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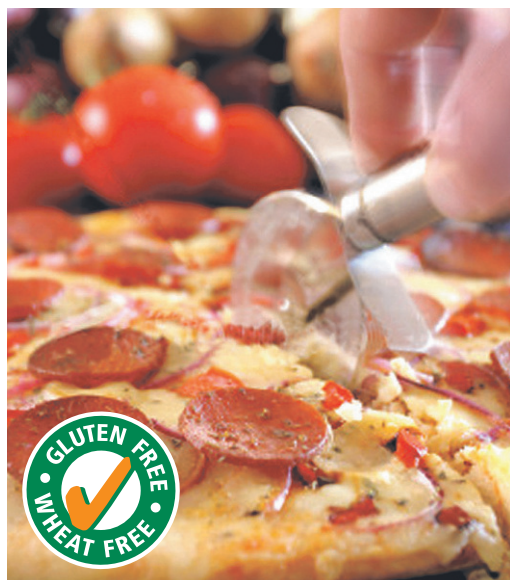
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EAT OUT

The Forkleys

Simon Thomsen takes a tongue-in-cheek look at the year's big movers and shakers in dining

GOOD morning and welcome to the inaugural Forkley Awards, the most glamorous day on Australia's food-prize calendar. This column has implemented these prestigious awards to recognise that the food industry, like a good soufflé, is a little bit cheesy and mostly hot air, so we'd like to pay tribute to the biggest trends of the past 12 months. And the winners are:

THE MOST IMPROVED SUBURB

Winner: Neutral Bay
FOR years real estate agents could only sell Neutral Bay as close to public transport and the city – where there was something to eat. Now an antipasto of new arrivals, including Enopizzeria, Pony, Neutral Bay Bar & Dining and Firefly, joining excellent Asian places such as Japaz, Ginger & Spice and Jugemu & Shimbashi, has the northside suburb rivalling Surry Hills as a culinary hotspot.

LET ME SLIP YOU SOME TONGUE AWARD

Winner: Holy Basil, Canley Heights
WHO made it compulsory to put veal tongue on menus? Even posh places such as Guillaume at Bennelong slip it into a main course with sweetbreads, raisins, almonds and gingerbread sauce. It's been the offal craze of 2010. In this keenly contested Forkley, Porteno's pickled veal tongue receives an Honourable Mention, however, Holy Basil's lu oi bo, grilled marinated ox tongue with nam jim wins.

HONEY I SHRUNK THE PORTIONS AWARD

Winner: Shared Plates
THERE'S a clever sleight-of-hand occurring amid the craze for shared plates. Portion sizes are shrinking, but you may notice your bill heading in the opposite direction. Now it takes three shared plates to equal two main courses, despite the shared food often costing the same as a normal main. If you grew up in a large family, avoid shared plates, since it's like fighting for scraps at the dinner table all over again.



City domination: Justin North's empire has expanded to the Opera House.

SHUT UP & EAT YOUR WEEDS

Winner: Rene Redzepi
FOOD fashionistas dumped Spaniard Ferran Adria like a ton of cold pork fat when they discovered his restaurant, El Bulli, was closing. In a scene reminiscent of Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, Danish chef Rene Redzepi became the new Messiah after Noma, in Copenhagen, was voted the world's top restaurant. Rene, like Melbourne's Ben Shewry, champions "foraging", which essentially means getting diners to pay for and eat what normal people call weeds. That's why plates increasingly look like an un-mown suburban backyard. Don't be surprised to find choko renamed the "Australian truffle" in 2011.

IN THE PINK

Winner: rosewinerevolution.com
AFTER years of Australia's rosé wines tasting like strawberry cordial, a sophisticated new approach emerged with a drier European style to drinking pink and the wineries responsible, led by Leanne De Bortoli, are championing the shift. Rosé wines are set to be this summer's top trend in plonk. Interestingly, social media, such as twitter, is where savvy wineries tweet about their new wines. Check the hashtag #roserev.

SECOND BITE OF THE CHERRY

Winners: Various chefs
IT was the year of the second restaurant, unless you're Neil Perry, who opened a second Spice Temple in Melbourne, along with plans for a third Rockpool Bar & Grill in Perth. Sake spread its wings with a Brisbane version, Woolloomooloo's China Doll crossed the Harbour with China Beach in Manly, while Damian Heads opened a second Pony Dining across the Bridge in Neutral Bay, and in Surry Hills, Vini's Andrew Cibej stayed close to home with Berta, so too Bodega with Porteno and Spice I Am with House. Even chefs from fine diners such as Assiette (District Dining, Surry Hills), Berowra Waters Inn (Ad Lib Bistro, Pymble) and Becasse (Charlie

& Co., City) hedged their bets by opening cheaper, casual places.

LET THEM EAT CAKE

Winner: Adriano Zumbo, Balmain
THIS country kid grew up to become the nation's hottest cake maker thanks to his macaron madness on *MasterChef*. A long queue now snakes out of his Balmain patisserie as fans wait for his zany sweet treats. Adriano was a favourite bon bon in *Cleo* Bachelor of the Year race and has been writing a patisserie book, due out later this year. A six-part TV series, *Zumbo*, airs on SBS from February 11.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU TWEET

Winner: Blue Angel, Darlinghurst
ON January 25, 2011, the Blue Angel celebrates a remarkable 50 years in the restaurant business. Not bad for an establishment that once received a review so scathing it sued the critic, Leo Schofield, and won. Owner Marcello Marcobello claims to have sold one million kilograms of lobster, but still maintains his rage, tweeting at restaurant critics, including this one, that he'd like to offer them the chance to "swim with our lobster".

THE GOLD FORKLEY

Winner: Justin North
THIS Kiwi-born chef has been quietly expanding his empire and his plans for city domination continue. Justin's flagship restaurant, Becasse, remains one of the city's finest diners. He also runs the more casual Etch at the InterContinental as well as two CBD cafes. More recently, joining one of 2010's biggest trends, he launched burger joint Charlie & Co. at Westfield Sydney. A second branch opened, along with Becasse Bakery, at the Opera House three weeks ago, while the main bakery opens to the public at Westfield Sydney in April. Justin is looking to expand Charlie & Co. this year, and, don't be surprised if a new style of restaurant joins the fold.



Forager: Noma's Rene Redzepi



On the up: Blood orange and cardamom tart at Neutral Bay Bar & Dining.