



Recently-recruited Emilio Venditti (left) with shop manager Rob Burton

Emilio Venditti Origin8, Cambridge

As its trendy name suggests, Origin8 is a deli and café for the 21st century. Opened in the centre of Cambridge last June by Julia Harbage, Jane Scriven and Stephen Tutt, the 1,500 sq ft shop's décor is fresh and modern with lots of clean lines and pastel greens – think Pret A Manger with a dash of Daylesford Organic.

Underlying this hip image, however, is a rather traditional approach to food based upon building relationships with local farmers and small producers in the Anglian region.

“There are some fantastic products from this area that either struggle to find a route to market or end up in farm shops where not everyone can find them. We aim to bring convenience to fine foods by selling top quality, local products in the town centre where people can easily access them,” says shop manager Rob Burton, who previously worked for Starbucks opening coffee shops.

This dedication to all things local extends to the food served in the 50-cover café by head chef Emilio Venditti, who has recently joined the company. “I’m just starting to get to know the ingredients and I’m really impressed with the quality,” he says. “I’m looking forward to meeting the producers over the coming months.”

Meat used in the kitchen comes from the shop's butchery counter, with options such as Shorthorn beef, Oxford Sandy and Black pork from Croxton Park Farm in Huntingdon and Label Anglais chicken from SJ Fredrick and Sons in Essex.

Croxton Park rare breed sausages are regularly used to make toad-in-the-hole, along with flour from Glebe Farm, while the café's hot meat bap, served in organic bread from Cobs Bakery with a dollop of mayonnaise from Stokes or jalapeño jelly from Completely Chilli, is popular with local workers in a rush at lunchtime. Other sandwich fillings include smoked salmon and chicken from River Farm in Bottisham or one of the 15 or so regional cheeses on sale in the shop, such as Suffolk

Gold – produced from Guernsey cow milk – Norfolk Dapple from Ferndale Farm or Mrs Temples Binham Blue. Homemade quiches, salads and soups are also available, while regular hot dishes include lasagne, beef stew and game pie. Prices range from £2.50 for a takeaway pasta salad to £6.50 for a hot main. The company has also recently started producing local selection platters for meetings and business lunches at local companies.

Venditti was born and raised in the UK, but his parents are from Italy – just south of Naples. “There has always been a lot of food in the family. If we make a meal for four people we usually end up with enough for 20,” he says.

He joined Origin8 after working in the restaurant of a large garden centre in Huntingdon and one of his key roles in his new position is to develop daily specials with a seasonal theme. “We’re serving purple sprouting broccoli bake at the moment and I’m looking forward to the asparagus season, when we’re planning an asparagus and chervil quiche. Cromer crab is also coming into season soon and we’ve developed a dish of crab cakes with a Thai dipping sauce.”

Many of the regular dishes on the menu were devised in collaboration with Silent Partners Catering, based near Norwich. Its owner, Trevor Knibb, was brought on board because of his experience in producing quality food in high volumes – something that will be increasingly useful as the business grows.

“Trevor has developed products for food halls, such as Selfridges, and handled corporate catering at Wimbledon. He understands the complexities of volume,” says Burton. “Origin8 has not been designed to just be a single outlet. We are looking for sites across the region, so everything we develop for the cafe must be easy to replicate in other shops.”

● Interview by Patrick McGuigan

recipe choice: Asparagus and Chervil Quiche

Pastry

110g plain Flour
50g butter
Pinch of salt
One free-range egg, beaten

Filling

175g asparagus
175ml milk
175ml double cream
3 large free-range eggs
25g spring onions, finely chopped
2 tbsp fresh chervil, finely chopped
Large pinch of salt
Large pinch of pepper

For the pastry

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C. Grease a 20cm baking tin. Rub the butter into the flour. Mix in the salt and enough cold water to bring the pastry together. Roll the pastry out thinly and line the tin. Chill for 30 minutes and blind bake for 15 minutes, before removing the baking beans and brushing the pastry with egg wash – this helps to seal the case and stop it going soggy. Put the pastry back in the oven for five minutes until cooked. Remove and turn down the oven to 160°C.

For the filling

Cut eight tips from the asparagus, then roughly chop the rest. Blanch the chopped asparagus in boiling water until just tender, then refresh in cold water. Do the same with the tips, keep these to one side to decorate the quiche. Mix the milk, cream and chopped asparagus and blitz it with a hand blender until the asparagus has puréed. Beat the eggs, push through a sieve and stir into the mix along with the spring onions, chervil and the salt and pepper.

Pour the filling into the pastry case, then gently float the reserved asparagus tips in a star pattern on top. Carefully place into the oven and bake for 40 minutes or until the filling has set. Leave to cool.

