

## REVIEW \

**A CAFÉ** or coffee shop gets judged very quickly. If it isn't any good, everyone is going to learn very that soon by seeing the empty tables and spare chairs. But obviously Lip Café, in Ivanhoe, serves its area well.

The café, which celebrated its first birthday last month is in a small strip of shops in Waterdale Road.

Every chair is taken. The communal table is packed – with singles and couples who can't find a seat anywhere else. But no one seems to mind.

The ambience is fun and lighthearted. Owner Julian Chew is busy at the coffee machine making coffees to order – he does up to 100 a day – while the rest of the crew of four young people, aged 25 to 35, are obviously enjoying the journey, too. They are at the stoves, bringing out the food quickly and carefully, keeping the red-enamel water jugs filled.

The service is friendly, helpful and unpretentious. Riding the popular wave of industrial chic décor, Lip's interior features polished concrete floors, a mix of wooden tables and mismatched chairs including white-painted Bentwood ones. Blue china teacups of the sort your aunty used for afternoon tea serve as sugar bowls. A box of books and board games is in the corner for mothers and babies.

Why Lip? That's the first question on everyone's lips.

"We called it Lip after the first letters of Life in Provence, and while we didn't want a connection with French food we like the concept of making food from scratch, much like the French do," Julian says. "It filters through into everything we do. Everything is cooked to order. We make all our sauces, chutneys and preserves, but we buy in the organic sourdough bread."

Lip serves breakfast until 3pm, lunch with a range of sandwiches and a few blackboard specials, a few sweets including yoghurt panna cotta as well as all-day coffee and tea including spiced chai.

What sets Lip apart from other suburban cafés is that Julian is brave with the flavours.

The Penang curry with grilled eggplant and rice is redolent of the flavours of Penang, where Julian was born. The beef had been braised for four hours, so it was full-bodied and rich and the meat gently fell apart.

A stunning caramelised cauliflower salad came with carrot, chickpeas, yoghurt tahini and dukkah. The pumpkin medley soup with bread was rich and hearty and almost a meal in itself.

"I try to do the food that I like eating every day," Julian says.

"I especially like to use spices of Egypt, such as dukkah and baharat."

That is evident in the sandwiches, which, apart from the cheese and tomato, have a real Middle Eastern and southern Mediterranean flavour.

Try this for choice: the Vego Lip of house-pickled beetroot, tomato, chevre and lettuce; a BLT with beetroot; grilled free-range chicken with beetroot relish, coriander and lettuce; slow-roasted lamb with chilli yoghurt sauce, cucumber and lettuce; crispy pork with aioli, tomato chutney and cos lettuce; and pumpkin and halloumi with onion jam and cos lettuce.

Another lunch favourite is the spiced minced lamb with red radish, chevre and lettuce on pita bread.



Penang  
curry with  
grilled  
eggplant



## FOOD \ MARIA HARRIS REVIEWS LIP CAFÉ

Occasionally Julian pushes the boundaries by including something radical such as black pudding cooked in different ways, but acknowledges a dish such as this mainly appeals to foodies.

The success of Lip is no accident as Julian brings healthy restaurant credentials to his café.

After migrating to Australia with his family aged 11 and finishing school in Sydney, he did an apprenticeship at Aria, which is almost as famous for its chef/owner Matt Moran as it is for its food. More recently he worked at South Yarra's Da Noi, then at Loafer Bread in Fitzroy North, where he baked the mouthwatering cakes and pastries that lure people inside.

At Lip he is off the pans and making it his mission to make "good, fast coffee consistently".

Head chef is Tekabu Wardrop, formerly of China Doll in Sydney. With staff such as this and dishes that add a new twist to old favourites and plenty of new combinations, it's no wonder Lip has got locals talking. \mharris@theweeklyreview.com.au

**verdict** The good people of Ivanhoe have enjoyed this funky, fun café for just over a year. Owner/chef Julian Chew has brought his "fresh food cooked to order" philosophy to Lip, along with a penchant for Middle Eastern and southern Mediterranean flavours and spices. Breakfast dishes include many egg options with ingredients such as chorizo and Moroccan beans. Half-size portions are available.

A blackboard menu, which lists two or three daily specials, often includes something from Julian's Malaysian heritage.

On the sweet side there are muffins, lamingtons, French crepes and a delectable yoghurt panna cotta with watermelon, strawberries, rose water and pistachios.

All the cakes are made in the Lip kitchen, using organic flour and Victorian butter.

**Stunning:** Caramelised cauliflower salad (top) with chickpeas, carrot, yoghurt tahini and dukkah.

**Tempting:** Grilled free-range chicken sandwich (above) with beetroot relish, coriander and lettuce. (DARRIAN TRAYNOR)

## eat this

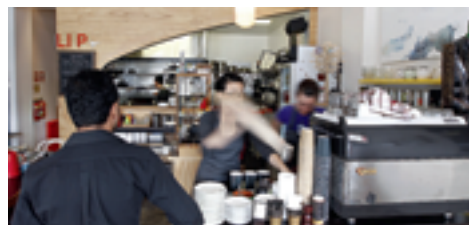
**Lip Café**  
226 Waterdale Road, Ivanhoe

**Phone** \ 9499 1162

**Head chef** \ Tekabu Wardrop

**Prices** \ Breakfast dishes: \$8-\$17.90; sandwiches: \$6-\$11.50; soup: \$10; mains: \$13.80-\$14; desserts, cakes: \$3-\$8

**Open** \ Monday to Friday 8am-4pm; Saturday and Sunday 8am-2pm



« Lip's mission is to offer good, fast coffee consistently.

There's a hint of trendy Northcote or Brunswick about Lip. It's got a welcoming vibe, recycled furniture and a communal table. Mothers and little children are well-catered for with books and games available. But the food's the thing and the kitchen is visible throughout the restaurant. When all tables are full, it's time to head to the courtyard out the back.