

Samantha Bowers

SYDNEY diners who find it hard to choose between a cappuccino and a cab sav will not have to deliberate much longer.

A growing number of city cafe owners are applying for on-premises liquor licences, allowing alcohol to be served with meals.

A spokesman for the Casino, Liquor and Gaming Control Authority said it had received 529 applications for new on-premises liquor licences in 2009-10; up from 430 the previous year. The number of applications granted rose by 54 per cent over the same period, and includes applications by catering, entertainment and accommodation venues as well as cafes and restaurants.

David Bitton, who owns Bitton Gourmet Cafe and Grocer in Alexandria, is one of the latest to take the plunge. The French-born chef starts serving alcohol under his licence today.

"I think it's a trend, definitely," he said adding the city seemed to be catching up with Melbourne, which he described as "much more of a European city".

Fellow Frenchman Jerome Jalibat, who owns Tigerbakers Cafe and Bar in Darlinghurst, agreed licensing gave cafe owners the chance to "operate as [we do] in Europe".

Tigerbakers got its on-premises licence in mid-2009.

Other cafes to jump on the bandwagon include Love Grub, Alexandria, which got its licence in July, and Mosman eateries Arena's Deli Cafe e Cucina, and Avenue Road Cafe, which have just applied for theirs.

Even bookshops are getting in on the action. Sappho Books, Cafe and Wine Bar, Glebe, started



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GOOD LIVING, PAGE 13

serving alcohol in May 2009.

Martin O'Sullivan, the president of Sydney's Small Bar Association and the owner of small bar Grasshopper, said licensed cafes were "fairly widespread".

"As a bar operator I don't see it as competition; I see it as complementary. Sydney needs the culture," he said.

An on-premises liquor licence application costs \$500 and takes about 90 days to process. Under the licence, alcohol must be ancillary to another service or product, such as food.

Despite previous involvement in wine bars - he was a partner in King's Cross bar Aperitif in 2007 - Bitton said the decision to apply for a licence was not one he took lightly. It cost about \$3000 to stock the wine cellar, he said - and that was only for nine wines.

"It [also] changes the ... ambience a little bit," Bitton said.

"We've got to be very cautious that we're not a wine bar. It's just a commodity; to have a quality glass of wine while you're having nice, good food."

Licence to thrill

as more cafes

wine and dine

across town



Glass half full ... David Bitton, the owner of Bitton Gourmet Cafe and Grocer, serves wine to patrons Talel Owen and Vanessa McRobert. Photo: Fiona Morris