



N A T I O N A L O R I A

For goodness sake, fast food revolution is on a roll

By Rachel Wells

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An appetite for health-conscious hipster food in a hurry is spawning a new breed of fast-food chains where diners are more likely to find pho and fajitas than french fries.

Take the hawker-style Vietnamese outfit, Roll'd, for example. Last May Bao Hoang, his cousin Tin Ly and schoolmate Ray Esquieres opened a small, hawker-style, Vietnamese eatery in a tiny laneway in the CBD. It soon became a popular enclave for city hipsters and the hungry business crowd.



Bao Hoang, Tin Ly and Ray Esquieres at Roll'd in Melbourne's CBD.

Less than a year later, the trio have opened three more stores, all in Melbourne's city centre. They plan to have a dozen Melbourne outlets within two years and will open a Brisbane store later this year.

And why wouldn't they? Walk past any of their outlets at lunchtime and you will find people queueing - often for metres out the door - for fresh rice paper rolls (or roll'd soldiers), beef and chicken pho, healthy banh mi and Vietnamese salads.

"It's been hugely popular," says Hoang. "And I think it comes down to the fast service, the healthy, fresh food and value for money."

Clovis Young, who opened Australia's first Mad Mex eatery in Sydney in 2007 - there are now 34 - claims to know exactly why "fast casual" eateries like Roll'd and his hipster Mexican food chain are booming.

"The one thing we identified early on was that if you wanted something quickly you were more or less relegated to the worst kind of food you could imagine," says Young, who claims his food is served "as fast or faster than a Maccas or a KFC" but without the high fat, salt and sugar content.

"There are a couple of big trends in food right now. One is for more exotic, exciting, experiential dining experiences, the others are finding things that are good value and good for you," he says. "If you can get that right, you're away."



Clovis Young at one of his Mad Mex restaurants in Sydney's CBD. NIC WALKER

Nahji Chu has been at the forefront of the fast street food dining trend since opening her first misschu Vietnamese tuckshop in Sydney in 2009. Since then she has managed to bring her tiny hipster enclave to the masses by re-creating the concept six times over - including two outlets in Melbourne. She plans to open a third in Melbourne this year, another two in Sydney, and is interviewing business partners in Queensland, South Australia and Perth. Her first international store will open in London in December with another due to open in Manila early next year.

"The whole fast street food trend has exploded since I opened my first tuckshop," she says. "My business is growing very fast for someone who wants to grow things slowly, but it's simply being driven by the overwhelming demand."

Chu says demand is being driven by an appetite for good, affordable, healthy food served in a contemporary environment. "Australians, for example, have



Nahji Chu at one of her misschu outlets. MICHELE MOSSOP

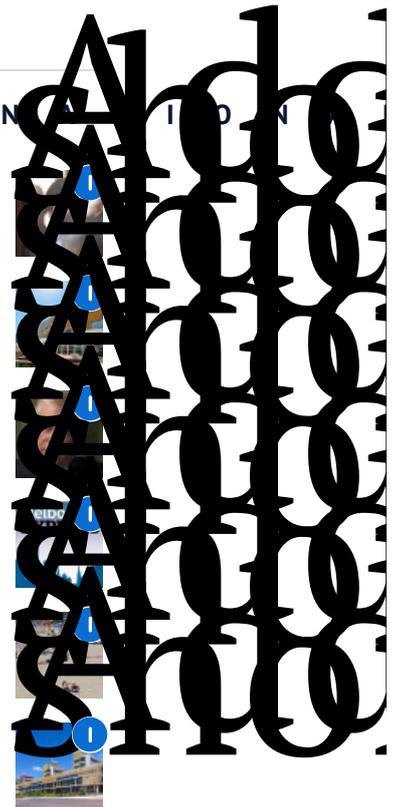
always loved Vietnamese food but they would often say I don't like going to Victoria Street because the lighting's too bright, there's no music, no atmosphere ... I've created these contemporary spaces where people can eat three, four or five times a week."



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