

A mood to celebrate

Thursday, 16 July 2009

By HELEN PERRY



• *Howick and Pakuranga Times*

It was son's birthday last week and he fully expected the main gift to be the arrival of a niece or nephew. His sister, three days overdue, couldn't oblige.

However, heavily burdened as she was, she was determined to join the usual family celebration and waddled into Barracuda at Bucklands Beach on Thursday evening. We had chosen the beachfront restaurant for several reasons – one it was close to daughter's home if she needed to depart in a hurry; two, it had great Tuesday to Thursday meal specials of \$17.95 (the full menu was also available), and thirdly, there was a new chef in the kitchen.

Without doubt we were in a celebratory mood and ready to enjoy ourselves. And we did. From the first, daughter's entrance caused great hilarity especially amongst a jovial group of women diners who looked to be having a girls' night out. I think, perhaps, there was a great deal of empathy for one who looked fit to burst.

Despite daughter still sticking to her gym programme – she reckoned squats were sure to hurry this infant along – and attending bump yoga, it seemed there was little she could do to hasten the birth and relieve herself of busy little feet that wouldn't stop tap dancing or practising footy. We didn't know whether we were expecting a grand-daughter or a grandson but whatever I'm sure this wee mite will be an exercise enthusiast too.

However, I digress. Back to dinner. While regretfully daughter could only manage about a quarter of her truly delicious salmon linguine – “there's just no space left,” she declared – the rest of us cleaned up, including the remains of her dish. It was scrumptious (and beautifully presented) scallops for the birthday boy, pork fillet for son-in-law and the husband and, for me, the perfect eye fillet steak.

Barracuda's new chef did himself proud despite being in the job a mere week. And just when we thought we couldn't manage another bite, son was presented with a complimentary dessert. Barracuda has made it a practice to give any guest celebrating his or her actual birthday at the restaurant a complimentary dessert of chocolate mudcake.

On this occasion, I think partly because of daughter's condition, the owners kindly extended this service to a small tasting plate of several desserts which gave each of us a mouthful of mudcake, gelato, citrus tart, sticky date pudding and passionfruit cheesecake. Personal preferences prevailed but it was the sticky date pudding that did it for me.

I was also impressed by the addition of white tablecloths for evening dining at Barracuda – they really did add an air of refinement. Our friendly waitress also did her part to make the evening a success and by time we left (with a “waddle and a quack”) we could all sympathise with daughter – a very full tummy can be both a pleasure and a pain!

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Restaurant Review

4:00AM Tuesday Apr 28, 2009

By [Phoebe Falconer](#)



Barracuda restaurant in Bucklands Beach. Photo / Glenn Jeffrey

Where: 23A The Parade, Bucklands Beach. Ph (09) 534 4943

Our meal: \$343.80 for four entrees, four mains, two desserts, wine and beer.

Wine list: Covers the bases, like the menu.

Verdict: A good local restaurant in a neighbourhood with few. Not a particularly cheap option though.

Out of 10

Food: 7

Service: 7

Value: 5

Ambience: 6

You know where Bucklands Beach is. It's that area colonised 40 or so years ago by those who wanted to live near the eastern beaches but couldn't afford St Heliers.

A skinny finger of land pointing north into Tamaki Strait, an outpost of the so-called Nappy Valley, populated by young families. A number of them still live there, I'm told. Our daughter-in-law Danielle remembers Barracuda from her post-school days at Macleans College, and swears that some of the folk who patronised Barracuda then were there the night we visited.

A barracuda is a large, predatory fish with huge teeth. So unless they're having a laugh at the locals, or basing the menu on things piscatorial - which Barracuda doesn't, particularly - the name is a mystery. However, we're here on a nostalgia trip for Danielle. And to be fair, the view across the Tamaki River towards Glendowie is spectacular.

Lights from the mansions on Riddell Rd gleam, and the sea is still. The restaurant is right on the beachfront and on a summer evening the sunset must be impressive. In autumn, the outside area is closed for the season.

The interior is fine though, comfortable and roomy. We order beer, a soft drink for David, the designated driver, and wine as we investigate the menu. It covers the basics, albeit with spelling mistakes - protobello mushrooms, anyone?

I have heard that the chef's special chicken liver and brandy pate (\$14.60) is worth a try, and Danielle can't go past oysters (\$18.60 for the half-dozen) when they're on offer. The pate is farmhouse and very good, with just the right amount of crostini, and the oysters are described as

creamy and excellent. David's calamari (\$13.90) comes with lime and chilli aioli and is on the winning side of the toughness battle.

The fish of the day is John Dory, in my mind one of the best examples of the finny kingdom. It comes with lemon and caper sauce and mushroom risotto (\$28.50). The fish is delicate and sweet but even though I am a risotto fan, I'm not sure that the combination works.

Bill and David have pork fillet marinated in spiced apple and served with vegetables and mash (\$27.90). It's fine without being too far from something you'd knock up at home with no trouble.

Danielle's fillet steak wrapped in bacon, topped with bearnaise and served on a potato rosti (\$31.90), is a standout. She's no slouch in the kitchen herself and knows the difference between good and poor steak. This is perfect. It's a leisurely meal.

There is no rush to get us finished and out, so we sit and chat and swap stories about best and worst meals. David's was ostrich carpaccio stuffed with artichokes, ours was Murray River cod.

The carpaccio was outstanding, our cod was the worst thing you could imagine eating. Barracuda is much better than that.

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Magic mushrooms!

Thursday, 22 May 2008

By HELEN PERRY



Determined to cut spending hubby and I have been staying home and dining on what's in the cupboards, fridge and freezer including loads of homemade pumpkin soup – those who read my recent story on hubby's secret garden will know what I'm talking about.

However, a recent opportunity to dine at Barracuda was too good to refuse. I was hanging out for someone else's cooking so made the most of the night by having an entrée and a main. Not really such a good idea because my entrée of mussels steamed with ginger, lemongrass and coconut milk, was exceptionally generous and very filling.

It meant I could hardly manage the second course of chicken breast which the menu said came with roasted pumpkin, pinenuts and Dijon cream. The mustard sauce and pinenuts were both there but the roasted pumpkin came in the form of a combination mash mixed with potato – had I realised I probably would have opted for something different. Even though the chicken itself was very tasty I really am tired of mash.

Full as I was after the entrée, I nevertheless managed to pack in most of my main but on this occasion I think my better half came out best off. He started the evening with portobello mushrooms topped with roasted capsicum, sundried tomatoes, pinenuts and mozzarella cheese finished with a puff pastry "hat". This had to be his pick of recent outings. It was flavoursome, nicely presented and a hearty entrée – I was so envious.

His main of eye fillet wrapped in bacon, topped with kumara shavings, and served with Bernaise sauce accompanied by a potato and feta gratin was another good choice. The way his knife slipped through the perfectly rare, pink flesh left me salivating.

We arrived at dusk and sat near the window watching the nightfall. The sea soon became a dark void but Glendowie's twinkling lights and the marine activity still made for a pretty outlook.

This pleasing evening was made even better when we spotted a familiar face among the wait staff. Sue McBeth has, over the years, worked at a number of local restaurants and at Barracuda her experience and professionalism shone.

It had been quite some time since we last met but I noticed she missed nothing. Though not allocated to our table she did appear at my side carrying an extra bowl for my mussel shells – a common restaurant oversight. I really appreciated this little attention to detail, it was the kind of attention that often sets a restaurant apart.

As usual I could not help but enjoy the lovely beachfront setting and the two things I will definitely go back for are those portobello mushrooms and that very tempting steak – all good stuff.