

**Bars** Kate Duthie

Reign of the plain

*Move over, hip flavours – Leichhardt has a contender for leader of the bland.*

**Vanilla Room**

153 NORTON STREET, LEICHHARDT. TEL: 9569 9411.

**Open** Fri-Sat 6pm-1am; Sun, Tue-Thu 6pm-midnight.

**Crowd** Mixed bag of locals.

**Vibe** Cool.

**Highs** The pizettas.

**Downs** Limited new decor.

**Drinks** Wine from \$6 a glass.

If I were vanilla I'd be outraged. I would loathe my nemesis chocolate and vow to bring it to its knees, along with its other flavoursome friends, strawberry, cranberry and, surely the tangiest, boysenberry.

Chocolate has had it too good for too long; it is considered dangerous, racy and exciting. Vanilla, regarded as boring, safe and predictable, has languished on the sidelines.

Strawberries become luxury items when they are dipped in chocolate and chocolate-coloured feature walls and furnishings are the decor du jour. Vanilla is the colour you paint your walls when you don't know what else to do, it's the colour that goes with everything else. When you order a vanilla gelato, everyone stares.

So it is with a scoop of trepidation topped with a sprinkle of high hopes that I venture to Leichhardt's newest bar, Vanilla Room. Will it plod along in a boring vanilla way or will it break the mould and re-establish vanilla as inviting, cool and sexy?

I'm disappointed to find that the interior doesn't seem to have changed much since it was the previous bar in this space, Uno 53.

The fitout is fine, making good use of what is a long, narrow room, with semicircular tables lining the fabric wave feature wall, a banquette-lined lounge at



the rear and tables and stools in the front bifold window area. More exciting is the addition, behind the tiled bar, of a wall of wines, glasses and decanters reflecting the bar's new focus on wine.

I love the red ceiling, dark floorboards and lanterns – made of wax and illuminated with tealights – that inject mood and warmth, making everything a bit sexy.

It's a Thursday night, not long after the bar's official opening, when I pop in and there's a good smattering of punters. It's ladies' night for a group downing cocktails, there's a couple romancing up the back, two blokes in the window nursing beers, two other blokes drinking a bottle of red, and me.

I sit at a small table along the wall, ordering a Yering Station chardonnay (from a barman who seems almost afraid of serving people) and, from the

dining menu, a pizetta described as "a subtle piece of magic transmuted by the alchemy of fire into a delicacy for the nose, the mouth and the eyes". Sounds racy. Within moments, my loins stirring in anticipation, I feast on a quite delicious Parma ham pizetta, straight from the oven, sliced and served on a rustic wooden platter.

So it's pretty exciting stuff, for vanilla, despite some teething problems that accompany new openings – some confusion over bills, a drinks mix-up and the attempt by the barmaid to settle my bill using someone else's credit card (fine by me).

It's just what Leichhardt needs since the only other grown-up bars include the very nice but oddly located Martin bar and the Leichhardt Hotel – where a recent insane, unnecessary redesign has put an enclosure full of pokies in the middle of the bar. Go vanilla.

Wall of wines: Vanilla Room's fitout reflects the bar's new focus. Photo: Nicole Boog