

# Andre's Cucina and Polenta Bar

Andre's Cucina & Polenta Bar  
94 Frome Street Adelaide  
Phone 8224 0004

Open Monday  
7am-11am Breakfast  
and 5pm-11pm Dinner  
Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner  
Tuesday to Saturday

[andrescucina.com.au](http://andrescucina.com.au)



## food & wine

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After a wine tasting I was bundled into Andre's Cucina and Polenta Bar by some good friends. I trust their food savvy well, but a *Polenta Bar*? I had no knowledge of its already famous chef. The place was full, and I was bemused.

It was explained to me, patiently, as if I were a child, that Andre Ursini was famous because he was placed in the television show *MasterChef*.

I am not going to rubbish *MasterChef* from my great intellectual heights. I have seen *MasterChef* and similar shows, and I believe that programs that engage and teach, especially with phenomenal ratings, must be good for the everyday use of cheaper, better, fresher. I don't give a bugger about people who love Jamie and loathe Nigella, if the end result is that more people take notice of food, even gardening, we will all be better off.

I have seen a couple of children's versions of the same show and I was impressed at how the budding chefs were not put under too much pressure and seemed to be enjoying themselves. It may be a truism, but you do have to know how to eat before you can cook.

As for the "and polenta bar" part of the restaurant's title, well, polenta doesn't dominate the menu to the exclusion of other Italian treats. This relieved me. I don't mind polenta as a sustenance food. It can be satisfyingly sloppy and cleverly crisp. Or it can be tricked up until it is glue. Or it can be crisped until it is dead.

The menu is not heavy on polenta; instead it relies on the chalk board as its centre, which

really does change constantly. The three (\$15) polenta dishes at Andre's have swerved me around about polenta. At least as they are served at Andre's.

Andre came and talked to my friends, who are regulars. I was looking on, wondering where the hell this animated knowledgeable young chef had sprung from. His fervour was marvellously infectious, even accommodating my own enthusiasm for the Amaro I was drinking, a predictable enthusiasm for anyone who knows me when I am out at an Italian restaurant and I have slucced down a few Montenegro, Cynar, or similar.

I ate at Andre's again, then, on my third booking, he recognised my voice, (not my name, as I don't book under John McGrath) and told me excitedly what I would like best on the menu. I adore being treated like that; no choice – here's what you'll have. His staff also reflect his enthusiasm.

Here are a few things I know you will like. *Bagna cauda*. A hot dip made at Andre's with a mixture of power and subtlety, served with fresh, not limp, vegetables. Dips, schmups. Nearly always a suicide mission in a restaurant. If you were lucky enough to be in Piedmont at Christmas time you might get *bagna cauda* based on truffles to swish cardoons in. Play around with your *bagna cauda* and maybe olive all'ascolana: olives stuffed with fine chicken, cheese and herb pâté and look at the main menu and the chalk-board to decide on your main course. Or you might try some *capesante*:

half shell scallops crusted with breadcrumbs, herbs and lemon zest. \$3.50 each. Or baby fennel

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photo: Tony Lewis

(so crunchily it qualifies as acoustic food) wrapped in *guanciale* with orange vincotto – from the specials. *Guanciale* is un-smoked Italian bacon made with pig's jowls. You might make a mental note to use it in your spaghetti carbonara, which is what some Italians do. If your family smokes *guanciale*, don't e-mail me in a rage, it is very hard to define exact methods for Italian cuisine. Which makes it all the more exciting.

We had a 2002 Kaesler "The Bogan" Shiraz. It may have been a high alcohol problem youth, selling drugs behind the gym at school. Now it is a big-hearted, well-balanced chap; a credit to the faith and patience of its parents. Amazing to drink eight years on. A reminder of what the Barossa could and could still do. Big fruit, big alcohol, big wood equals an amazing funambulist stunt which equals miraculous elegance. We shared Bottle No 10650. I didn't want it to finish. This

bottle was "off list". The main wine list is short and well chosen. It hovers from \$35 - \$60.

Sashay on to the main menu with *assaggiini misti*, a platter of good Italian salumi, garnished with cheese, olives, Italian preserves and crostini.

Vegetarians get two sorts of mixed platters. I wouldn't miss the *fungi al burro di nocciolate* (mushrooms sautéed in hazelnut and garlic butter served with ricotta and basil pesto).

There is much more to the main courses on the blackboard.

If the panna cotta is on the board, one of you must have it.

I am thrilled that whatever it takes to star in *MasterChef* can translate into running a successful restaurant. I'll be back, next time for a marvellous looking breakfast I haven't had.

Remember to book. See you there.

– John McGrath