



Pasta pilgrimage

Two things make Emilia's Crafted Pasta in St Katherine Docks, London, stand out from the crowd - the determination of a 24-year-old entrepreneur, Andrew Macleod, - passionate about making pasta the hero again, and the authenticity of the pasta bar he created.



AUTHENTIC

Emilia's fresh pasta is made daily with a respect for tradition learned from local chefs in rural Italy, and a range of other foods and drinks sourced for their authentic Italian nature.

To get to the heart of what makes good pasta, founder, Andrew Macleod, spent 18 months travelling around the Emilia Romana region of Italy, studying the science and geometry of pasta, taking inspiration from chefs - not the famous ones, the local ones with a real passion for cooking recipes passed through the generations. Shortly after his return, he sold his poker events company, started when he was just 17, and invested every penny into launching his dream - Emilia's Crafted Pasta. Ahead of the pasta trend, he opened Emilia's on the fringes of the city with idyllic waterside views at St Katherine's Docks in November 2016.

Emilia's food is made from scratch every day to guarantee freshness, authenticity and taste. The menu is made using only the purest ingredients, with some exclusively sourced from a handful of local, sustainable suppliers in Italy. There is also a revolving specials board that showcases dishes never seen before in

London such as Parmesan Balls - melt-in-the-mouth fried parmesan, shaped into small balls. There are also twists on classics such as their famed four hour slow-cooked Bolognese using 'Pasture for Life' certified 100% grass fed organic beef, made heartier and creamier with fresh béchamel, and the homemade pesto which is filled to the brim with Parmesan, making it wonderfully creamy and proper Genovese.

ACCOMPANIMENTS

Drinks, such as the Lurisia Gazzosa (an artisanal lemonade usually only found in Italy) and Amarcord Gradisca (a unique Italian craft beer feature on the menu) also feature on the menu, as well as coffee that has been sourced from The Roasting, a small independent Italian roaster with a coffee shop in Victoria.

The wine menu is simple, with two whites, two reds, a rose and a prosecco. The standout option is the Nuovo Quadro from the Battistina Estate. This single estate Gavi di Gavi comes from a small five-hectare plot which is renowned as the prime vineyard location in the area, and delivers texture, minerality, zesty citrus and ripe peach, finishing with a nutty

twist that's so characteristic of the region.

Inside, Emilia's is chic and simple - reclaimed cargo timber for cupboards and shelving complement the marble-topped pasta bars, while terracotta shaded floor tiles have been sourced from rural parts of the Emilia Romagna region, providing a rustic feel to this buzzy Italian pasta bar. Boasting an immersive chef's table and open kitchen, this intimate 38 square metre restaurant offers 25 seats inside with a further 12 outdoor seats with tranquil dockside views, feeling almost like one could be dining by the coast in Italy.





Q&A

HOW DID YOUR TRIP TO EMILIA ROMAGNA COME ABOUT?

I've loved eating pasta since I was a young boy; my mother always served up a simple fresh pasta dish regularly. From these humble beginnings started an obsession with this fascinating Italian staple. I started cooking pasta at home then travelled numerous times to Italy to learn from experienced *pastaio*. Being the birthplace of fresh pasta, it was only natural that I visited Emilia Romagna, where I found the best restaurants to be the local family trattorias serving modest yet delicious meals.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN THERE?

During my travels I met some talented chefs with a real passion for cooking recipes passed down the generations. I learned about flavour, tradition, small details, techniques and came to appreciate the craft behind making pasta. I also learned about the differences between different types of the same cheese and olive oils. Throughout my travels I also learned about the provenance of ingredients such as artisanal balsamic vinegar, Parma ham and other cured meats as well as tomatoes, pistachios and lemons. We try to source many of these at Emilia's.

WHAT DISCOVERY/INSIGHT SURPRISED OR INTRIGUED YOU THE MOST?

Making pasta is a craft. No two pasta makers create exactly the same pasta, hence why it is still considered a craft – simple variations in the process make for a completely different flavour profile.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO FOCUS ON PASTA AND HOW HAVE YOU INTEGRATED WHAT YOU DISCOVERED INTO YOUR CONCEPT?

I grew up on pasta, born of the millennial generation for whom pasta was an everyday item. Family trips to Italy further inspired my interest in this simple, yet complex staple. I came to really appreciate the level of craft involved in creating this delicious and aesthetically pleasing food. You don't see potatoes, rice or bread created in the multitude of fun shapes you'd find pasta.

