

**EATING OUT:** Tom Doorley travelled by way of the DART to sample the Italian delights of Il Fornaio and declares it a joy

# A piece of Italy in Kilbarrack

DEREK SPEIRS

**T**HERE are many crimes committed in the name of 'Italian' food in this country. One could mention the sort of gunk that passes as 'minestrone' soup, the obligatory tomato sauce with everything, the glorified cowpats that are sold under the name 'focaccia', the anaemic espressos, the plastic 'mozzarella'.

I once cooked a big brand pasta - I can't remember where it was made but it certainly wasn't Italy - and I was amazed at how it passed in seconds from a state of unyielding hardness to a sticky, soft mush with no intervening period for being *al dente*. And this is what most Irish people cook at home and think is pasta!

Perhaps the greatest abomination of all is what in Ireland we call 'garlic bread'. It is always made with baguette and if you are hungry enough and there's plenty of proper butter and parsley in it, it can be pretty tasty. But the chances are, it's made with a so-called dairy spread and has all the allure of a bucket of axle grease. This kind of garlic bread is unknown outside the British Isles.

In Italy, they take proper bread, a rustic loaf, and cut a thick slice from it. Then they toast it, rub some garlic over the surface and drizzle some excellent olive oil on top which then soaks into the dense texture of the bread. It is one of the simplest foods there is, but when done well, it's magnificent.

And it's magnificent at Il Fornaio, a little bit of Italy that has been mysteriously re-located to Kilbarrack Road in greater Raheny. Now, a few years ago I commented in these columns that Talbot Street was a particularly horrible place and I was savaged as a Southside Bigot by the *Evening Herald*. I have no doubt the same will happen now when I express mild surprise that this superb Italian bakery, *traiteur* and cafe should be in Kilbarrack rather than some fiercely trendy part of town like the more fashionable purlieus of Ranelagh or the damp but desirable fringes of Sandymount.

Anyway, the reason why Bruno Cinelli opened within a stone's throw of Kilbarrack DART station was



Il Fornaio on Kilbarrack Road, Raheny: proprietor Bruno Cinello says the time is right for authentic Italian food

because he has lived in the area for 30 years and he "knows the people". And they know his grub because as I munched my bread a steady stream of people were coming in to carry home lasagne, pizza, real focaccia, loaves of bread, the most amazing cakes and puddings and the stunning individual chocolate mousses.

I had plenty of time to contemplate the place because my companions for the evening were coming from the Southside - from

Skibbereen to be precise - and I had given them totally misleading directions. When they arrived, they were famished and craved, above all, salad because they had been living on junk food all day. So, we kicked off with a great big bowl of salad which we dressed to our individual requirements with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. At this point we also shared a bowl of cheese ravioli in a walnut sauce which, although a mite bland, began to fill the gap.

Then came pizzas of various sorts

which were so generous that Autumn (11) and Holly (9) suggested that the only answer would be a doggy-box. They proposed finishing them for breakfast.

Il Fornaio's pizzas have amazingly thin and crisp bases but they still retain an essential flexibility which is the mark of true pizza. Mine was liberally mulched with tomato sauce, mozzarella and little cherry tomatoes. It was the business. Holly and Autumn and I all had the same while their mum, Madeline, went

quite exotic and had something involving anchovies and artichoke hearts.

The grown-ups finished off with luscious, wonderful panna cotta (a kind of set, flavoured cream) while the girls larupped into exceptionally good chocolate mousse. They consumed a fair quantity of Coke while the over-21s enjoyed a delicious 1992 Barolo at a mere £17.50.

Espresso was, of course, superb and so was the general feeling of

well-being which coursed through the veins as we made our way to the DART.

Bruno Cinelli has run Valcomino, the Italian food wholesaler, for many years now and he says the time is right for authentic Italian grub. I'm sure he's right. Il Fornaio is a joy. The bill for four hungry and recklessly extravagant people came to €70.70.

Il Fornaio, 55 Kilbarrack Road, Raheny, Dublin 5. Telephone: 01 832 0277.