

# METRO LIFE

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Water Babies at The Arches make a splash 27

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Prepare for a smashing time with Bloc Party 27

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Malcolm Middleton bids for Christmas No.1 27

# A real winning approach

## METRO FOOD & DRINK AWARDS 2007

### FOOD HERO OF THE YEAR

Fiona Hamilton of Fifi And Ally

Last year, Metro's first Food Hero award went to Martin Wishart, the veteran chef who has been putting Scotland's restaurant scene on the map for nearly a decade. This year, the award goes to someone responsible for a much more recent arrival on the scene. The Fifi And Ally outlet on Glasgow's Wellington Street has yet to celebrate six months in business but it has already set a promising blueprint for the future. A retail store, cafe deli and stylish restaurant,

► If you are going to have soup or salads then you want it to be the best ◀

the venture successfully extends the ideas that cousins Fiona Hamilton and Alison Fielding first put into action two years ago when they opened the original Fifi And Ally in Princes Square.

Tuned in by parallel careers in retail strategy and design, Hamilton and Fielding reckoned that there was a gap in the market for a business that combined boutique shopping with a cafe that focused on a female-friendly menu. Banking on public hunger for an alternative to an often clone-like high street, they wanted Fifi And Ally to offer some personality along with the cupcakes, premium salads and champagne afternoon teas.

The Princes Square unit worked but the Wellington Street branch takes the business to a whole new level. With a large restaurant, menu inspired menus and full-scale kitchens staffed by high-end chefs, the new Fifi And Ally has put the food side of the operation to the fore. It uses local, seasonal and often organic ingredients to produce thoughtfully cooked food at reasonable prices. Moreover, it does it well verve. Thanks to its naughty wallpaper, eye-catching lights and industrial but



On the ascendant: Fiona Hamilton of Fifi And Ally can see the venture's smart set-up transferring well to other cities

sleek interior, Fifi And Ally has its own bold style without feeling in any way forced.

Though both Hamilton and Fielding played key roles in getting Fifi And Ally off the ground, it is Hamilton who concentrates on the restaurant side of the business and who has a hands-on role in its day-to-day running. Creating Wellington Street has involved a steep learning curve for her, not least in terms of finding the right staff in the kitchen.

"In Princes Square, it was very hard for us to get the right people in place," says Hamilton. "The attitude was: 'Salads? Cupcakes? Fifi And Ally?' It won't work." A lot of serious chefs didn't get it. They thought, this is Glasgow, you need to have some stodge going on here."

However, by the time they were recruiting for Wellington Street, they had chefs knocking on the door. "I think they realised that if you are going to have soup or salads then

you want it to be the best," says Hamilton. "Everything is made from scratch. For example, we do our own stocks. That's why when you try the salads or the soups you can taste the difference. We try to deliver the best, freshest ingredients that we can."

The current kitchen team has worked in Abode, Stravagins and the Three Chimneys on Skye. Its members are no strangers to stints in Michelin-starred kitchens. Fifi And Ally scores by showing off these talents in a casual setting and at an affordable price. Dishes like the roast ramp of lamb served with chorizo, white beans and rosemary (£9.95) are honest but elegant.

The new venture broadens its appeal while keeping the female-friendly nature of the first Fifi And Ally. The original could be a little girly for the more unconstructed bloke. The Wellington Street branch

hasn't lost its feminine allure but won't intimidate men. "What we think is probably what a lot of other women are thinking, which is maybe why it clicks with women," says Hamilton. "Sometimes on a Saturday, I walk into Wellington Street and you can feel the gossip in the air. I feel like joining half the tables."

Hamilton looks to have a winning formula with Fifi And Ally, and the business is set to expand. Finding the right site in Edinburgh is proving difficult but London could be the next port of call. "Hopefully, within a year we can see ourselves in Canary Wharf or in the City somewhere with this concept," says Hamilton.

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80 Wellington Street,  
Mon to Wed 8am to 5pm, Thu to Sat 8am to midnight.  
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## READERS' CHOICE: BEST NEWCOMER

Pintxo



With almost double the votes of its nearest rival, Pintxo is the convincing winner of Metro's 2007 Newcomer Award. Most tapers joints look and taste like the branchchild of someone who dimly remembers a package holiday in Spain. Allan Mawn, Pintxo's owner, has spent a lot of time there and it shines through in his Basque-inspired menu.

Authentic was a word that kept on appearing in the comments left by voters and you also liked the friendly atmosphere and keen prices. One reader with a Dirty Dancing obsession wrote that "nobody puts Pintxo in the corner". We can only agree.

562 Dumbarton Road, Glasgow.  
Tel: 0141 334 8666.  
[www.pintxo.info](http://www.pintxo.info)

## Runners-up

### Bella Mbriana

Authenticity played a large part in securing Rosario Sartore's new Edinburgh restaurant a significant number of fans, outweighed at finding Neapolitan cooking at the bottom of Buckingham Street. Bella Mbriana 7-11 East London Street, Edinburgh.  
Tel: 0131 558 9581

### Abstract

Unexpected flavour combos and daring culinary invention got a thumbs-up from Metro readers. 33-35 Castle Terrace, Edinburgh.  
Tel: 0131 229 1222.  
[www.abstractrestaurant.com](http://www.abstractrestaurant.com)

### Gandoffi Fish

Celia Gandoffi's fish-focused extension won voters who liked its sophisticated location and spanking fresh seafood. 84-86 Albion Street, Glasgow.  
Tel: 011 552 9475.  
[www.cafegandoffi.com](http://www.cafegandoffi.com)