

Reborn identity

A new chef has instilled his own creative spark to enliven Enoteca.

FROM THE outside, standing on the footpath in Carrington St, Enoteca still looks securely attached to the right side of the Italian Centre. There has been no seismic movement, not even the first signs of cracking.

But less than half an hour later, I'm sitting inside contemplating a plate with a pair of lightly browned quail breasts, a single scallop, a daub of parsnip puree, a little pile of salt, all artfully arranged, and I wonder where I am. It couldn't feel further from the culinary tradition and home cooking you would associate with the club next door.

Yes, Enoteca has changed, and it's not just the Cucina that was dropped from its name a little while back (though it lives on in the website address). Since the beginning of the year, the shift has been more fundamental, with a new chef in charge who, quite rightly, is doing his own thing.

Brent Kemble-Beech had been in the kitchen at Enoteca for only four months when head chef Sarah Turner left to start proceedings on Barossa Valley project and head up the Colonel Light Hotel kitchens. Turner had won widespread acclaim during her time in charge, including *The Advertiser* award for best chef in 2007.

Far from being intimidated when he was asked to take over, Kemble-Beech was very clear about what he wanted to cook. Within the first week he had written a new menu and re-organised the kitchen to run to his own masterplan. The focus now is most definitely on a contemporary interpretation of Italian cooking, one that blurs frequently into French and even Spanish cuisine.

The results can be memorable, such as those exquisite morsels of butter-poached quail breast, and that seared scallop. Both components have a soft, luxurious texture, the quail, pink, fleshy and mildly gamey, the scallop clean, sweet and innocent. They come together with a dab of the puree, a dip into the celeriac salt and a touch of the sherry vinegar.

"Insalata" of marron, zucchini flowers, cherry tomato and avocado look straight from the colour plate of an expensive cookbook, with each of the elements carefully composed

REVIEW

SIMON WILKINSON

on a large, white plate. But it seems more a dish of mid-summer than late autumn to me. It's served cold - too cold - and the chill has dulled the flavours.

A frittata has been cooked to order so it is still nicely puffed up, its rich creaminess lifted nicely with a finely diced salsa of olives and cucumber, and the appealing bitterness of radicchio. It's a superior rendition of an Italian classic.

Kemble-Beech learnt his traditional Italian repertoire in the kitchen at Cibo, with Salvatore Pepe, a passionate advocate of the food of southern Italy.

But it was his next stint, at The Manse with Tim Montgomery and then Ayhan Erkoç, that really fired his imagination. He learnt about multi-layered and subtle flavours and the labour-intensive technique needed to bring it all together on the plate.

This style fits well with a room that has the contemporary palette (black, white and taupe) and minimal adornment that you might find in an art gallery. Drapes covering the walls and in the middle of the room soften the edges - and the noise level. The only splashes of colour are the blown glass in a sculpture on the bar and in the central light fittings.

Enoteca's chicken dish is a ripper. A boned-out maryland fillet has been rolled around a mix of chicken farce and sauteed leeks, roasted once to cook through, then again to crisp the skin for service. The result is sublime, as juicy, soft and tender as chicken could possibly be. Chunky batons of bacon, baby carrots, a couple of stripes of parsley puree and an almond sauce all make this a roast to remember.

Pork and sweetbreads have a similar presentation but don't work as well. Slices of pork loin, pale and tender, are lined up in a neat row, each with a piece of sweetbread balanced on top. I'd prefer a cut of pork with more flavour and melting texture (belly or



Enoteca chef Brent Kemble-Beech brings a contemporary interpretation to his Italian dishes.



THE RESTAURANT ENOTECA

262 Carrington St, city.
Phone 8227 0766.
www.enotecacucina.com.au
Lunch: Noon-3pm, Wed-Fri.
Dinner: 6pm-10pm, Wed-Sat.
Owners: Steve Blanco, Peter and Paula Kudler.
Chef: Brent Kemble-Beech.

THE VERDICT

THE BILL

Entrees: \$18-\$26.50.
Mains: \$24-\$38.
Desserts: \$9-\$15.50.
Corkage: \$20/bottle.

SUMMARY

A new direction for Enoteca, with an assured young chef producing food of some finesse. It's different, but remains among the better Italian dining experiences in town.

SCORE 16/20

Score guide: Below 10: Awful. 11-12: Fair. 13-14: Good. 15-16: Special. 17-18: Outstanding. 19: Brilliant. 20: Perfect.



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