

Burger barons

A WHOPPER of a hamburger war has broken out in Perth and punters are using two hands to devour the fallout — juicy, designer burgers brimming with natural flavours, organic produce and homemade chutneys.

Groovy, high-end hamburger bars are springing up from Hillarys to Fremantle, biting into the market of traditional burger chains with a very different product.

There is room for the “v” word among the new burger bars which offer vegetarian options amid graffiti-laden walls, retro fit-outs and cool jazz on the sound system.

But Rod Mason, who bought Bilby's in Mt Claremont about six years ago and serves healthy, no-fuss, no-frills burgers, says the new kids on the block have pilfered his colour schemes, his signage, his menu style and names of burgers — such as Aussie Battler and City Slickers — and put in the word “gourmet” and lifted prices.

“It's a cutthroat business,” he said. “There's been a steady stream of new operators in here fishing for information.”

“They're all trying to find out where I get my buns from. My customers have seen the same item names on others' menus and come back to tell me.”

“I don't really mind if they copy me as we were the first to do char-grilled, gluten-free and the 95 per cent fat-free burger.”

Mr Mason said his burger bar was the only one to use scotch fillet in his steak burgers and — despite others' claims — he was the first to offer gluten-free bread.

He caters for vegetarians, too, but meat is the most popular item on the menu.

Those at the high end use Harvey beef and Angus prime beef, prized for its finer marbling of fat. They make the burger patties on site, hand-cut the chips and use WA produce.

Chris Rose, part-owner of the recently opened Burger Bistro in Perth, said: “We are very conscious of providing the best quality product and we order from suppliers who use humane treatments in the raising of the animals. We use hormone-free chicken and best-quality Angus beef. It provides the quality our customers are seeking.”

Others vying for the gourmet market are Flipside in North Fremantle and Wembley, Madlily's in Cottesloe, Australia's Finest Burgers in Subiaco and Hillarys, and Jus Burgers in Leederville. They're all turning the fat-laden burger into food history.

Staff at Retro Betty's, the hamburger veteran for nine years in Leederville, recently reacted to their new neighbour with signage having a cheeky dig at their opposition, Jus Burgers, owned by Justin Bell.

“Jus not Leederville without Retro Betty's. Come in, we're good too!” the sign declared.

Owner Michael Wiss said: “That was really in response to Justin's overconfidence. He was open six weeks and he was calling himself the burger king. Don't get me wrong. I want him to do well, sometimes you just need some grace.”

“He had a go at us, a local icon. We've been around for nine years, we'll see if he's still standing after nine years. Anyway, all these new places opening up just confirms that nine years ago we were on the right track.”

So, how do the new burgers rate? When choosing your favourite outlet there are really only two rules — avoid any place that tops the buns with sesame seeds and make sure the burgers are made to order.

After chomping through a few, we came up with the following burger ratings:

JUS BURGERS 5 STARS

743 Newcastle St, Leederville (9228 2230)

Who would have thought it was possible to reinvent the hamburger? Justin Bell may not have done that, but he reminded us what a perfect meal ground beef and great buns can make when he

SPECIAL REPORT BY STM FOOD WRITER GAIL WILLIAMS



Flipside ****



Madlily's ***

turned his well-trained cheffing hand to focus on the humble burger.

Here the ingredients are top of the range — Harvey beef, Amelia Park lamb, Mt Barker free-range chicken, along with turkish buns cut thin at the top so the base is thicker. The chips are freshly cut and never frozen. The aioli is homemade and there's even a burger that comes with foie gras.

A standard burger with lettuce, tomato, onion, relish and aioli costs \$10.

FLIPSIDE 3½ STARS

239 Queen Victoria St, North Fremantle (0433 2188)
294 Cambridge St, Wembley (9287 2288)

Some would say pear and parmesan don't belong on a chicken burger, but it shows the edginess to Flipside, where the burgers are cooked to order on a char grill. After launching in Freo in 2006 it opened in Wembley last year.

The classic burger of 150g prime beef, salad, tomato relish and mayo costs \$9.

MADLILY'S 3 STARS

1 Eric St, Cottesloe (9284 3744)

There's only one thing that could cap the perfect ending to a morning at the beach and that's sinking your teeth into a Madlily's burger. The owners recently took on a French chef who is adding touches such as fish with mango salsa.

There is an unpretentious beachy feel here and the burgers — chosen from a blackboard menu — are basic and homely. There are vegetarian options.

A standard beef burger with tomato, lettuce, mayo and onion is \$9.

AUST'S FINEST BURGERS 3 STARS

531 Hay St, Subiaco (9388 6221)
Shop 205 Sorrento Quay Boardwalk, Hillarys (9448 5516)

This is the recommended route for those who eat their burgers with a knife and fork and want to swirl the matching wine that is recommended on the menu.

go to war with a relish



Burger Bistro *****



Jus Burgers *****



Australia's Finest Burgers ***



Bilby's Burgers ****



Retro Betty's ****

Butterfield beef patties are made in-house and come between turkish buns. The chips are standard frozen par-baked. Two vego options include grilled haloumi and roasted red pepper, mushroom and cheese.

Standard burgers with a 200g patty cost \$9 and include salad and homemade relish.

BILBY'S BURGERS 4 STARS

Shop 2/64 Davies Rd, Claremont (9383 2997)

Bilby's was around well before the current hamburger revival and at \$7.20 for an Aussie Battler you get some idea of its value for money. The buns come from a secret source, the beef is Harvey and the relishes and marinades are made in-house. The chips — a 13mm variety used by pubs — are frozen but gluten-free.

Bilby's fiercely loyal fans spread to Japan, China and Britain, where it has its own fan club. It does a lot for charity and fundraising, in particular its namesake, the bilby.

RETRO BETTY'S 3½ STARS

127 Oxford St, Leederville (9444 0499)

Retro is the operative word here. Milkshakes go hand in hand with the old-style gutsy burger which — at \$9.90 — comes with cheese, beetroot and a bun from a local chain, and premium-grade beef from Carl Torre, the Northbridge butcher. Vego options include lentil and chick-pea patties.

BURGER BISTRO 5 STARS

Shop 16 Shafto Lane, Hay St, Perth (9485 1729)

This is the new funky kid on the block that replaces daggy with cool. It's inner-city site makes it the most expensive of all.

But what's \$12.80 for a meal when you get a handmade, prime-beef patty with rocket, spinach, tomato, spanish onion and a homemade tomato relish on the best sourdough buns around? The burgers come with a pink centre. Thick-cut chips comes as a side for \$2.80.

MONDAY JULY 6



Two local bakers rise to