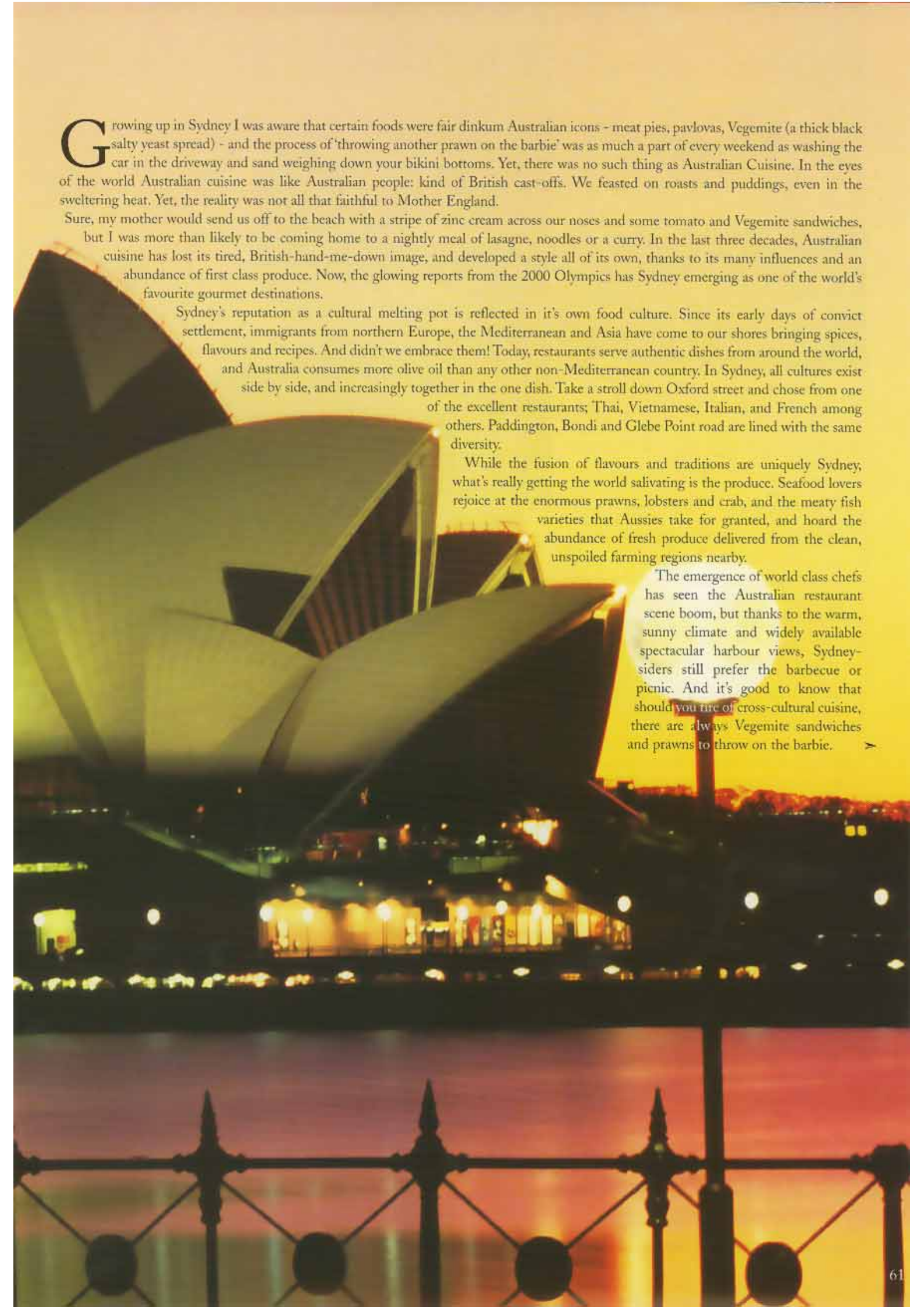


Margaret Ambrose takes us on a gourmet tour of Australia's hottest food city

The
food lovers
guide to
Sydney



Growing up in Sydney I was aware that certain foods were fair dinkum Australian icons - meat pies, pavlovas, Vegemite (a thick black salty yeast spread) - and the process of 'throwing another prawn on the barbie' was as much a part of every weekend as washing the car in the driveway and sand weighing down your bikini bottoms. Yet, there was no such thing as Australian Cuisine. In the eyes of the world Australian cuisine was like Australian people: kind of British cast-offs. We feasted on roasts and puddings, even in the sweltering heat. Yet, the reality was not all that faithful to Mother England.

