

Holloway gets a slice of the action

David
Sexton



RESTAURANTS OF THE WEEK

ZIA LUCIA
★★★★☆

157 Holloway Road, N7 (020 7700 3708, zialucia.com). Open Tues-Sun, 11.30am-10.30pm. About £40 for two.

YARD SALE
★★★★☆

54 Blackstock Road, N4 (020 7226 2651, yardsalepizza.com). Open Mon-Thurs, 5pm-11pm, Fri-Sat, noon-11pm, Sun, noon-10pm. About £40 for two.

IT'S a funny place, Holloway Road, aka the A1, a river of traffic without many crossings. For years I used to sit at the traffic lights at Drayton Park contemplating the premises of Co-op Funeral Care opposite, waiting me out. According to Pevsner, "the indifferent S. end of Holloway Road has a scatter of decayed minor C19 ribbon development..." It now has boutique coffee and snacky places (La Muse with a butternut squash and halloumi petit déjeuner "vegetariene") amid the surviving marble masons and autoparts, secondhand furniture shops, a "couture latex" specialist, porn merchants (webuyanyporn.com), and pizza takeaways (City Pizza, featuring the Hawaiian and the Meat Feast).

It moreover now boasts this excellent, properly Italian pizzeria, created by Holloway residents and financiers Claudio Vescovo and Gianluca D'Angelo, in premises that used to be a fireworks shop. They've done a great, not too original conversion: an oak floor, bare brick walls, filament bulbs, harlequin furniture, a stripey awning, Ikea glasses and napkins. The ceiling is high enough to make the acoustic enjoyable too. Simple shelves high on the walls are stocked with bottles and supplies (big cans of Polpapizza and Carciofi Alla Romana) and each table has its bottle of olive oil and balsamic vinegar plus a flask of water filled with a stalk of mint, just enough to give it a little tang.

There are 46 covers inside and a dozen or so on the pavement. Sitting there at lunchtime on Sunday, the number of walk-ins was noticeable: couples passing by, turning around and liking what they saw enough to stop by, in this child-friendly place, amicably managed by another long-time local, Alessio.

Yet the pizzas are classy, made from 48-hour slow-fermented sourdoughs, twirled by a showy pizzaiolo and cooked in a fierce wood-fired oven imported from Naples, starting with a Margherita at £6.90 and running up to a lavish Arianna at £10.80 (mozzarella, fresh sausage, taleggio goat cheese, pecorino, truffle honey).

There's a choice of bases, traditional, wholemeal and a new one on me, the "Vegetable Charcoal", quite black with an enjoyable slightly bitter flavour, not to mention, the menu adds, "digestive gas-absorbing capacities", possibly TMI. In fact, all the pizza bases, although substantial, chewy and even doughy



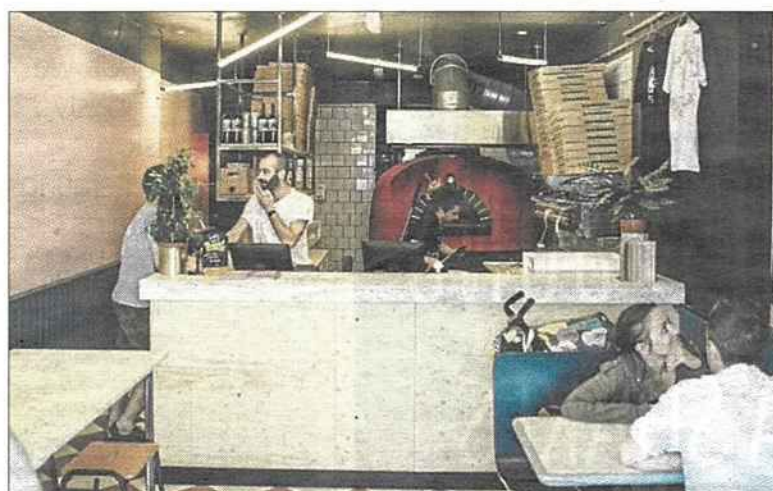
rather than Roman-style thin and crisp, turned out to be surprisingly digestible, mercifully not resulting in profound pizza-penitence a couple of hours later.

There is also the now compulsory gluten-free offering. An interesting article in that invaluable journal Gastroenterology, on Nonceliac Gluten Sensitivity, points out that "there is clearly a fad component to the GFD", since coeliac disease actually affects only one to two per cent of the population. Quite why, if you suffered from it, you would head for pizza nonetheless, when, as Daniel Young points out in his global bible, *Where to Eat Pizza*, published by Phaidon earlier this year, it is the sticky gluten, often 12 per cent or so, developing in the dough, that gives it its strength and elasticity, seems a question too sad to insist on. Young, incidentally, also points out that the assumption that buffalo mozzarella is always best for pizza (as it certainly is for salads) is no longer true ("fresh, high-quality cow's milk mozzarella, with its supreme melting qualities, might now be the more appropriate cheese to cook"). Zia Lucia caters for this by offering to switch up any pizza to buffalo for £2.50 extra.

