

Cooking class

Food magazines and TV chefs are popular distractions, but if you're serious about learning to cook then why not take a real-life course? By **Carli Ratcliff**.



yourself. Be warned though: there is a scramble for bench space as stealthy seafood schoolers race to get their hands on the fun bits, so as not to be stuck de-veining prawns.

Former ad man Kim Terakes began **Boys Can Cook** four years ago. After 25 years of business lunches, Terakes decided it was time to teach blokes how to put a meal together. Presenting two-hour classes on Saturday afternoons, he has one eye on the sports channel, the other on the stove as he shows boys of all ages how to create a three-course meal, while throwing back a few beers with the rest of the class. The boys lap it up, asking questions and sharing restaurant recommendations between the laughs.

Accoutrement in Mosman opened Sydney's first cooking school, pioneered by gourmet guru Sue Jenkins, in 1980. The program runs all year and includes a wide range of cooking styles. Pitched at Niggellas in the making, chefs include Martin Boetz of Longrain fame on curries; Brent Savage from Bentley on the perfect pre-dinner snacks; pastry goddess pastry Lorraine Godsmark on desserts; and cheese specialist Claudia McIntosh on the perfect cheese platter.

Accoutrement's Ben Jenkins is the brave chef who runs school holiday cooking classes for kids and teenagers. The menu is healthy and sophisticated. Teens prepare an entree of pumpkin mozzarella bake, followed by chicken escalopes with parsley and capers, and a side of sauteed cauliflower. The chocolate toffee nut squares they make for dessert are a hit, the kids scrambling to lick the bowl.

Nick Palumbo of **Gelato Messina** in Darlinghurst runs gelato appreciation classes on the first Saturday of each month, taking students through the history and finer points of making gelato and sorbetti, with plenty of tasting along the way. Lovers of all things icy can try their hands at decorating Messina's impressive range of ice-cream cakes.

Italy's famous pasta company, Barilla, opens a new Italian cooking school in Leichhardt this week called **Casa Barilla**. Headed by Luca Ciano (pictured left, in black, with president of the Council of Italian Restaurants in Australia, Armando Percuoco), it's not just about pasta. The school offers classes in the art of risotto, and for singles there's a food and wine matching class where you mingle with like-minded foodies while Luca takes you through the creation of a menu for two. There are classes on the regional cuisines of Lombardy and

Tuscany, and on extra virgin olive oils and aged vinegars.

Maeve O'Meara started **Gourmet Safaris** 10 years ago, taking interested foodies into suburbs and food cultures they'd previously had no exposure to.

"Speaking to the participants on our Italian walking tours, we discovered there was a fascination with really great pizza," explains O'Meara. "So five years ago we teamed up with expert and Napoli native, Ben Riccio, at Napoli in Bocca [in Haberfield]. Ben takes the class through the history of pizza, demonstrates the best way to make dough and sauce, and translates the best pizzeria pizza into recipes and methods students can replicate at home."

WHERE TO LEARN

SYDNEY SEAFOOD SCHOOL
Sydney Fish Markets, Pyrmont
www.sydneyfishmarket.com.au

Bookings: 9004 1111
GREEKALICIOUS
The Intuitive Well Centre
1st Floor, 70 Bronte Road,
Bondi Junction
www.greekalicious.com.au

Bookings: 9331 0734
ACCOUTREMENT
611 Military Road, Mosman
www.accoutrement.com.au

Bookings: 9969 4911
BOYS CAN COOK
Blanco Showroom, 40 Ebley Street,
Bondi Junction
www.boyscancook.com

Bookings: 9281 2433
GOURMET SAFARIS
www.gourmetsafaris.com.au

Bookings: 9960 5675
GELATO MESSINA
241 Victoria Street, Darlinghurst
Bookings: 8354 1223

CASA BARILLA
4 Annandale Street, Annandale
www.barillaaus.com
Bookings: 8585 3911

Sydney has a world of hands-on how-to classes certain to spice up your kitchen repertoire. And don't worry: the professionals running these courses aren't just great cooks: they're also bursting with personality.

Maria Benardis retired from a career as a tax specialist, swapping her calculator for a colander to follow her dream of teaching Greek cuisine to keen home cooks. She began **Greekalicious** in 2007.

"I felt there was a need to revisit and teach traditional Greek recipes, true to their heritage and region," Benardis (top right) says.

Her class is fun and fascinating. Bernadis's knowledge stretches back to the Ancient Greeks and Romans and she peppers the class with enchanting stories and the history

of ingredients. I had no idea that fish sauce was invented by the Greeks, or that the cooks that served the Roman Empire all hailed from Athens, the centre of 'gastronomy', a word that originated from the Ancient Greek *gastros* (stomach), and *nomos* (knowledge).

Maria invites everyone to the stove, and by the end of the session, as we tuck into *plaki* – a whole baked snapper, ouzo-laced cheese pies and cinnamon rice pudding – she has 15 students confident enough to have a crack at a three-course Greek meal.

Sydney Seafood School, upstairs from the Sydney Fish Market in Pyrmont, offers cooking classes for fish lovers, from those who have only ever opened a box of fish fingers to aspiring Rick Steins.

Classes run for two hours and begin with a demonstration by the chef of the day before you don an apron and prepare the dish