

Life & Home



Porteño
restaurant
in Surry Hills,
Sydney

MARK ROOPER



playing with FIRE

A CHANGE OF LOCATION BRINGS A FRESH
START AND DELICIOUS NEW MENU, PLUS
THE (VERY) GOOD TIMES YOU EXPECT
FROM SYDNEY RESTAURANT **PORTENO**

by **FAITH CAMPBELL**
photographed by **MARK ROPER**
styled by **AMBER MACKAY**



CLOCKWISE FROM
LEFT: Grilled tongue and
crab salad with yoghurt
and watercress (recipe
on p157); chef Ben Milgate;
a corner of the character-
filled dining room; chef
Elvis Abrahamowicz.





ABOVE: Details of the new Porteño dining room.
RIGHT: Cocktails served on a Georg Jensen tray.
OPPOSITE: Chefs Elvis Abrahamowicz and Ben Milgate; beetroot salad with whipped ricotta (recipe on p157).



THE COCKTAILS

BANANA OLD FASHIONED
50ml banana-infused Jack Daniel's
2 tsp smoked maple syrup
Pour whiskey and smoked maple syrup into an old-fashioned glass over a large ice cube, and stir gently before serving.

CLASSIC MARTINI
50ml dry gin
10ml dry vermouth
green olives for garnish
Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add gin and vermouth. Stir well. Strain into martini glass. Garnish with olives and serve.

AMERICANO COCKTAIL
45ml Campari
45ml sweet vermouth
soda
slice of orange for garnish
Pour Campari and vermouth into rocks glass. Fill glass with ice then top with soda. Gently stir then garnish with a slice of orange.

We drink what we like and we eat what we like—there are no rules,” says Ben Milgate. “Don’t make it complicated,” adds Elvis Abrahamowicz. A pretty simple philosophy, but it’s one that clearly works for the friends, chefs and co-owners of Porteño restaurant in Sydney. And after six rowdy but well-respected years at their original Cleveland Street location in Surry Hills, the cohorts have taken their “rustic, flavour-packed” menu and opened a new outpost a few blocks away on Holt Street.

“The space had to be amazing for us to move from that building,” explains Milgate. “We wanted to be close to the original, and to concentrate on the restaurant,” adds Abrahamowicz. Apart from a fresh start, the move was made for practical reasons: “We were getting a lot of requests to do big functions, and we could never close a night of service to do that sort of thing,” says Milgate. The first Porteño now operates as a live music venue and full-service events space—perfect for “weddings and bar mitzvahs” jokes Milgate—and the pair have thrown themselves into creating the latest incarnation.

Walk into the European bistro-meets-Colonial parlour-style dining room and you’ll likely be greeted with a solemn nod by

Abrahamowicz’s stalwart dad, Adan. He’s as much a part of Porteño as his son, Milgate, and the *asado* (fire pit) he tends from morning til dinner service each night. Two walls of windows open out to the street and flood the space with light—the opposite effect of the original’s moody atmosphere. “You prep [for service] and get to watch people go by,” says Abrahamowicz. “At [Cleveland Street] you didn’t know what time of the day or year it was,” he adds, laughing. Milgate agrees: “[It was] like a casino with less smoking.” The interiors are familiar—cool marble and polished wood, framed vintage prints and retro-inspired finishes—and the down-to-earth feel they’re known for is part of the furniture. “You can be yourself and talk loud,” says Abrahamowicz, “not feel like you have to whisper,” Milgate agrees.

Before Porteño, the young chefs opened Bodega in 2006 and are proud to be celebrating 11 years in August: “That’s a long time in the restaurant scene,” says Milgate. While rock’n’roll and delicious, Argentinian-inspired food drew the crowds, hard work and family have been crucial to the success of both restaurants. “We spend a lot of time, every single day, at it—changing [things], trying to improve where we can,” says Abrahamowicz. “Having great staff over the years [has helped] as well,” Milgate explains. “Joe [Valore] looking at front of house stuff, and we’re always looking at [the] back of house.” Both admit that their business partner Valore—also the sommelier

at both restaurants and Abrahamowicz’s brother-in-law—deserves equal credit for their longevity: “It’s not just us two numnuts!” says Abrahamowicz. “We each have half a brain, which [only] makes one brain,” laughs Milgate.

Now veterans in the kitchen, they both have young families and are starting to feel their age and experience: “Kids come in here who were born in 1997—I’ve been cooking for longer than some of them have been alive,” Milgate says. But aside from the constant ribbing, it’s obvious neither wants to be anywhere else. “It’s a hard job, it’s not easy,” explains Abrahamowicz. “I love what I do,” says Milgate, “and I know Elvis does too.”

Describing the menu they created for *InStyle* as “easy peasy”, Milgate says it’s exactly what they’d make for a long lunch with friends. Abrahamowicz’s semi-serious tip for aspiring home cooks? “Get really drunk so you can’t do the dishes!”

