



MY TASMANIA
Leo Schofield

Let's push our fine food

Philip Kennedy is from Cobram in country Victoria, Peter Leary hails from Crookwell in New South Wales. Both now live in Melbourne.

They have two further things in common besides their place of domicile. Both are businessmen and both are passionate about Tasmanian produce.

It was this near-obsession with the food raised, grown and harvested here and the special affinity they feel with farmers that prompted them to open a restaurant on Melbourne's Southbank called Pure South, a site previously occupied by another landmark Melbourne eatery called Blakes.

The odd ingredient or condiment might be bought locally but almost everything that's put on a plate in this restaurant is from Tasmania, flown in daily.

One has become accustomed to Tasmanian produce appearing on interstate menus, where the listing of source has become a kind of appellation d'origine controlee, a virtual guarantee of quality. But to date this is the only mainland restaurant I know of that is dedicated exclusively to serving Tasmanian food and wine.

It was to celebrate this fact that last week they asked chef Nick Anthony to put together a menu of exceptional Vandemonian fare and invited a dozen lucky guests, this writer included, to partake.

We kicked off with a plate of oysters. Not your average bivalves these, but a selection from various parts of the island.

Arranged clockwise and geographically they were, from the top, samplings from Smithton, Moulting Bay, St. Helens, Pittwater, Eaglehawk Neck, Pipe Clay Lagoon and Hastings Bay, all opened minutes before hitting their waiting beds of sparkling ice.

The guest of honour, in fact the raison d'être for this dinner, was local winemaker Julian Alcorso, who selected the wines.

It was understandable he should choose those wines he had made.

To accompany the oysters, what better than a bubbly from Clover Hill? Followed by a King Island egg (yes, even the eggs come from here) slow-cooked sous vide for two hours and served on cauliflower puree with shaved Tasmanian black truffle. Encased in a nest of crisp salsify and garnished with baby mache, micro celery leaf and truffle salt and drizzled with olive oil from Evandale, a new one on me.

As presented on the plate it could have been mistaken for an example of Melbourne Cup millinery.

I had never heard of Mark Eather until I saw his name on the menu at Garagistes. Nor had I heard of ike jimi, his preferred method of dispatch, a Japanese technique for paralyzing and bleeding fish to ensure not only a quick and painless exit but also maximum flavour retention.



VANDEMONIAN VINTNER: Local winemaker Julian Alcorso.

Picture: NIKKI DAVIS-JONES

The kingfish and stripey trumpeter, the latter in my opinion the finest white fish available in Australia, were given this kind of exit and served as sashimi with some finely scored and lightly grilled calamari that was the most delicious I've ever tasted. It had a slightly smoky flavour and was as soft as a baby's neck, the polar opposite of those rubbery quoit-sized rings beloved of fish and chipperies that taste like elastic bands dipped in glue and sawdust and deep-fried in rancid vegetable oil.

This rabelasian feast continued with a ceviche of Spring Bay scallops and cocktail abalone in a mussel stock served with Tassie wasabi, then some of the fabled pork from rare-breed Wessex Saddleback pigs, raised by Guy Robertson and Eliza Wood at Mount Gnomon in the north-west of the state.

The chef had chosen meat off the bone of a loin, washed it in a salt brine containing fennel, bay leaves and white wine vinegar and cooked it for about an hour.

With it came scrumptious Tasmanian organic quinoa, pistachio, parsley and marjoram salad, and compressed apple and a sherry sauce.

Then to the cheeses, a farandole of Bruny Island's finest, offered with a pinot paste.

Mercifully we were spared dessert, although some fragile macaroons as light as fairy floss were served with some exceptional Sullivans Cove single malts.

It goes without saying that the wines

throughout were a match for the superlative food.

The reason I've chronicled this dinner in detail is to re-emphasise the point about food quality in Tasmania and to wonder why it is not more aggressively promoted by Tourism Tasmania.

As with MONA, it's the individual operators rather than the expensive bureaucratic behemoth who garner coverage in the powerful mainland media for their activities.

Will the new boss of Tourism Tasmania re-order his priorities? One heard that emphasis is to be placed mainly on the environment, but not everyone wants to don hiking boots and beanies and stomp through leech and snake-infested forests.

There is a market, and a big one, for such activity, but an equally important one for gastronomic tourism as well as for cultural and heritage tourism.

A few years ago no one could have imagined massive visitations for a specific and rather specialised (not to mention idiosyncratic) contemporary art gallery and yet 165,000 people, many from interstate, have made that particular pilgrimage.

Similar numbers could be generated by specific, well-conceived and aggressively marketed cultural events but daring, courage and imagination are required and these are qualities spectacularly absent among our current crop of politicians and bureaucrats.



contents

My Tasmania with Leo Schofield	2
The Other Side with Christopher John	3
Still chipping away: David Foster	4-6



Where the Heart is with Ben Davidson	7-10
Notes from a shed with Mike Jackson	10
On the Wing with Don Knowler	11
The Two of Us	11



From all corners for a bite of the Apple Isle:	12-15
Tasle Towns: Wilmot	16-18
Quick Quiz	18
The Book	19
The Collector with Adrian Franklin	19
Good Earth with Paul Healy	20
In the Garden with Jennifer Stackhouse	21
Gallery Watch with Clyde Selby	22-23

Magazine Editor Martine Haley
Advertising Kylie Dermoudy
6230 0645

On the cover: A cut above. World champion woodchopper David Foster. Picture: Marc McCormack.

Published by News Magazines
Proprietor and publisher Davies Brothers Pty Ltd (ACN 009 475 754) of 91-93 Macquarie St, Hobart, 7000 for insertion in the Mercury on Saturday, August 6, 2011.