

Review – e'cco



One of the key attributes that separates the very best restaurants from the rest of the pack is the fact that they are constantly being finessed. Not re-invented ... finessed. And, if there is one restaurant in Brisbane that could no doubt have coasted through the past decade without much need for improvement at all, it is *e'cco*.

But it has been finessed ... ceaselessly. The *e'cco* of today is a far more polished and sophisticated beast than it was when it was named Australia's Best Restaurant: no more frilly and no more formal, but undoubtedly more contemporary and far better in terms of the food, the wine and the service.



The *e'cco* menu is by no means the most eclectic in town and nor should it be. Its reputation is for simple food, bistro food, treated with care and flair and assembled from the best ingredients. If that makes it sound plain or ordinary you've been misled. The art of simplicity is a far more demanding beast than that of the ornate, and it is one that Phillip Johnson and his culinary team have perfected.

On a recent visit I put it to the test with a couple of dishes far removed from my ordinary repertoire; cauliflower soup (\$14.50) and a whacky rendition of grilled whiting (entrée, \$24.50).



Let's begin with the whiting because it exemplifies the point of this article. A bunch of whiting slivers on a bed of rocket (okay), raisins (a bit whacky) and curry-spiced cauliflower florets (truly odd). It all melded into a scintillatingly good dish – unexpected, complex and reeking of confidence - and I reckon I could traverse the length of the east-coast of this country without encountering that combination again. Simple ... sure; but there is a lot of experience and understanding that has allowed that dish to surface.

Cauliflower soup was far more as expected ... but still exceptionally good. The theory behind the choice was the supposed kilojoule count, but I reckon there was so much cream in the dish I need to jog for a month as a sort of fat-offset program.

In previous times the wine list has suffered by comparison to the menu. Boy-howdy have those times changed. Today even the glass-list is an eclectic journey around the vinous globe; no wine ordinary, all affordable and each and every one a testament to some pretty insightful thought behind its inclusion.

The rest of the *e'cco* package is handled with the same well oiled professionalism. Service – at busy times (and there are plenty of them) – can be fast-paced and practical rather than cosseting, which is entirely apt given the 'bistro' nature of the place. And the room can be rather noisy; a fact some more traditional diners might find unsettling but once again is merely a spot that marks the leopard.

Rating (out of five)

Food: 4.5

Wine: 4.5

Service: 4

Ambience: 4

e'cco bistro, 100 Boundary Street, Brisbane. Call 07 3831 8344. Open for lunch from 12midday to 2.30pm, Tuesday to Friday and for dinner from 6pm to late, Tuesday through Saturday.

For more information, visit www.eccobistro.com

Words by Tony Harper

Images courtesy of e'cco bistro