FRESH OR DRIED – IS THERE A DIFFERENCE/PREFERENCE, IN YOUR OPINION (PARTICULARLY WHEN IT COMES TO THE ITALIAN RESTAURANT SCENE)?

There is a common misconception in the UK that fresh pasta is in some way superior to dried pasta. Incorrect. The difference in the way they're made means certain sauces work better and neither is superior to the other. At Emilia's we make both dried and egg pasta as certain sauces pair better with egg pasta (e.g. béchamel Bolognese) and others pair better with semolina pasta (e.g. carbonara). It for this reason that we believe in having a mix of both on the menu. For our dried pasta we opt for semolina only pasta as I prefer

the rough texture it creates and believe the sauce sticks better to the pasta than with just flour 00 or a mix of both.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT SOME OF YOUR PASTA DISHES – SHAPES AND SAUCES PAIRINGS, WHAT GOES WELL WITH WHAT, AND WHY...

Our pasta dishes are made from scratch every day start to finish and inspired from traditional recipes and techniques. The menu is made using only the purest of ingredients, with some exclusively sourced from a handful of local, sustainable suppliers in Italy.

Our most famous dish is a twist on a classic – a (minimum) four hour slow-cooked Béchamel Bolognese made with our 'Pasture for life' certified 100% grass-fed organic beef mince from a small farm just outside Bristol, made heartier and creamier using fresh béchamel. We serve this with long silky-smooth golden ribbons of egg pappardelle, which is a pasta shape that works well with rich and meaty sauces enabling it to capture the Bolognese sauce on every cm of the pasta.

The pairing of sauces with their shapes is what we call the science behind our pasta. The weight, texture, and size of the pasta should complement the sauce. The delicate nature of long pasta such as bucatini requires a simple olive oil, tomato base or runny egg sauce, whilst the curves of ridged pasta like *casarecce* allow delicate recipes like homemade pesto to nestle in their twists

IN YOUR OPINION, COULD PASTA DISHES IN THE UK, ON THE WHOLE, BE FAR BETTER AND DO WITH BEING TREATED WITH FAR MORE RESPECT AND APPRECIATION, AND IF SO, HOW (ANY 'TOP TIPS')?

Yes, it definitely could! I'm always excited to try new restaurants that put have respect and appreciation for pasta above all and am always looking to perfect my craft. Pasta is the most popular carbohydrate in the world, but very unrepresented in restaurants in the UK. I opened Emilia's as I felt there was a lack of restaurants that made pasta properly with respect for the craft that is passed down the generations from *pastaio* to sons and daughters. It takes a lot of dedication and passion to pursue pasta making as there are so many details and intricacies to make it well.



For example, one of the first times I encountered the carbonara in Italy was when I was staying with five students from different parts of Italy. They were each giving their own tips about Italian cooking and one guy cooked it with egg yolks only. I had only previously seen whole eggs being used and that sparked a conversation. It emerged that there are different ways of cooking it in different regions in Italy and we experimented the different techniques and ingredients, from pancetta to guanciale, with and without parsley, etc. Although I still favour the northern Italian method using whole eggs to make it a little lighter I love that I first encountered this dish from a cultural rather than culinary point of view. It is a true reflection of Italian culture and for me the carbonara represents the simplicity of Italian food and how hard it can be to get it absolutely perfect in taste.

WHAT FEEDBACK HAVE YOU HAD FROM YOUR GUESTS, AND WHAT DO THEY LIKE – THEIR FAVOURITE DISHES - AND WHY?

All our guests have different things they love about their experience at Emilia's. Some like our youthful casualness and positive energy – we enjoy what we do! The dining experience has received many plaudits because we have a lovely balance between flavour, density, freshness and lightness. Our homemade pesto, which is filled to the brim with Parmesan, making it wonderfully creamy and proper Genovese is a dish that has been the subject of much critical acclaim and praise from our guests.

WHAT AMBITIONS IN RELATION TO YOUR PASTA DISHES DO YOU HAVE FOR THE FUTURE?

I try not to think too much about my ambitions, but rather prefer to take each day one pasta shape at a time. I really want us to be recognised as the best and most engaging pasta restaurant in operation. We plan to open a second restaurant in 2019 in Aldgate and my focus will simply be to bring our unique crafted pasta to a wider audience.

ANY MORE PASTA/FOODIE TRIPS PLANNED TO ITALY?

I try to visit Italy at least two times a year to further explore the world of pasta and Italian food. I'm always learning something new and exciting each time I go there, small nuances that, on my return, make for an amazing pasta experience at Emilia's.