Sure, my mother would send us off to the beach with a stripe of zinc cream across our noses and some tomato and Vegemite sandwiches, but I was more than likely to be coming home to a nightly meal of lasagne, noodles or a curry. In the last three decades, Australian cuisine has lost its tired, British-hand-me-down image, and developed a style all of its own, thanks to its many influences and an abundance of first class produce. Now, the glowing reports from the 2000 Olympics has Sydney emerging as one of the world's favourite gourmet destinations.

Sydney's reputation as a cultural melting pot is reflected in its own food culture. Since its early days of convict settlement, immigrants from northern Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia have come to our shores bringing spices, flavours and recipes. And didn't we embrace them! Today, restaurants serve authentic dishes from around the world, and Australia consumes more olive oil than any other non-Mediterranean country. In Sydney, all cultures exist side by side, and increasingly together in the one dish. Take a stroll down Oxford street and chose from one of the excellent restaurants; Thai, Vietnamese, Italian, and French among others. Paddington, Bondi and Glebe Point road are lined with the same diversity.

While the fusion of flavours and traditions are uniquely Sydney, what's really getting the world salivating is the produce. Seafood lovers rejoice at the enormous prawns, lobsters and crab, and the meaty fish varieties that Aussies take for granted, and hoard the abundance of fresh produce delivered from the clean, unspoiled farming regions nearby.

The emergence of world class chefs has seen the Australian restaurant scene boom, but thanks to the warm, sunny climate and widely available spectacular harbour views, Sydney-siders still prefer the barbecue or picnic. And it's good that should you tire of cross-cultural cuisine, there are always Vegemite sandwiches and prawns to throw on the barbie. ➤

SURF AND FOOD DESTINATION

Campbell Street, Bondi

As well as attracting an eclectic range of visitors, from surfies and junkies to supermodels and media magnates, Bondi fare, to be consumed as you stroll down the promenade dodging rollerbladers and small children, is equally diverse. The aroma of souvlaki and kebabs may be too much to resist, or you might be tempted by one of the many fruit juice stands that allow you to invent your own fruity cocktail combination. But if you really want to be like the locals, wrap your laughing gear (that's Aussie slang for 'mouth') around a battered and deep-fried Mars Bar - it's the snack of choice for surfies.

BEST TAKE HOME INGREDIENTS

Simon Johnson

Every Australian gourmet speaks of Simon Johnson like a dear family member. His three stores in Sydney sell a large range of gourmet food products along with a wide array of high quality fresh fruit and vegetables. Simon Johnson has a fabulous cheese room with a mouth-watering selection, and expert staff to help you choose.

*Simon Johnson, Purveyor of Quality Foods,
55 Queen Street, Woollahra NSW 2025
+61 2 9328 6888*

BEST MARKET

Sydney Fish Market

Seafood doesn't get any fresher than when it's sold meters from where the boats dock. Sydney Fish Market, right on the harbour's edge at Pyrmont, has all the vibrant atmosphere of a wharf-market. The world's second largest seafood market outside of Japan, Sydney Fish Market sells over 100 species of fish and seafood daily. Arrive by boat or water taxi, and take time to experience this authentic fishermen's market, which incorporates a working fishing port, wholesale fish market, fresh food retail market, food and beverage outlets, a seafood cooking school and live entertainment.

Bank Street, Pyrmont, NSW 2009. Tel: +61 2 9004 1100

RESTAURANT WITH BEST HARBOUR VIEW

Café Sydney

A sheer glass wall is all that stands between you, your meal, and one of the world's most breathtaking views: Sydney Harbour, the Harbour Bridge, and the Opera House. Café Sydney is located at the historic Customs House building overlooking Circular Quay, the equivalent of Central Station for ferries. It's a relaxed, lively venue and with the team of chefs working in the open kitchen, it's



