations and live performances transforming their streets as part of the Tiny Stadiums Festival. But not all the works are confined to the streets. In fact, participants don't even have to get out of bed to experience Lucas Ihlene's art.

Curator Mish Grigor has helped bring together a collection of artists who really hit home with their messages.

"Lucas Ihlene has been working with University of Wollongong students and they created a series of soundscapes," she says. "You register online and they will call you on your phone in the morning and wake you with one of these soundscapes. It's like little performances that happen in bedrooms all around Erskineville."

At the other end of the spectrum, artist Dan Koop will deliver postcards with hand-written messages as part of the festival.

Participants can leave a message with Koop and he will pass it on, like a carrier pigeon, but without the ability to fly.

"It's almost like a telegram," Grigor says. "It's really old-fashioned delivery on foot. They're all these lovely little ideas."

The festival, in its fourth year, is run by the PACT centre for emerging artists in Erskineville.



Big expectations: Tiny Stadiums Festival's Lucas Ihlein, Mish Grigor and James Hallihan in Erskineville
Picture: John Fotiadis

Since the outset organisers have seen Tiny Stadiums expand with the backing of the City Of Sydney.

"We were running a whole bunch of programs in and around PACT already," Grigor says. "It didn't really feel like it had a home in a gallery. This year we just looked into what artists are doing at the moment and asked 15 artists if they would be interested in being in the festival."

"They're works that fall loosely under the banner of live and/or street performance."

But the real star of the show is Erskineville itself.

"There's something nice about Erskineville," Grigor says. "It's very close to the city but because it's 300m away from Newtown, it is like a little village. There's just something special about it; it's a lovely little pocket of the Sydney area."

● **Tiny Stadiums Festival, various locations in Erskineville including PACT, 107 Railway Pde, Erskineville; today and tomorrow, free live art 11am-3pm, some events at PACT are ticketed, including a double bill of Nat Randall's Cheer Up Kid and Applespiel's Executive Stress/Corporate Retreat, today and tomorrow 7pm, \$25, pact.net.au**