Italy comes to Bondi: Guido's Famous Gelato

Guido Pellicciari makes gelato the traditional way.
Photograph courtesy of the Pellicciari family.

Brothers Guido and Gianni Pellicciari immigrated to Australia from Italy in 1951 and went straight into the food business making espresso coffee, gelato and pizzas. Guido claims to have been the first person making traditional gelato in Australia and he soon set about his mission - educating Australians to appreciate this Italian ice confection.

Guido learnt to make gelato in Rome at a famous restaurant *Gigi Fazzi*. He then taught his younger brother, Gianni, the secrets of this tradition and Gianni, in turn, taught his children. In this way an authentic Italian gelato recipe was passed down through generations of the Pellicciari family, with a direct link back to the old Roman gelato customs.

In 1961 the Pellicciari brothers arrived in Bondi and Guido saw a café in Bondi Pavilion with a wonderful location right opposite the beach. The location seemed natural as, in Italy, gelato is a traditional beach food.

When the Pavilion was built in 1928 this end of the building was set aside as a dedicated beach food outlet and over the years had been a refreshment room, pie shop and eventually a café.

Guido approached the café's operator, Dick Parter, asking could he hire out a corner of his café to make gelato and then sell the cones out of the café's window to beachgoers walking along the Pavilion's front veranda. Dick agreed.

Guido and Gianni sold their first gelatos for one shilling each. With this winning location, and their determination to work every day from 7.00am-11.00pm, the business thrived and eventually the Pellicciari brothers took over the café and renamed it Guido's Famous Gelato.

It was a family business from the start, and after Guido died in 1969 Gianni continued to run the café with his wife Anne and later their children Mario and Nadia. The Pellicciari family's business expanded. Guido's Famous Gelato café was joined by Pellicciari's, Guido's Beach House and Licensed Taverna and Gianni's Beach House – all at Bondi Beach.

Its advertising boasted that 'Guido's famous gelato ice confection' was 'non fattening' and in the 1960s introduced to beach goers to not just the usual ice cream flavours, but Italian specialities like *tartufo* (two or more flavours with either syrup or frozen fruit in the centre and covered in a shell made of chocolate, cinnamon or nut) and *cassata* (gelato containing candied or dried fruit and nuts).

During summer they sold up to 10,000 cones a day with one famous regular, Kerry Packer, frequently stopping by for his favourite ice confection – lemon gelato. Their sweet creamy desserts were also popular, with the café becoming famous for their lemon meringue pie.

Guido's Famous Gelato epitomized beach food, but with an Italian twist, gelato replaced ice-cream and pizza replaced hamburgers. The family remembers the pizza oven being turned on at 7.00am and the first pizza trays being pulled out and ready to go on sale 30 minutes later. The pizza kept on coming until 9.00pm or 10.00pm, on a busy day the cafe made over 100 trays of pizza a day.

Their pizza was renowned; the large slices - the size of a meal in themselves – were renamed 'the death slice' by the Waverley Council Lifeguards because of its dense rich flavour. The family built a close relationship with the Lifeguards. On Christmas Day they put on lunch for them, giving the Lifeguards family-style break when rostered to work on one of the beach's most notoriously difficult days.

When Guido's Gelato Café closed its doors in 2002, after 41 years in business, the shock of its demise spread beyond the Waverley area, making the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*.

Guido's gelato was considered so authentic that when the staff of the Italian airline, Alitalia, were in Sydney they would travel all the way from the international airport to Bondi Beach to buy Guido's gelato.