All the toppings here are righteous: Via del Campo (£9.50) with buffalo mozzarella, cooked tomatoes and fresh tomatoes, with basil, does that River Café trick of having the same ingredient in two different states, while the Nduja (£8.90) is wildly spicy, be warned. No pineapples

FIVE THINGS DAVID ATE THIS WEEK

1. On Thursday, crispy roast duck leg, visiting David and Mary-Alice, happily back for the summer from Berkeley.
2. On Saturday, with neighbours Tom and Alba, with neighbours Tom and Tarshish, the palatial new top-floor restaurant in Wood Green with amazing views, assiduous service and an ambitious, fusiony menu (Wagyu steak!),



are harmed on these premises. A short list of desserts (tiramisu, ricotta cheesecake) includes a monstrous pizza pudding with custard and fruit, plus nutella concealed in the wrap-around, or cornicione. The all-Italian wine list starts at £5.50 a glass, £18 a bottle, passes through two proseccos, one being extra-dry, and concludes with a deeply-flavoured red Renosu from Sardinia (£27). So this is the real thing, as Italian as it comes (somewhere between Rome and Naples, one of the owners suggested): Holloway Road never had it so good before.

Yard Sale started on Lower Clapton Road in May 2014, created by three friends who had begun in a back garden, and its pizzas have been hailed as

opened by the owners of Gokyuzu. But perhaps straight Turkish can't be beaten?

3. On Sunday evening, watching France dispatch Iceland in the Euros (I support France), some fantastic brown shrimps in the shell, pictured, from the Norfolk fishmonger in Islington Farmers' Market. With a glass of Mâcon, of course.

4. For Monday lunch, a margherita

Hackney's finest by Hackney types. Now it has opened a second branch, just south of Finsbury Park, on the mix-up that is Blackstock Road, just past the ultra-trendy and extremely busy Salvation in Noodles. It seats just 28, some in a den at the back, and presumably does most of its trade as takeaway and delivery (a Clapton friend, although a fan, warns that it is not the speediest deliverer).

Here the ambience is full hipster: blue and pink paint, red and white chequer lino tiles, utility furniture, no cutlery, strip lighting hung at fun angles, bass-heavy soft rock at high volume, a pizzaiolo with matted dreadlocks.

In his forthcoming collection of essays, *Against Everything*, the brilliant cultural critic Mark Greif reprints his 2010 New

at Pizza Pilgrims in Dean Street, as a reference, before seeing horrorfest *The Neon Demon*. Pretty good but I did feel uncomfortably indigested at just about the point the eyeball is regurgitated.

5. For supper on Monday, fried plaice fillets from the same Islington stall – it is the sweetest fish, mysteriously, isn't it? – with softened sorrel. Better at home, just as Rowley says.

York piece called *What Was The Hipster?*, saying it was "something like bohemia without the revolutionary core. Among hipsters, the skills of hanging-on – trend-spotting, cool-hunting, plus handcraft skills – become the heroic practice. The most active participants sell something ... and the more passive just buy it." All he got wrong was the tense of his title, as a visit to Yard Sale reveals. Strange what a difference the short trip from Hackney to Finsbury can reveal: this is like a colonial mission.

The pizza bases are well-proved, well-made and baked (gluten-free and thus denatured for an additional £2) available in 12- or 18-inch rounds, with untraditional toppings. TSB was a rather bland vegetarian option (£9.50 for the smaller), with broccoli, manchego, pine nuts, garlic and olive oil. A Finsbury speciality was the Mullered Mushroom, portobello mushrooms braised in beer ("Five Points London Smoke porter") with a sweet onion chutney also made with beer ("Five Points Pale Ale") as well as ricotta and mozzarella and herbs: quite a rich, rewarding novelty, if not pizza as seen in Italy, or for every day.

Still, the most memorable pizza ever for me was the square of thin crust, topped just with waxy yellow potato slices, dressed with rosemary and oil, that I invariably had for breakfast from a stand in Rome, when it was all I could afford. Now nothing beats the Turkish version, lahmacun, superbly made at Antepililer in Green Lanes, for £3.50.

Yard Sale's rocket and parmesan salad, pleasantly fresh, came however with whole tomatoes and a strange absence of olive oil: the wooden forks we were given with this helped make the pizza eating slightly less mucky at least. The wine was a Sicilian blend from a winebox but then if you don't go for locavore craft beer here, you're misplaced.

Where to Eat Pizza, all 575 blocky pages of it, in which Yard Sale features, alongside tips for Singapore and São Paulo, is proudly displayed on the counter. If it makes another edition, Zia Lucia richly deserves to be there too. Even more so, perhaps.

Pizza party:
Zia Lucia
and, below,
Yard Sale