

Bilson's (09/12/2009)

Radisson Plaza Hotel Sydney
27 O'Connell Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Where to begin? My first 3 chef's hat experience with the dinner club and there was a lot of anticipation and persuasion involved. The question remained what difference the 3rd hat made and what was the big hype about. To be fair other previous experiences with 3 hat restaurants made me a strong believer in this difference, so even before sitting down Bilson's had a reputation to match and hopefully surpass...

The setting and location on business side of Pitt St left a lot to be desired (personal distaste in having a view of my office). This was something mentioned to me before about Bilson's, that for the price and dining experience a 3-hat restaurant was expected to offer, the view at this restaurant left a lot to be desired. However, Bilson's being one of the few restaurants who have year after year defended their rating must have had its gems, the atmosphere and decorations were not its main focus and would be similar to what you would expect at a good Western fine dining restaurant. The Sommelier and waiters were a joy both in friendly and professional terms.

It was also to be a sad night as it would be the Jeff's final (fine) dining experience with us before he left for overseas. We were fortunate enough to have everyone arrive promptly and started our degustation dining experience. The Amuse Bouche was our first taste, the style of preparation and especially the display was signature for a 3-hatted restaurant, the flavours for this dish were not overly complex and it was an interesting start to our meal.

For our next tasting course, the spanner crab, once again the presentation was exquisite, I would believe the light flavours and sweetness of this dish was to accentuate the flavours for oncoming dishes. This was followed by the prawn sashimi and pork neck by this stage it was obvious that presentation was something to expect from every dish, it really was a delight to behold, the flavour of the sashimi was not to my taste personally, the texture of the prawn did not make it enjoyable along with the bland taste, this however is probably more of a personal taste.

Every meal has one and the next dish, the 'Tarte Fine of Scallops with Silverbeet, Veal Sweetbreads and Truffled Sauce' was the highlight of our night. The scallop was decent serving portion and seared to perfection. The truffled sauce was not too overpowering and brought out more of the sweetness of the fleshy scallop, served on a pastry base. We were savouring this dish for the rest of the night. This would definitely be something to order for future dining experiences at Bilson's.

The Kingfish had a very hard act to follow, the foam similar to the amuse bouche provided a light touch yet strong flavour and matched well with the decent serving of kingfish, the 'Textures of Onion' on the side was a first for me and neither it nor the sauce provided the flavour I was expecting. In hindsight however, this was probably something more to cleanse the palette between two strong-tasting mains and served its purpose in that regard, something else which promotes the expertise of the chef.

The partridge served with foie gras was a powerful punch of flavour, a display to the restaurants ability to use the strong flavours together without fear, the different parts of the dish worked very well together, the foie gras was divine and the strong flavours mellowed by the partridge and sauce. We were advised by our serving waiter to let go our shyness and to use our hands for this dish, simple helpful and encouraging advice to enjoy the dish with. I really appreciated the more friendly nature of the staff which was a big plus for me

The sirloin steak to follow was not appreciated properly by myself, by this stage of the evening the serving sizes had sufficiently filled my appetite and the steak though nicely cooked and prepared paled in comparison to what we experienced at Rockpool B&G. The polenta was a letdown but aside from that the dish was good but more of another filler.

The start of the desserts, Hm...how to approach the 'Petit Fromage Affiné', we were warned by the waiter about the strong taste of the blue cheese which was softened already by the addition of fruits to the dish, personally I'm not a huge fan of blue cheese in general but never thought myself to be strongly adverse to them, the flavour of the cheese in the end was far too strong for my taste and was a dish I could not bring myself to continue eating, I wonder whether it should have been on the tasting menu since it was clear to me that it was an acquired and particular taste for patrons. I understand the importance of cheese and fruit in French cuisine and admired that. To bring home the point, most of the people on the table felt they needed to rinse and override the taste from this dish afterwards.

The chestnut and pear to follow was very timid in comparison to the cheese dish, the sorbet was grainy for my taste and I had trouble appreciating the sweetness of the dish possibly due to the previous course, display was wonderful and this led on to the Sacher Chocolate. Chocolate honestly are most people's favourite and this dish aimed to bring together a mixture of different types, textures and styles of the sweet. One very unfortunate point to end the night on was that I found a hair embedded in a piece of my chocolate. It really was a shock, though to be honest I didn't mind too much, I would expect a lot more from Bilson's, this coupled with the blue cheese but a dark patch on my dining experience and impression of their desserts.

I could not fault the petit fours however and eating them whilst sipping a tea and chatting with friends after a delicious and satisfying meal was wonderful. Would I go back to Bilson's? Yes, but would not be for degustation and would probably pass on desserts. Bilson's proved they deserve the 3 hats they have held for so long, they are comfortable and confident in their strong French flavours and exquisite touches in varying flavours and beautiful presentation.

Bon appétit

- Revsion Tam

Food Quality	8.5
Value	6
Ambience	7
Cleanliness	7 (-2 for the hair, it's unfortunate but something I would not expect or accept)
Service	8.5