After more than a decade in the game, the pair aren’t fazed by the food fads that regularly sweep Sydney’s dining scene. “To tell you the truth, I don’t even know what the trends are—we just try and do what we believe in,” affirms Abrahamowicz. “I think there are a lot of people who still want...” Milgate begins to explain. “A ramen burger!” his longtime friend interjects. “But then they come back to us,” Milgate finishes.



Porchetta served with chimichurri (recipes on pp157-158)



Salt cod croquettes served with stewed peas and tartare sauce (recipe on p157)

THE RECIPES

GRILLED TONGUE AND CRAB SALAD WITH YOGHURT AND WATERCRESS

SERVES 6-8

- 1 x 1.3kg large fresh ox tongue
- CRAB
- 1 king crab leg
- 150g unsalted butter
- juice of 1 lemon
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- salt to taste
- 1 bunch chives, finely chopped
- ½ bunch watercress
- 6 tbsp natural yoghurt
- 2 tbsp olive oil

1 In a large saucepan, cover the tongue with water and bring to the boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and leave to braise for about 2.5 hours. Remove from heat and leave tongue in its cooking liquid until cool enough to touch. 2 Remove tongue and set the liquid aside. Peel and discard skin from entire tongue, then place in a container, cover with the cooking liquid and refrigerate overnight. 3 Preheat oven to 180°C. Roast crab leg for 12 minutes. Allow to cool and pick the meat, set aside. 4 In a pan, brown the butter, stopping the process before it burns by adding lemon juice, cayenne pepper and salt. 5 Remove pan from heat and fold in crab and chives. 6 Cut across the tongue in 5mm slices then sear on a hot grill for 2 minutes on each side. In a bowl, dress watercress with yoghurt and olive oil. To serve, place sliced tongue on a plate and top with crab then watercress.

SALT COD CROQUETTES WITH STEWED PEAS AND TARTARE SAUCE

SERVES 6-8

- 500g bacalao (salt cod fillet)
- 1L milk
- 6 garlic cloves
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 200g potato
- 75ml extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp dill, chopped
- cottonseed oil, for frying

TARTARE SAUCE

- 4 eschallots
- 4 large gherkins
- 3 tbsp capers
- 2 bunches tarragon
- 1 handful parsley, finely chopped
- 1 handful dill, finely chopped
- 500ml thick mayonnaise
- STEWED PEAS
- 1 brown onion, finely diced
- 2 sticks of celery, finely diced
- 2 carrots, finely diced
- 200ml extra virgin olive oil
- 500g peas
- 1L chicken stock
- 1 bunch curly leaf parsley, chopped

1 Place fish in a bowl, cover with water and leave to soak in the refrigerator overnight, then rinse. In a medium saucepan, cover fish with milk, add garlic and bay leaves and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Simmer for 5 minutes then drain, reserving 55ml of warmed milk. 2 Meanwhile, peel and cube the potato, place in a small saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to a simmer over a medium heat and cook until tender, set aside. 3 Remove skin and bones from the fish and place the flesh in a food processor. Pulse until fine, then drizzle in the extra virgin olive oil and reserved warm milk, and pulse again until combined and emulsified. Place in a bowl. 4 Pass the potato through a ricer, or push through a fine sieve, then combine with the fish. Fold in chopped dill, then season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate until needed. 5 Fill a deep, heavy-based saucepan a third full with cottonseed oil and heat to 170-180°C. Form the salt cod mix into tablespoon-sized croquettes and fry in small batches for 3-5 minutes, or until they are a deep golden brown colour. Drain on paper towel. 6 To make the tartare sauce, finely chop eschallots, gherkins, capers, tarragon, parsley and dill. Combine ingredients, then mix through the mayonnaise. 7 To make stewed peas; sauté onion, celery and carrot in extra virgin olive oil in a heavy-based saucepan until soft. Add peas, cover with chicken stock and simmer until reduced and dark green. Remove a quarter of the reduced mixture and blend, then add to remaining unblended mix. Season then garnish with parsley. Serve with croquettes and tartare sauce.

BEETROOT SALAD WITH WHIPPED RICOTTA

SERVES 6-8

- 6 medium beetroots, washed
- 1kg Kalamata olives, pitted and crushed
- 200g honey
- 35g chilli flakes
- 25g aniseed, crushed
- 2 brown onions, finely diced
- canola oil
- 500g ricotta
- salt and pepper
- 2 heads witlof
- 1 bunch dill
- Vinocotto (syrup)
- extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp roasted pecans, chopped

1 Preheat oven to 200°C and line a roasting tray with foil. Place whole beetroots on tray and cover tightly with foil. Roast for 90 minutes. 2 Once soft, remove from oven, place beetroots on a plate and cover with cling wrap to steam for 30 minutes. While warm, peel away skin and cut beetroot into 5mm slices. 3 To make dressing; combine olives, honey, chilli and aniseed in a saucepan. Add onion and just cover with canola oil. Bring to soft simmer over a low heat for 45 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool. 4 Put ricotta in a blender and season with salt and pepper. Blend until smooth. 5 To serve, spread whipped ricotta on plate, creating a thick, even bed to build the salad. Layer slices of beetroot on top, drizzle with dressing and garnish generously with witlof leaves and sprigs of dill. 6 Finish with a drizzle of Vinocotto, extra virgin olive oil and pecans.

