

Carving success

MATILDA ABEY

discovers a glamorous Sydney retail outlet that is a true butcher's shop at heart

GLOSSY magazines have written gushing reviews about the new and extremely posh butcher shop, Victor Churchill, in Sydney.

They have detailed the \$1.5 million-plus fit-out and the location in the exclusive enclave of Woollahra.

And they have salivated over what is on offer, including jaw-dropping \$190/kg Blackmore Wagyu sirloins.

The luxury store was launched last September by the Puharich family.

Launch celebrations included three exclusive parties featuring high-profile chefs who were flown in from around country to prepare tasty morsels for invited guests.

The Puharichs are behind Australia's largest premium meat wholesaler, Vic's Premium Quality Meat, which they started 13 years ago.

Family patriarch, Vic, is a butcher by trade and has passed his passion to the younger generation; in particular his son Anthony, who dreamed up the

idea for Victor Churchill.

"During all my travels through France, I would see places like this, that offered a real service and remembered people by name, and showed the art of butchery," Anthony said.

"Despite this fit-out we are still just a butcher's shop."

And with those simple words, Anthony summed up the reason's for the store's undeniable popularity. Yes, it's a butcher's shop with an enticing layout and an amazing selection and quality of meat — but service is the key.

Victor Churchill is not only popular with people who want to buy an exorbitantly-priced piece of Wagyu or rare-breed pork, but also with customers on tighter budgets.

Customers from the teenage boy seeking dog bones for his Border Collie, to the couple who visited because a chef in Singapore had told them about the amazing selection of meats, are prized.

Both requests were greeted with warmth and a "can-do"

attitude — much like a butcher's shop in any country town.

"We serve 2500 customers each week," Anthony said.

Customers browse the two enormous floor-to-ceiling display cabinets on one side, while on the other side industrious butchers work at round timber blocks, behind a large glass wall.

Children press their noses against the glass in fascination, watching carefully as the butchers slice ribs or trim a large loin.

"I was amazed by the knife skills of the butchers and so I wanted to honour that," Anthony said.

Victor Churchill sits on a dip in the flashy stretch of Queen St in Sydney's leafy eastern suburbs. The Puharich family took over the lease of the shop in August 2007 and spent more than two years "getting it right".

The building has always been home to a butcher's shop — since its namesake, Victor Churchill, opened the shop 134

years ago. The Puharichs are one of only four owners.

An original brick wall, crumbling in places, is a feature of the shop and preserves a piece of its history, as does the name.

"It would have been arrogant to change the name from Victor Churchill, so we kept it," Anthony said.

Vic's Premium Quality Meat sells wholesale meat to high-end restaurants in Melbourne and Sydney, tailoring the product to clients' needs.

"We wanted to bring that quality of product to retail customers, that is really why we opened the shop," Anthony said.

The store dry ages its own beef, and all meat is hung for at least 30-40 days.

Dry-aged beef can lose as much as 20 per cent of its weight through the ageing process.

"Every carcass will lose 1 per cent each day for the first



fortnight, then this rate slows," Anthony said. This makes the process more costly, but the end product is tastier.

The hanging process begins in an outer-Sydney warehouse and continues in-store beside a wall of Himalayan salt bricks — said to iodise the air and imbue the meat with a faint salty flavour.

"It is expensive to make everything ourselves — we probably make 90 per cent of the products in the shop — but I am so, so proud," Anthony said.

The company also opened two businesses in China and Singapore in 2007-08.



Top cuts: butchers work behind glass walls to create quality cuts



Sharp eye: Anthony Puharich saw the opportunity for his family business, Vic's Premium Quality Meat, to create Sydney's most glamorous butcher's shop