

**RESTAURANT** Epicurean, 73 Wickham Tce, Brisbane | **Margie Fraser**

**E**picurean opened in September on the site of the former Seasalt at Armstrongs in the heritage-listed Inchoon Hotel on Brisbane's Wickham Terrace. Sharing a street address with some of the city's oldest buildings, there is a yesteryear charm about the place, which was converted from medical consulting rooms to a boutique hotel in 1999.

The restaurant is tucked away behind the hotel's reception area on the ground floor. It's a discreet spot, well sealed from noise while still enjoying an outlook over the street corner. Tonight, things are quiet ... too quiet. Our table is the only occupied one until another solo diner wanders in. It's always hard to make an empty restaurant feel atmospheric, and this one, while comfortable enough, feels a little dull.

The menu is presented on a large sheet of paper, bistro-style. Coffin Bay oysters are available natural or with a choice of resting foam or vinaigrette. Sadly, my friends are served at room temperature. Entrée choices run to six, with rabbit roulade, beef carpaccio and prawn salad among them. We try the roasted baby beets with hazelnuts, goat curd, fennel and dainty droplets of marmalade dotted about (pictured, far right). The plate is as pretty as a picture and the combinations are good in theory, but lack flavour when it comes to the crunch. I ward off an over-eager waiter trying to clear my half-eaten serving after she's taken my friends' plates. Etiquette no-no No 1.

A short list of mains includes steaks from Cape Grim and Baroo. The Cape Grim sirloin is disappointingly doused in an oversupply of



bearnaise sauce and is not as flavoursome as this great beef can be. Ditto the Milly Hill lamb, which comes overcooked and dry. A fillet of king salmon is delightfully fresh, with a crisp skin. Its shaved fennel and cress topping and bed of quinoa with preserved lemon are bland, but the smoked tomato *beurre blanc* is a neat accompaniment.

A chocolate and olive oil mousse is a more inventive dish from chef Adam Herbert, making use of bitter cocoa flavours. A white chocolate parfait on the side is perfumed and flavoured with tonka bean (banned in the US for its anti-coagulant

properties). It is subtle in flavour and chalky in texture, and a smear of soft butterscotch adds some tooth-tinging sweetness.

The wine list, a document of mostly kindergarten-aged drops – many of them offered by the glass – is short and unsurprising, although a more comprehensive cellar is in development.

Epicurean has the makings of a smart little bistro with a captive audience in this otherwise restaurant-bereft strip. The dishes are soundly conceived and ingredients bear the right pedigrees, but their preparation and delivery require a little more TLC.

**set menu**

PH 08324556  
**WEblink** epicurean  
 brisbane.com  
**HOURS** Open  
 Mon-Fri, breakfast  
 7am-9am, lunch  
 noon-2.30pm, dinner  
 from 6pm, Sat,  
 breakfast 8-10am,  
 dinner from 6pm  
 Sunday, breakfast  
 only, 8-10am  
**LIQUOR STATUS**  
 Licensed  
**PRICES** Entrées  
 \$15-21, mains \$29-46  
 desserts \$12-16  
**NEED TO KNOW**  
 Air-conditioned;  
 street parking and  
 carpark opposite,  
 taxi rank in street,  
 major credit cards  
 accepted; wheelchair  
 access and facilities.

**THE SCORE**  
 12/20



1-2: poor • 10-12:  
 needs work • 13-14:  
 reasonable • 15-16:  
 good • 17-18: very  
 good • 19: excellent  
 • 20: perfect

OVERSEAS VISITORS: THIS RESTAURANT OPERATES UNDER  
 AUSTRALIAN REGULATIONS. PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.



**The cross-pollinated grape durif is known as "shiraz on steroids" ...**

Good news for lovers of brooding, inky reds – from Queensland's Granite Belt to Rutherglen in Victoria, there is a renaissance afoot with a variety known as durif. Described as "shiraz on steroids", it was the unintended offspring of cross-pollination between the little-known French grape peloursin and syrah, known here as shiraz, with half of its genes from each variety.

Botanist Dr Francois Durif first

cultivated the grape in his French vineyard and named it after himself. Locally, however, durif is a rarity. It was brought to Rutherglen from France in 1908 by Australian viticulturalist Francois de Castella, and the northern Victorian district has its own durif group with eight members: All Saints Estate, R.L. Buller & Son, Campbells, Colfield, Morris, Rutherglen Estates, Scion and Stanton & Killeen.

Of these, the All Saints 2009 Family Cellar Durif (\$80) has power and richness restrained by ripe, round tannins, while the opulence of Campbells' 2009 The Barkly Durif (\$49, pictured) speaks volumes.

Not to ignore Queensland durif, Ray Costanzo of Golden Grove Estate at Ballandean in the Granite Belt recently won a national gold medal for a durif displaying perfumed liquorice.