CHIMICHURRI

MAKES 400ML

- 250ml blended oil, 95% canola oil, 5% extra virgin olive oil
- 100ml white wine vinegar
- 55g flat leaf parsley
- 3 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped
- 3 tbsp dried oregano
- 1 tbsp dried chilli flakes
- fine sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1 Place all ingredients, except salt and pepper, in a food processor and pulse until a coarse paste forms. 2 Season to taste, then refrigerate in an airtight container until required.



Baked whole trout
and grilled leeks with
black bean chilli

BAKED WHOLE TROUT AND GRILLED LEEKS WITH BLACK BEAN CHILLI

SERVES 8

1 lemon, sliced
½ bunch dill, roughly chopped
4 green shallots, roughly chopped
1 x 3kg ocean trout, scaled
and gutted
salt and pepper
extra virgin olive oil
6 leeks

BLACK BEAN CHILLI
1 garlic clove
½ red birdseye chilli
50g dried salted black beans
250ml blended oil, 95% canola oil,
5% extra virgin olive oil
75ml sherry vinegar

1 Preheat oven to 180°C. Stuff lemon, dill and shallots into the cavity of the fish and season with salt and pepper. Place fish on a wire rack inside an oven tray and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil. **2** Bake for 20-25 minutes, and allow to rest for 10 minutes before serving. **3** To make the chilli; chop garlic, chilli and black beans as finely as possible and place in a small saucepan with the oil, which should cover the black beans completely. **4** Simmer over a very low heat for about 1 hour. Remove from the heat and allow the mixture to cool completely. **5** Add sherry vinegar and store in an airtight container in the fridge (chilli will keep refrigerated for up to one month). **6** Preheat oven to 220°C. To prepare the leeks; roast whole, with no oil, for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven. **7** Remove the dark outer leaves and cut in half lengthways. Dress with the black bean chilli and serve alongside baked ocean trout.

PORCHETTA

SERVES 6-8

1 tbsp fennel seeds
1 tbsp fine salt
1 tsp chilli flakes
1 tsp black peppercorns
4 cloves garlic
2 tbsp fresh rosemary
1 x 3-4kg pork belly, deboned, skin on
extra fine salt

1 Begin a day ahead. Using a mortar and pestle, pound fennel seeds, salt, chilli, peppercorns, garlic and rosemary into a paste. **2** Rub the paste over the inside of the pork belly. Roll the pork belly lengthways and use butchers twine to tie the meat in place, at 2.5cm increments. Cover and refrigerate overnight. **3** The next day, remove porchetta from fridge, uncover and season liberally with salt all over skin. Leave for 1-2 hours to draw out moisture, then wipe away salt with a damp cloth. **4** Preheat oven to 140-150°C. Place porchetta on a wire rack inside a baking tray and cook for 2.5-3 hours. If the skin has not crackled, increase heat to 200°C and cook for a further 15 minutes. **5** Take out of oven and rest until warm. Remove string and using a serrated knife, cut into 1cm-thick slices. Serve with chimichurri.

FLAN MIXTO

SERVES 12

400g caster sugar
500g eggs (approx 10 whole eggs)
700ml milk
700ml cream
400g tin of condensed milk
1 jar store-bought dulce de leche
250ml whipped cream, to serve

1 Preheat oven to 120°C. In a pan, stir caster sugar on high heat until it forms a medium-to-dark caramel, then quickly add it to flan moulds before it sets. The moulds can be any shape, but must be at least 5-6cm deep. **2** In a bowl, whisk eggs to emulsify the yolks and whites. Add milk, cream and condensed milk and mix until incorporated. **3** Once the caramel has fully set in the moulds, pour the egg and milk on top. **4** Place full moulds in a large, oven-safe tray that is suitable to hold hot water. Fill with hot water, at least 2cm up the side of the moulds. **5** Place the tray in the oven and cook for 40 minutes to an hour. Low heat is essential; you can monitor with a cooking thermometer—desserts are perfectly cooked at 79°C. **6** Cool in the fridge for at least 4 hours before serving topped with dulce de leche and whipped cream.



Flan mixto topped
with dulce de leche
and whipped cream
(recipe on p158)