

# Tales from the riverbank

All paths in an idyllic locale seem to lead to this airy and historic cafe.

## WEEKEND DINING HELEN GREENWOOD

**Armory Wharf Cafe**  
Blaxland Riverside Park,  
Jamieson Street (near Holker  
Street), Sydney Olympic Park,  
Homebush Bay, 9714 7513  
Mon-Wed, 9am-4pm; Thu-Fri,  
9am-9pm; Sat-Sun, 7.30am-9pm  
(kitchen closes an hour earlier).

WE SHOULD have brought our bikes. At least, we should have strapped them to the back of the car so we could pretend to blend into the sea of wheels and lycra that ripples through the Armory Wharf Cafe on a Sunday morning.

The colours and patterns of the riders' outfits are striking but even they are no match for the beautiful spot where this cafe is located. The light plays softly on the Parramatta River, the mangroves stir gently on the foreshore opposite and the solicitous architecture that houses the cafe weaves everything harmoniously into a meditative mood.

The Armory Wharf Cafe is where armaments and munitions were unloaded before being stored at the Newington Armory in the late 19th century.

The cranes are still here and so are the railway tracks and the handsome entry gate, dated 1897 on its arch. Several other structures on this heritage site are now the Armory Amphitheatre, Armory Theatre and Armory Gallery.

These days, they are all part of the Sydney Olympic Park Authority, which stretches north of the sports facilities built for the 2000 Olympic Games to the river. Cycle and walking tracks run along the river foreshore and through the nearby woodlands, wetlands and parks – and all the paths seem to lead to the Armory Wharf Cafe.

The cafe faces the river and acknowledges its mainly motorised procession of pleasure craft, while its architecture echoes the industrial and military themes of the site's past. Modern materials, such as corten steel, adorn the new structure, which was built by Lahz Nimmo Architects to replace the old weatherboard cottage that burned down nearly 18 months ago.



Nice touches ... camouflage netting offers shade; (below) baked eggs with chorizo.

The cladding has a wonderful, changeable rust-like finish and dramatises the chimney profile containing the kitchen ventilation. Mill-finish aluminium lines the ceiling and tops the roof, while camouflage netting provides a poetic mirror of the mangroves with its dappled and surprisingly effective shade for the outdoor seating.

An old, safety-yellow railway

trolley is parked here at the end of the railway lines. Galvanised steel buckets holding newspapers sit on top and so do people waiting for take-away coffee.

Though the restaurant is crowded, it's spacious and airy enough to accommodate the take-away and eat-in mobs. As the lycra lads and ladies refill their water bottles and get back on their

bikes, their places are taken by families, children and middle-aged couples who have the look of empty nesters.

We order off a breakfast menu that aims higher than most. You can choose the Armory's own granola or bircher muesli, baked eggs, chorizo and tomato, Big A bacon and egg roll with tomato relish (named after a regular sausage "sarnie" with onion jam, french mustard and swiss cheese), eggs Bene' with double smoked ham or Tasmanian salmon and spinach, and a croissant or ciabatta with double smoked ham, Heidi Gruyere and Armory's fig compote.

We go for bircher muesli and baked eggs, and succumb to the blurb that urges us to "share a jar" of one of the following unique fruit sodas: pink lady and raspberries, apple and ginger, pineapple and star anise, blood orange and carromom". They are fruit cordials reconstituted with soda water and are a nice touch, though somewhat muted on the flavour scale.

A charming young waiter brings our coffees (good), returns with our orders (quickly) and then is floored (understandably) by pointing out that the bircher muesli looks like moist granola.



## DIGEST

### ▶ Food

**Aspirational, interesting ingredients and ideas. Check the bircher muesli before you order it.**

### ▶ Service

**Amiable and friendly with the right casual touch and professionalism.**

### ▶ Atmosphere

**Truly unique thanks to classy architecture, classic river views and collected history.**

### ▶ Value

**Very good. \$5-\$13 for a breakfast dish won't break the bank.**

### ▶ Noise

**Low.**

### ▶ Recommended dishes

**Baked eggs with chorizo, tomato and balsamic, grilled herb and garlic mushrooms, Armory's granola, coffee.**

Apologetically, he agrees and says most of them have looked that way this morning. We guess someone forgot to soak the oats and has come up with this scratch solution. Having said that, the granola is pretty good.

The baked eggs with chorizo are presented in a black frying pan, dressed with balsamic vinegar and a sprinkle of herbs. The slab of toasted ciabatta is fresh but the crust fairly rips your soft palate.

I also give the grilled herb and garlic mushrooms with toasted ciabatta a go and the toasted ciabatta assaults my palate with its crust in the same way. The mushrooms, though, are beautifully cooked – not too watery, not too oily and seasoned lightly.

Sitting comfortably on carbon fibre chairs the colour of charcoal, gazing dreamily at the grey sheen of the water and the green-and-yellow river cats plying up and down, we could happily hang around until lunchtime.

Then we could move into panini with aioli, dusted whiting fillets, ploughman's lunch with prosciutto, medium-rare sirloin, blue cheese salad and savoury tarts. We'll save ourselves for next time, when we bring the bikes.