



Syracuse Restaurant

When co-owner Paul Lumicisi found a dilapidated hotel dining room in a forgotten area of Melbourne, he decided to revitalise this 120-year-old beauty.

“**W**hen Charlie [Sirianos, co-owner] and I first saw the space in 1996, it had been unoccupied for three years. Its last incarnation had been as a dodgy Indian restaurant that had been closed by the authorities. I had never seen such a mess. The cast-iron columns had seven layers of oil paint on them. There were old air-conditioners in the windows and huge rat holes in the floorboards. The only piece of equipment was an ancient tandoori oven.

“But we could still see the beauty of the room. It was originally a dining room for a hotel built in 1892. The building is called Stalbridge Chambers and at one stage was the highest building in Melbourne. So we began restoring this grand old dining room. There are 16-foot ceilings, running plaster cornices, arches and cast-iron columns. The proportions of the room are fantastic. People enter through a small doorway—where we have retained the original black and white marble tiles—then step onto the wooden floor as the space opens up to reveal a beautiful room with two large chandeliers and huge mirrors.

“We had the chandeliers specially made and they suit the room perfectly. They look like they have been there forever. We also have wall uprights and rosette lighting on top of the columns.

“During the day, the sunlight bounces off the building next door which gives a great glow inside. By the end of the night, the chandeliers are turned all the way down so there’s just a soft glow from the wall lights. Lighting is paramount and everything is on dimmers.

“We took the advice of Amanda Lynn [interior designer, 0438 952 141] when it came to colours. She’s helped us with simple things like using clean white on the ceilings and darker colours at floor level to ground the place.

“While all the crockery and cutlery is brand new, we found that second-hand tables and chairs really suited the space. We dress them up with new linen but also use a lot of antique pieces like sugar bowls and jugs. The room was built in 1892 and to keep that feel in place we go to a lot of auction houses such as Leonard Joel [www.leonardjoel.com.au]. We found the large oak fireplace and some beautiful lamps at auction.

“One new item is the long timber serving bar. It has a top made from 330mm-wide planks of Oregon timber and is about six metres long. It’s a really warm, beautiful piece with only one knot

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in it. The kitchen would be one of the smallest in Melbourne. Originally the hotel had an offsite kitchen accessed by an elevator. Our kitchen is in the spot where the elevator used to be. It’s semi-open and can be challenging for the chefs because they have to design a menu that pumps out interesting food very quickly from a small space.

“We are a good solid restaurant. We’re not top-end and we’re not a cafe. I’ve been working here for 15 years and I still don’t get bored. Syracuse is such a beautifully proportioned room, filled with interesting nooks and crannies.” ○