

BUSINESS IN FOCUS

European cheeses bring big smiles

By Casey Neill

Amalia Europe Cheese looks a little different these days, but still has cheese and smallgoods at its heart.

Mina Dawood's mum Amalia set up the business in Hemmings Street, Dandenong, about 10 years ago.

"Mum passed away, so I ended up taking over the business. That was eight months ago," he said.

"So now me and my sister Mirna run this shop.

"It was very much a traditional-style business. Now we've funky'd it right up.

"What I've introduced is new products, in terms of our grocery, cold meats, frozen pastries, and the coffee and the sandwich bar.

"We do toasties, bagels and American hotdogs.

"The cheese that we use in our deli we use in our food that we serve.

"And our cold meats as well, our smallgoods, we incorporate those in our sandwiches.

"It gives our customers the opportunity to try what our products are like."

The cheeses range in origin from France, Italy, Greece and Holland to Australia.

The smallgoods and grocery ranges also feature imported and locally made products.

"The San Daniele prosciutto comes in from Italy," he said.

"The coffee is roasted here in Melbourne, but it's a combination of Columbian and African beans."

Mina said customers were "spinning out".

"The couple that were here when you walked in, they've been our customers for the past 10 years," he said.

"I'm really grateful that we've still been able to retain those people."

New faces are coming through the doors, too.

"What we're noticing is a lot of people who work in the area are coming in, purely just by seeing this retro looking-coffee machine," he said,



Mina Dawood knows plenty about cheese. 159555

Picture: GARY SISSONS

gesturing to the gleaming green and silver appliance on the front counter.

"Once they try it they just keep coming back.

"It's challenging, being on Hemmings Street, but I think we've got the right mindset.

"We've got 150 spaces across the road and ample parking in front of the shop."

Amalia Europe Cheese's transformation is not yet complete.

"We do three bagels at the moment. I'm looking at introducing two more new bagels," Mina said.

"The same with our American hot dogs, we'll probably add some exciting flavours or have one different hot dog every week.

"In the near future, we'd be looking at doing breakfast.

"Our next phase is setting up our platter com-

ponent better to cater for the vast range of customers."

Mina's favourite product is the prosciutto, with grilled halloumi not far behind.

"That is like heaven. That first bite into halloumi is like 'wow,'" he said.

"Also, we've got saganaki. What I've been doing lately is throwing that in some flour and sprinkling chopped oregano on top.

"We've got nine different options in our chilli sauce range, which range from mild to burns you twice. They're also available for tasting.

"They're an all-natural, hand-crafted sauce. There's no preservatives or additives or anything like that in them.

"With our hotdogs, we're doing a mad chilli dog so I've blended the chilli sauces and each sauce does a different thing.

"I've seen customers sweating profusely. They come back for more."

Customers Helen and Bruno live a short walk away and popped in for some feta for a salad during the Journal's visit.

Mina asked them what they were looking for in a cheese and what they enjoyed, before recommending a product.

They used to buy cheese from Amalia, and described the shop today as warm and welcoming.

"He's put his mark on it. He's made it more up-market," Helen said.

"You feel like you're stepping into one of those gourmet shops in one of the trendy places of Melbourne."

The husband and wife sat down for a coffee and added a filo pie and parmesan to their shopping.

"He knows his product," Helen said.

"It's great quality."

Amalia Europe Cheese is at 72A Hemmings Street, Dandenong, and is open 7am to 5.30pm weekdays and 9am to 3pm Saturdays. Call 9793 5754.

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AMALIA EUROPE CHEESE



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