



## CAVERSHAM HOUSE

DOUGLAS SUTHERLAND-BRUCE

*The  
Thoughts  
of an  
Ageing,  
Balding  
Foodie*

If one thinks about Caversham House in the Swan Valley, one immediately thinks of a rather posh wedding venue.

And, of course, it is - complete with elegant topiary dolphins and spirals, immaculately clipped hedges, sweeping Corinthian columns in glacial white, dove grey velvet and ivory white neo-Adam mouldings surprisingly comfortable ball-room chairs.

But it's very much more than that for the average Australian diner, it's a rather splendid place to take luncheon.

After all, how many times do we actually married (providing we're not Elizabeth Taylor or Micky Rooney) as compared to the times we're looking for a decent place to eat lunch.

The hardest part is finding the entrance, really

because it's not very well signposted. I can tell you that you sweep in the entrance, guarded by two fearsome grotesques on either side that look as though they've just flown in from Notre Dame in Paris, up the long drive and break to the right hand car park.

Once out of your car (which you immediately wish you'd taken through the car wash first, since the place is immaculate) there's a Palladian archway in front of you.

Once through there, along a hedge-lined pathway, turn left at the Gazebo through the French doors into the restaurant proper of ivory white and smooth grey velvet draperies.

The tables are elegant, draped in white nappy and with tiny ballroom style chairs. The cutlery is equally elegant, simple but heavy, and the menu beautifully printed on heavy velum paper in buckram buckboards.

The menu is not vast - five entrées, five mains, five sides and five desserts.

Prices for entrée and mains are set - \$19 and \$39.

It is at this point that would like to introduce the chef - Chef Ingo Maass. Chef Ingo came to Caversham House eight months ago and has worked hard with the owners and front of house staff to produce a beautiful, balanced menu of meat, seafood and poultry with vegetables and herbs from Caversham House's own vegetable garden, on the premises.

I was fortunate enough to be able to have a chat with Chef Ingo, author of *New Arabian Cuisine*

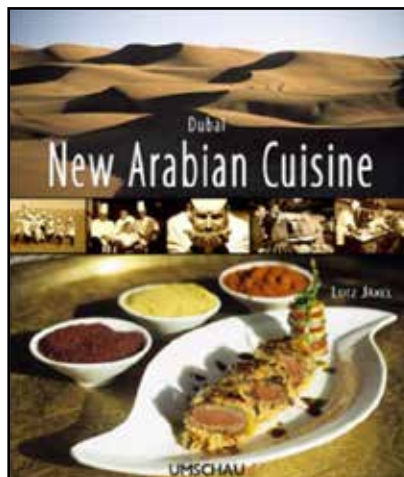
*Cuisine*, and we were in total agreement about the necessity of the freshest produce, local protein and simplicity of cooking to allow the flavour to speak plainly.

We were both in raptures about the quality and availability of West Australian lamb and the local produce readily available and with almost no food miles.

Born in Germany, and trained, well pretty much everywhere, Chef has spent time in Dubai

and elsewhere, honing his skills.

His book, a combination of anecdote and recipe with the most





exquisite photographs, is on sale through Amazon

And, I have to tell you, very considerable skills they are. The menu Roxy and I ate off was very new, only the second day of operation, but nevertheless bedded in beautifully.

The wine list is also not extensive, but very well balanced and relying mostly on quality local wines. The wine waiter was also knowledgeable, which is always nice and had opinions, which in my opinion is vital. I really like a waiter to be able to make a suggestion when I ask for something 'sweetish, white and fruity'

The suggested wine was all of that. Available by the glass or by the bottle.

Roxy was a trifle late so I kept myself busy with a dish of home-made sourdough buns served warm with capsicum butter and EVOO (\$3). Delicious and crusty and warmed in an oven not in a microwave. You can always tell the difference.

For entrée I chose Slow Roasted Pork Belly, simply presented with a chunk of crisp, crunchy crackling and three apple balls, sweet and softly juicy on a tiny pillow of apple sauce, the same as accompanied the protein.

The meat was absolutely magnificently flavoured, tasty and succulent. Although elegant the portion was quite large and certainly satisfying.

Roxy's selection was the 'Vegetable Square', literally so, as it turned out, with a *quenelle* of black olive *tapenade* - olives, capers and anchovies chopped finely. The name comes from the *Provençal* for capers - *tapenas*. Very strongly flavoured on its own, the *tapenade* went superbly with the vegetables.

I'd hesitate to call it *nouvelle cuisine* since the portions are substantial, although the presentation was breath-takingly artistic.

My main course is a case in point (see the photographs). The dish was crusted Rack of Lamb, cooked to perfection as medium to rare.

The plate looked like a landscape - a river of red wine *jus*, between banks of pureed peas set with rocks of potato croquettes, peeled roast tomatoes and pearlised, caramelised onion shells, flowing under the bridge of the Frenched bones of the rack.

Charming, but every artistic touch and flourish edible. And deliciously edible.

Roxy had a simple dish of filet steak, simple to describe but sublime to taste - also beautifully presented, with a spear of roasted asparagus, a splendid *jus* and a fondant potato - that's the pillar at the top of the plate.

Fondant potatoes are a bugger to cook, it's a long and tricky process involving frying in frothy butter, poaching in stock with garlic cloves and thyme, but well worth the effort - if someone else is cooking it.

Roxy's steak was delicious and if I hadn't been making those little grunts and groans one makes with really, really tasty food I might have envied her.

As a side dish we shared truffle-infused mashed potatoes served with miniature lardons of crisp bacon - delicious.



Chef was kind enough to send over a plate of the Salt-Water Barramundi to try and that was excellent. The skin crispy and the flesh, succulent and translucent. Served on a bed of mash with braised medallions of leeks, slivers of beetroot and radishes and curls of courgette.

Barramundi is what the Americans call 'sea-bass'. *Barramundi* is Aboriginal for "large-scaled silver fish" and they are delicious, not too 'fishy' in the sense that mackerel are, and not too 'gamey' as some of the larger fish can be.

At this point in the meal, one usually thinks about dessert, and pretty damn enticing the sweet menu looked. But, there was just absolutely no possible way I could have crammed another mouthful in.

Happily, of course, I can come back and have another go, he said with a satisfied smile.

It will come as no surprise to learn that Caversham House won the Gold Plate in 2014 and 2015 for Licensed Casual Dining - Metro and has also been a finalist for the 2014 and 2015 CIA Gold Plate Venue Caterers Award and Tourism Restaurant.

Service is formal, if not silver service, but courteous and friendly.

Caversham House is not the choice for a quick lunch, nor for a cheap and cheerful bite.

It is not expensive as it's exceptional value for money, but a three course meal will run you about \$75 a head.

And there is no way that you would want to rush your meal, this is a place to enjoy and linger

over your food over a long lunch, preferably with an attractive red-head, but in any case to be leisurely sampled and savoured.

In summary, the decor is elegant and formal, the menu small but perfectly balanced, the food magnificent and the service correct and friendly.

Very Highly Recommended Indeed. 



*Caversham HOUSE*

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