

Rockpool Bar & Grill

66 Hunter Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Review Date: 25 November 2009

Total Cost: \$138 + tip

Official Rating: 2 Chef's hat in Sydney Morning Herald's *Good Food Guide 2010*

Review:

Being a bar and grill, this posh looking restaurant is famous for its steaks. Therefore, its stunning decorations (including a chandelier made from Riesling wine glasses), its powerful patrons (we met a certain Peter Costello on the night) and the friendly staff will mean absolutely nothing if the steaks did not meet what was admittedly high expectations on my part.

My personal orders were hit and miss. But I'm confident in saying that, regardless of your prejudices, if you order the 300-day grain fed rib-eye from this restaurant, you won't be disappointed.

Entree: Charcoal Roast Squid and Pork Belly

I was in the middle of a pork belly craze. Having had about 3 servings of pork belly within the past week, I can entertain thoughts of been a specialist critic on this dish.

The lean pork meat was buried inside layers of pig fat. This may sound disgusting, but it is indeed the way it is meant to be. The only thing missing was the crispy skin. Admittedly, the menu did not mention anything about crispy skin, but I've grown fond of the crunch that the crispy skin provides. I feel the dish would be better off, if the skin was not removed.

The squid was not much different to what could be bought from a fish and chip shop. I don't mean that it was bad, but it did not particularly capture the imagination.

I also tried the roast king prawns and the asparagus. Next time I visit this restaurant, I'm definitely ordering the prawns for entrée. It was juicy, well marinated and full of flavour.

The entrees were large, so I would recommend that you share one dish between two. You don't want to fill yourself up too much, given what's coming...

Main: Full Blood Wagyu Rump

I know I ordered the Wagyu rump steak, so should be spending most of this space reviewing this dish. However, it was perhaps the most disappointing dish of the night. It had the highest Marble Score, it was expensive, but it was far inferior to the grain fed steak. The meat was a bit too tough and chewy. The accompanying sauces overwhelmed the flavour of the Wagyu steak, and it felt like eating an ordinarily steak with tendons streaking through the meat. It could have ruined the night...

But along came the grain fed steak, like a knight in shining armour, or in this case, a gift on a shining plate, which a generous friend agreed to share. He probably wouldn't have done so, if he tasted it first before making the agreement. It was everything I wished my steak would be; tasty, juicy, tender and filling. As I slowly chewed a piece down, trying to prolong the experience and searching unsuccessfully for some fault to justify my choice of ordering the Wagyu, I could understand why some people believe that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

I rationed my piece carefully, so that the final lingering taste in my mouth prior to the desserts would be that of the grain fed steak, not the Wagyu. I later discovered that just about everyone else did the same thing. It really was *that* good.

I also had pieces of the wood fire roasted chicken. By itself, it would have been an excellent dish at a great price. Compared to the grain fed steak, it is barely worth mentioning.

Prior to tonight, it was difficult for me to imagine the pleasure that can be derived from a simple steak. I believed that the *raison d'être* for it was to pump the diner with enough calories so that feelings of hunger would be abated for as long as possible. Hence, I tended to prefer places that served steaks for \$5.

In this respect, the Rockpool steak has changed my perspective and *modus operandi* as much as the Galileo oysters. This will be the new benchmark for steaks. A mark which I suspect few will match.

Dessert: Black Forest Trifle

By this stage, I must admit I was already full. As I had thought about having this dessert for an entire week, I was not about to go home without trying it.

The trifle was bigger than I had expected...time to loosen the belt. The topping was thick and creamy. The two layers of cake were a delicious mix of chocolate and something that I can't quite put my finger on. The raspberry sauce was mild at first, but grew sharper as I dug further into the trifle. I would have preferred a fruit other than raspberry (like mango), but it was an excellent dessert nonetheless.

I struggled to finish the entire thing. It was a mistake to order it for myself. It probably could have fed a family of four. Definitely recommended for those with a sweet tooth.

Summary

The waiters were on the ball (they spotted me flicking through the wine list and called for a sommelier; I only wanted to ask what goes well with an \$80,000 bottle of wine?) and gave great advice on the different steaks ("The grain fed is more watery and smooth"...no kidding). There is a reason why this restaurant won the best new restaurant award. Our seat was a little too close to the kitchen and we found it difficult to talk across the table, so the ambience was diminished somewhat. Regardless of any other imperfections...Rockpool Bar & Grill will always be remembered for its steak.

Scores:

Quality of food	=	7 (would be 9 if I ordered the right steak)
Value	=	4 (would be 7 if I ordered the right steak)
Service	=	10
Ambience	=	7 (could not hear those two seats removed)
Cleanliness	=	10