

Hickson Road Bistro

A matinee of the Sydney Theatre Company's brilliant production of Alan Bennett's play, *The History Boys*, saw the party of the second part and I lurching at the Bistro which is run to suit theatre patrons. For a 1.00pm matinee it opens at 11.30, for 2.00pm at 12.30, 6.00pm at 4.30 and so on. Entry is through the theatre foyer.

The presentation is nice with white paper over white linen table cloth, white linen napkins, elegant glasses and a view of the busy kitchen if you are facing that way. Bread rolls and water arrive promptly, drinks a little slow but the menu comes with the water. The menu is 'Modern Australian', whatever that means. It is extensive and interesting but I will describe only what we had, two entrees and two salads.

The trio of duck was a mixed salad with duck liver pate (superb), duck carpaccio (interesting) and duck terrine style sausage (very satisfying). We both loved it. We also shared a warm salad of thinly sliced pork belly, garnished with baby octopus in a light lime mayonnaise, which was light enough but full of flavour. The menu said 'with seafood garnish' so maybe you get what's good on the day. The tiny baby octopus certainly was.

The salads were nicely dressed with a little Balsamic vinegar and olive oil. One was wild rocket with shaved parmesan, the other mixed tomatoes (yellow, red and green), olives, celery and a soupcon of fennel. Plenty of salad.

We had a beer each, followed by a glass of Montrose sauvignon blanc and a Yarra Valley (Yering) pinot. It was an excellent pre-theatre lunch: light, bright and fun. Book well ahead on theatre days and nights.

Hickson Road Bistro
20 Hickson Road
Walsh Bay
Ph: (02) 9250 1990
All major cards accepted

Omega

A gathering of four skin cancer victims lunched. The basement restaurant is brightly and tastefully presented. The nicely spaced tables set with white linen cloths and napkins. Crunchy bread rolls came quickly with Coopers beer and zatziki dip, a spicy brown dip and olive oil. All excellent. We decided on one main each with skordalia and a house special Greeek salad as sides.

The professor had twice cooked spicy duck with a cheese tart and quince poached in red wine which he pronounced excellent. Very senior counsel and his favourite junior both had the rabbit pie with a mousse of celeriac skordalia and black olive sauce. The pie was a brilliant presentation: elegantly decorated golden puff pastry on top with short pastry below and a pool of black olive sauce around. I found the filling disappointing because it was too dry for my taste – rabbit can be like that. None the less I was glad I tried it. The fourth main was Kingfish Herasand, perfectly grilled, served with spinach and a crab and mushroom ragout. The chooser loved it.

All in all, a very good lunchtime experience, but pricey. Mains were a high \$30 each. Pinot gris for starters, Yering pinot noir to



go on. The worry was that on a Friday there was only one other table, six ladies doing lunch. Can it survive? Paul Merroney's 163 next door was packed.

Omega
161 King Street
Ph: (02) 9223 0242

Home cooking

Now cassoulet has a mystique about it which is, I believe, misplaced. Elizabeth David says, 'a hearty seasonal dish'. I have come to think that, like its cousin, Basque stew, it is just a good household manager's way of dealing with quality leftovers (who would cook a goose and then put it into a pot with beans without having some hot first time around?)

As I dealt with leftover turkey and ham after Christmas, I devised an easy way to get the quantities just right. I took three (240g) tins of white cannellini beans and tipped the contents into a colander to drain. I filled one tin with leftover turkey, one with leftover ham and one with chorizo sausage and black pudding, all chopped into stew-sized chunks and put aside. Next I filled one tin with chopped onion and garlic, one with chopped carrot and one with chopped celery. I fried the vegetables lightly in a large heavy bottomed Dutch oven with a good fitting lid, added the meat and beans then barely covered with stock made from the turkey carcass, a veal breast and vegetables in need of a cook up for the dog! (Half red wine and half stock is OK too.) After tucking in a bay leaf or two, some thyme and oregano I cooked it for about 15-20 minutes with the lid on until the vegetables were done. Then I left it off an hour before reheating to eat. A crusty sourdough and a full flavoured red is all you need to go with it.

Bon appetit!
John Coombs QC