Stocking up in a Simon Johnson store

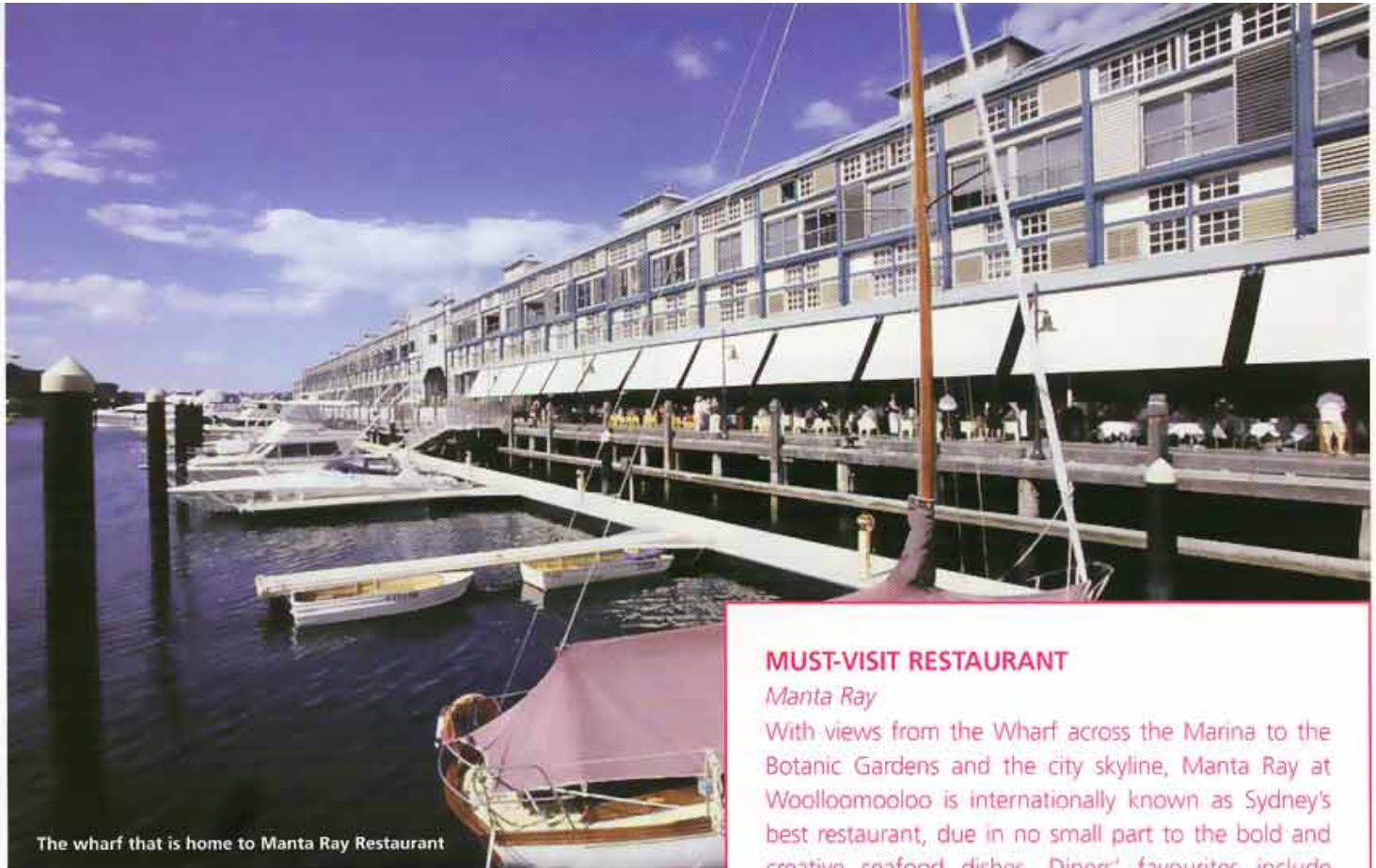
vibrant, bustling and full of energy. A menu featuring modern classics with a focus on fresh, Australian seafood and special features include a wood-fired grill and rotisserie, authentic Chinese wok and Indian tandoor oven.

*Level 5, Customs House, 31 Alfred Street, Circular Quay NSW 2000
Tel: +61 9251 8683*

LITTLE ITALY IN SYDNEY

Leichardt

Leichardt, in Sydney's inner west, was originally home to poor Italian immigrants and today is still home to an abundance of traditional Mediterranean delicatessen, where old men stand in the doorways heatedly solving the problems of the world, and family-run eateries, which serve traditional mama and papa fare prepared by mama and papa themselves. Now that inner west is terribly chic and property prices terribly expensive, the old widows in black who spend their days wandering from store to store in search of the best prosciutto are noticing the emergence of more upmarket restaurants with their modern takes on traditional Italian favourites.



