

Funky bar brings life back to dead alley

Description



The genius behind Coffin Sally's pizza and bar in Port Fairy is the combined talents of Trent Eggington and Peter Charlton.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]t was fog-breath freezing and pouring with rain when *Bluestone* first discovered **Coffin Sally's** bar which, theoretically, should have been as dead as a doornail, given the weather.

Instead this little slice of Fitzroy in Port Fairy was packed with people warming themselves by a roaring fire in an old bluestone fireplace that was built for just such nights, while owners **Peter Charlton** and **Trent Eggington** and their fleet-footed staff kept the wine flowing and the pizza coming.

It was like stepping into a party to which everyone was invited and everyone was relaxed, not least of all Peter and Trent who, in their own words, are living the dream.

The pair became friends about seven years ago after working together in pizza shops in Lorne, and – like most of us who work for others – dreamt of some day owning their own business that, in their case, would centre around a gourmet pizza bar.

Peter, who grew up in NSW, is a chef and Trent, from Melbourne, has three years' training as an architect which has given him a keen eye for what works with interior design. Aside from an appreciation for good food and aesthetics, however, the pair also share a passion for surfing.

"We spent about two years looking for the right place, the right building, that was also by the beach," Peter explains.



Trent's background in training as an architect has created a space that is as quirky as it is warm and inviting.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T [/dropcap]he pair originally headed east from Lorne, investigating shops around the Port Arlington area, before deciding to check out Port Fairy and finding not only fantastic surf, but the perfect, vacant building – although it didn't look perfect at the time.

“When we first saw this place, the walls in the whole back area were covered right up to the roof,”

Peter says of the thick bluestone walls that date back to the 1840s.

Peter and Trent took the plunge and started their gourmet pizza business at the front of the shop in 2012 which – with its retro interior, cool music and chilled, expert staff (some hail from Cookie and The Toff, in Melbourne) – set the tone for what was to come.

“It is the first time we have ever done anything like this, so we are still learning, but there has been a slow evolution and things have just grown and unfolded organically,” Trent explains.

After developing a loyal following through their pizzas, Trent and Peter expanded by renovating the middle of the building to create a cosy bar that serves boutique beers and interesting wines and added a separate dining room at the rear that, through clever design, looks like it has been there forever.

“I love old things,” Trent says of his interior design work that features exposed beams, candles piled with dripping wax and blanched animal skulls.

“I love wood and stone and earthy, recycled materials and because we didn’t have much money, we have worked with what was here,” he says.

What was there included the idea for a business name, with the back alley behind the shop known as Coffin Alley because it originally led to an undertakers. The boys simply added an ‘s’.



Surfing and small business come together for Trent and Peter who spent two years looking for the right location before deciding on Port Fairy.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T [/dropcap]he bar opened in winter last year and, like the pizza shop before it, has become extraordinarily successful without one ounce of advertising, but simply word of mouth.

And the pair isn't finished yet. As part of their organic growth, they hope to eventually expand their kitchen and their menu while sticking to their philosophy of using only good quality produce.

"I think if you don't get too caught up in making money and just enjoy it, that is how we have taken each step so far," Peter says.

Besides, there is also surfing to be done.

Despite it being barely 10 degrees, Trent tells me that he, and his kelpie Anchovy, will be heading to the beach straight after our interview.

"It's a pretty good life," he laughs.



Candles burn well into the night in the back bar...

[box type="bio"] **Coffin Sally is at 33 Sackville St, Port Fairy. Winter opening times are Wed-Sunday. Ph: (03) 5568 2618**[/box]

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