



## THE beerhunter

IT'S the perennial question for me—should I just bog straight in with an ale I haven't had before, or have an appetiser?

Whether that appetiser be a morsel of food or a trailblazing brew I already know, or both.

On the day of reviewing Harvest ale, I decided to soften up the approach to the new one with an old favourite.

So, step forward James Squire The Chancer Golden Ale (4.5 per cent, 345ml).

This lovely number goes down the glass with class, lacework and all, while retaining a nice head.

I used an old Grolsch stemmed glass for it, which added to the sense of occasion.

There was a turkey roast wafting its deliciousness all around the house, with the spuds and other veggies singing along in chorus.

As the wonderful Golden Ale disappeared, in came the new beer on the block in a magnificent bottle, a Southern Hemisphere Harvest fresh hop ale from brewer Sierra Nevada.

This 2011 vintage is one of the brewery's special releases. It also has its year-round offerings and seasonal ones, quite a line-up.

The guys from Cellarabration at Blackmans Bay put me to the test with this American beer, which uses fresh hops rushed to the US from New Zealand in our autumn (or fall as the Yanks would have it).

They also do a northern hemisphere version in their own fall.

I hoped the 6.7 per cent brew would stand up to expectation under the glare of forensic testing in my kitchen lab.

It comes in a large bottle—in US terms, one pint and eight fluid ounces, which is about 710ml, a bit less than an Aussie longneck.

The label on this one is an absolutely beautiful piece of work but would the beer be?

The colour was not unlike the Golden Ale, maybe a bit more ruby, with fantastic bubbly life in the glass.

The moment of truth—zap, this one is loaded with that penetrating edge fresh hops impart.

This is where I stopped note-taking and went into the living room to just enjoy the brew.

We just wanted to be on our own together.

Harvest is a hugely powerful drop in terms of flavour, as well as alcohol by volume.

Lovers of hoppy big-hitters will be in heaven with this thunderous number from Chico, California.

It may go too far for some but it's an experience ale lovers should have.

● **Verdict:** Happy to be a fall guy.

**Rating:** Golden and Harvest 3.8 out of five.

ERIC McCORMICK

# Guide to getting it wrong

IN MAY, the Tasmanian Hospitality Association announced its 2011 awards for excellence among its members.

The assessment of restaurants and cafes had been carried out by 20 independent judges against some 55 judging criteria under the categories of pre-table, pre-eating, food, drinks, and sundries with considerations of service included throughout.

By way of feedback for those establishments that didn't win any prizes, I took the opportunity recently of discussing with the chief judge: the most common shortcomings and failings the judges saw during their visits.

He said that generally the standards were good, particularly at hotel counter meals, but that there were some terrible and, in some instances, surprising cases of real concern, mostly to do with food and wine service.

Among the most common were the fall away in service between seating and presenting diners with menus and orders being taken; the timing of dishes delivered to diners at the same table; the failure of wait staff to offer desserts, the wine list

for a second bottle, to re-fill water and top up water and wine glasses; and the absence of service when it came to paying.

The judges felt much of this lack of attention to the ongoing needs of a table was due to different staff servicing a table at different times with no one assigned a station—that is, particular tables to look after. In one case, a waitress introduced herself on arrival as their waitress for the night, and, while four others served them at various times, it was the last they saw of her.

While service at arrival was generally good, the judges stressed that it needed to be just as timely, attentive and friendly throughout and at the end of a meal, when paying and on departure.

The judges said while the offering of wines by the glass had improved, too many establishments were still offering the cheapest wines and styles and too many wine lists were physically stained, old and often tacky. A major and all-too-common failure was to pour wines by the glass away from the table, out of sight of the diners. They said it was just as important to show the bottle and pour

wines by the glass at the table as when a bottle had been ordered.

Menus, they said, were physically often old, stained, cheap and nasty and that menu descriptions were often incomplete—a real concern these days when so many people suffer allergies.

Frozen food was all too frequent, especially fish and out-of-season seafood. Garnishes and accompaniments were too often repetitive across dishes and staff often lacked menu and wine list knowledge and enthusiasm.

But not apparently one waiter. When one judge complained there was no beef in his serving of what the menu described as a beef and pasta dish, the waiter replied: "That's bloody bullshit!"

The saddest part in all of this, according to the chief judge, was that many of these shortcomings could be corrected if management were to take the time to train and organise their staff properly, in house, at very little effort or cost.

As he said, we tend to blame the staff when really it's more often and ultimately the responsibility and fault of management.

# Pure genius



savour

GRAEME PHILLIPS

"CHEFS have a new opportunity—and perhaps even an obligation to inform the public about what is good to eat and the relationship between food and food supply systems, sustainability and the social significance of how we eat. There is no conflict between a better meal and a better world."

"Close interaction with farmers and scientists can expose the chef to new flavours that can be used to delight diners. But that's just the start. Those same relationships, in this age of agrifood, can help a small farmer survive financially. They can also represent a small step against the decline in biodiversity—an astonishing 90 per cent of crop varieties have been lost in the past century—that not only threatens our environment, but also explains why it's so hard to find a tomato that tastes like the ones we remember from childhood. In its own small way, a relationship forged between a chef and a farmer, or a chef and a biologist, has the power to effect real change."



TASSIE'S TASTIEST: Pure South owners Peter Leary, left, and Philip Kennedy, right, with chef Nick Anthony after a successful Tasmanian truffle hunt.

SO WROTE Rene Redzepi—chef at the No. 1 restaurant in the world, Noma in Copenhagen—in a recent article in the *Guardian* newspaper (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/aug/14/rene-redzepi-chefs-better-food>).

Redzepi's words perfectly reflect the driving philosophy behind Philip Kennedy's and Peter Leary's Pure South restaurant on Melbourne's South Bank.

Since opening seven years ago, they have ensured supply of the best of Tasmania by visiting the state often and seeking out, supporting and building close, on-going working

relationships with our small, specialist growers and producers.

At the restaurant recently, chef Nick Anthony fashioned a fabulous dinner featuring freshly shucked oysters from eight different parts of the state; King Island eggs; Tasmanian black truffles; Thorpe Farm salsify; Evandale olive oil; Mark Ether's kingfish and stripy trumpeter; fresh Shima wasabi; Spring Bay scallops and cocktail abalone; Mount Gnomon Farm Wessex Saddleback pork; Tasmanian organic quinoa and apples; Bruny Island cheeses; pinot paste; and bread made with Tasmanian walnuts.

The dinner was accompanied by a Clover Hill Brut and the results of Kennedy's latest project—a pinot gris, chardonnay and pinot noir that he'd worked with Julian Alcorso at Winemaking Tasmania to custom produce for the restaurant.

Altogether, the dinner was a triumphant celebration of Tasmania. While Pure South's ongoing success underlines their and Redzepi's approach to food, the way they go about sourcing their produce and supporting producers could serve as an object lesson for many restaurateurs and chefs here at home.

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