The wharf that is home to Manta Ray Restaurant

MUST-VISIT RESTAURANT

Manta Ray

With views from the Wharf across the Marina to the Botanic Gardens and the city skyline, Manta Ray at Woolloomooloo is internationally known as Sydney's best restaurant, due in no small part to the bold and creative seafood dishes. Diners' favourites include lobsters or mud crabs barbecued or steamed with ginger and shallots or in the wok with sambal chilli. Dine in the stylish dining room or relax outside on the promenade where you can sip on a cold beer and enjoy the view.

The Wharf, Cowper Wharf Roadway, Woolloomooloo, NSW 2011. Tel: 61 2 9332 3822

BEST DARLING HARBOUR EXPERIENCE

Lotus Pond

No visit to Sydney is complete without being seen eating or shopping with the beautiful people at the newly developed Darling Harbour. Lotus Pond restaurant, nestled in the heart of Darling Harbour's Star City complex, incorporates delicacies from various regions of Asia in an extraordinary Chinese palace garden set within a delightful pond. Enclosed within the curves of two great dragons, Lotus Pond's menu features regional delicacies from China, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam.

Level 2 of Star City, Lotus Pond NSW 2000. Tel: 1800 700 700.

STOCKING A PICNIC BASKET

Jones the Grocer

Make sure you have a very large picnic basket before you drop into Jones the Grocer at their scenic Bondi Beach location. Jones the

Grocer is a local institution, stocking a wide variety of gourmet produce, fruit and vegetables and pastries, alongside an impressive selection of oils, sauces, olives, pates, anti-pasta, dips, cold meats and sausages. Jones the Grocer offers lots of delicious pre-prepared dishes, including noodles, steamed dim sum and couscous. Don't miss their famous Portuguese custard tarts.

36 Campbell Parade, Bondi NSW 2720. Tel: +61 2 9362 1222

LOCAL DELICACIES

Croc, Roo and Emus

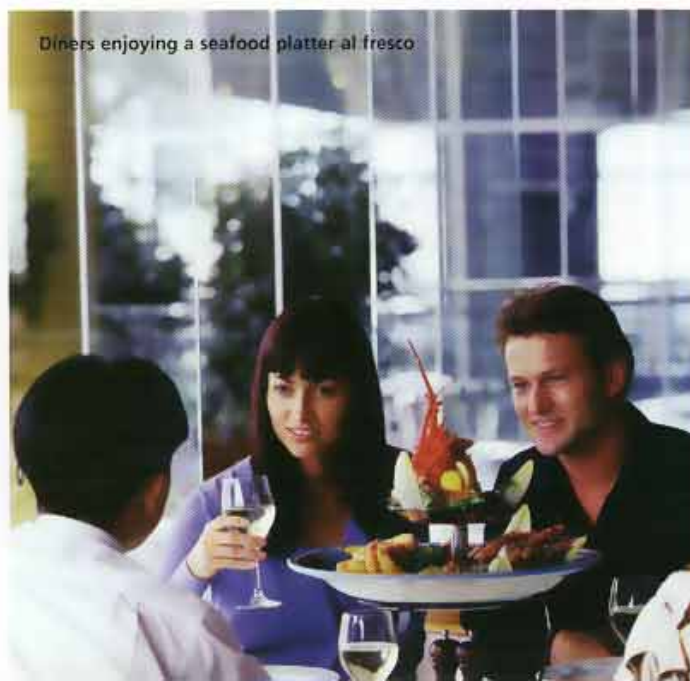
Although 150 years ago, there was barely a dish that didn't contain Kangaroo meat, these days Aussies have an aversion to eating roo meat, otherwise known as Skippy, or one of their national symbols. However, 'bush tucker' is on its way back into fashion, and other forms of Australian wildlife are fair game, with dishes such as crocodile in pastry, grilled wallaby, and raw emu steak tartare appearing on the more adventurous menus.

SPECIAL WINE SHOP

Ultimo Wine Centre

With Australian wines experiencing a renaissance, it can be difficult for the uninitiated to choose. Ultimo Wine Centre, in the heart of Sydney, is one of the city's largest wine retailers. The store is divided into regions so you can sample a drop from every winemaking region. Saturday afternoon tastings makes it an especially good time to shop.

Shop 21/99 Jones St, Sydney NSW 2007. Tel: +61 2 9211 2380 🍷



Diners enjoying a seafood platter al fresco