

# Italian flair for Dublin

Il Valentino's has captured Dublin consumers' appetite for artisan-style products, finds **Hugh Oram**

**A** new Italian-style bakery, Il Valentino's, in Dublin, has been trading since early this year. Owner Owen Doorly spent 13 years in Italy, working mainly on coffee roasting, and returned home to start up this bakery.

Set beneath the very contemporary style ground floor shop and café, beside Grand Canal Harbour, Il Valentino's is named in honour of St Valentine, the patron saint of romance, who is buried in Dublin and is also a word play on the name of Doorly's Italian wife Valentina.

Doorly bakes a wide range of Italian-style breads, crusty on the outside, soft on the inside, with a complexity of textures and crusts, using flour imported from Italy. He also makes plenty of pastries. The shop and café also sell many varieties

of filled products, such as sandwiches.

"I didn't expect the huge amount of feedback that we've been getting from happy customers, very appreciative of what we are producing," says Doorly.

Setting up Il Valentino's was quite an achievement. Doorly wanted to site his new business somewhere close to Dublin city centre, but getting the right location and premises took the best part of a year.

With the help of Italian consultants, he kitted out the 110sq m bakery as he intended and believes Dublin was ready for a new-style bakery such as this. "There's a keen consumer appetite for genuine artisan bakery products," he says. "And there's nothing else quite like Il Valentino's in the city." □



Owen Doorly (right) with Luigi Leoni, head baker at the company. Doorly has had to recruit largely from Italy

## Going it alone

**The brief:** to set up a genuine Italian-style bakery, retailing outlet and café, producing authentic artisan-style products, both bread and confectionery. The aim of Il Valentino's is to tap into the strong consumer demand in the Dublin area for genuine artisan bakery products, as opposed to plant bakery products.

**Retail market:** residents and office workers in the new Grand Canal Harbour area of south Dublin, close to the River Liffey. About 3,000 apartments are being built in the immediate area, with around half already occupied. Il Valentino's also wholesales to other retail outlets, including delis, within a 5km radius.

**Concept:** a snazzy, contemporary-style retail outlet, strongly Italian in its decor, that includes a café area, serving bread and confectionery products made in the bakery beneath the shop, as well as a good variety of filled products, including sandwiches.

**Finance:** 40% financed by owner Owen Doorly, with the balance from other sources, including start-up business finance from the Dublin City Enterprise Board.

**Staff:** owner Owen Doorly plus four personnel in the bakery, including a master baker. A further four people are employed on the retail counter in the shop and in the café.

**Background:** Owen Doorly had no previous experience in baking, but during his 13 years working in Italy, most of his work experience was in coffee roasting, which gave him plenty of manufacturing and retailing experience.

## Pros and cons

### Biggest challenges

Whether the project was going to work. "You may have put everything into the venture but you don't look so much at the risks but at the opportunities," says Doorly.

Risks associated with the start-up included getting enough finance together for the project, especially as he didn't have a recent track record in Ireland, having worked abroad for so long.

Now, says Doorly, one of the biggest challenges is getting enough staff of the right kind. Bakers who can produce this type of artisan Italian product are very hard to find in Ireland, he explains. Nearly all his bakers and his pastry chef have been recruited from Italy.

### Greatest satisfaction

Seeing the bakery get off the ground as he had planned. The whole project depended on customers arriving from day one, says Doorly. Word spread quickly, however and soon, an appreciative customer base began to develop.

Marketing played a key role in minimising risks, once Il Valentino's had opened. Consumer publicity, including in The Irish Times newspaper, has been a big help, he adds.

