

Silvas

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Arriving at Silvas the morning after Portugal are expelled from the World Cup by France, this section of Sydney, known as Little Portugal, is quiet. Side Dish and I take a seat at a table in Silvas, and the large, open shop front lets in air and light, while glass dividers prevent the eating area from getting too noisy or windy. Near the entrance of Silvas is a glass fronted counter, presenting barbequed chickens, salads and the myriad of other dishes that Silvas offers for takeaway. This area is partitioned by a low wooden wall from the dine-in area, and from our table we witness a constant stream of customers arriving to order their lunch.

We start the meal with a dish of small black olives, sharp and tangy, and I am pleased to notice that the olives still contain their stones, as nature intended. We eat these with a freshly sliced baguette and order our meal from the menu. The prices vary, from burgers and chips around \$9, to more substantial main course meals, around \$25.

We order the octopus and the Espetada a Madeirense, a speciality of Silvas. SD digs into the mound of octopus, which tastes strongly of garlic and lemon, and served with simple boiled potatoes. The texture of the octopus was firm, and not chewy, and they are large tentacles, unlike the baby octopus often found in restaurants. My Espetada catches my attention before I have tasted it, as the waiter brings the long skewer to the table and places it and a stand in a hole in the middle of the table. I look around and all the tables have this hole, demonstrating that the Espetada is a commonly ordered dish. And, so it should be. Tender, moist chunks of beef, cooked medium rare as I have requested are lined up on the skewer. Using my cutlery I slide each slice off the bottom of the skewer, one at a time, and slice into the soft flesh. The pieces have been marinated, and the outside skin has a slight hint of charcoal, while the inside shows a delicate pink tinge. Large flakes of salt randomly burst in my mouth as I eat my way through the skewer. The Espetada comes with a green salad, garlic bread and a pile of soft polenta cubes, which also melt on the tongue.

We finished our meal with a Portuguese tart, with flaky pastry and



wobbly, and is served as a substantial wedge, oozing the caramelly sauce down the side.

As morning creeps into afternoon, more and more people enter Silvas, and the room is soon abuzz with chatter and laughter. Maybe what I mistook for solemnity after the football game was merely people catching up on sleep, for when your national food tastes like this, there