



PRIVE 249
Sofitel Central Brisbane,
249 Turbot St, city.
Ph: 3835 3535.
Chef: Matthieu Astier.
Owner: Sofitel Hotel.
Lunch, Tue-Fri, dinner, Tue-Sat.
Licensed. Major credit cards
& Eftpos. Wheelchair access.
Paid parking.
FOOD // 8 WINE // 7
SERVICE // 8.5 AMBIENCE // 8.5
RATINGS 10: perfect; 9: excellent; 8: very good;
7: good; 6: passable; 5: disappointing; 1-4: woeful

French evolution

Revamping a city hotel has left space for a petite fine diner with a Gallic air, writes Tony Harper

Photographs // Richard Waugh



Sofitel Central Brisbane has undergone a serious makeover, part of which has been the creation of a gorgeously appointed fine-dining restaurant. The accent is decidedly French (French chef, French wait-staff and even a “bonjour” from the front desk when they answer the phone), and the design is distinctly fresh and contemporary.

The small Prive 249 dining room is discreetly curtained off from the bar, foyer and larger buffet restaurant. It manages a lovely balance between baroque ornateness (chandeliers, filigree cutlery) and the cutting-edge (glass-topped tables, ultra-mod cruet sets and sleek furniture), while low lighting and dark colours set off the city lights.

On the night of my visit, the room was run by two French waiters – a senior and a commis – and they provided exceptional service. They were efficient, engaging and fast paced, but calmly so – a key part of what makes the restaurant so special.

Chef Matthieu Astier was one of the crew who came from France to man the pans at Belle Epoque. There, he was a few rungs down the ladder with, it appears, his creative wings clipped. Here, he treads a tightrope as carefully and successfully as the interior designers trod theirs.

The menu is trim but devilishly interesting and it follows the theme of modernism paired with classicism.

Breaded pig's trotter with sauce gribiche, parmigiano reggiano and meaux mustard (\$24) tasted great and, aside from needing a smidge more sauce, simply wowed. Less confronting but just as skillfully managed was the king prawns, blowtorched (there's that modernism), goat's curd salad, baby beetroot and walnut vinaigrette (\$26).

The mains were, if anything, better. I tested the waters with Holstein veal liver, broad beans, shiitake, gnocchi and onion rings (\$36), wondering how capably he would handle liver. It was perfect. My wife's Berkshire pork cutlet, nicoise vegetables, pommes gaufrettes and sauce charcuterie, *inset*, was the dish of the night.

Dessert didn't live up to the rest of the menu. An undercooked tarte tatin with flaccid pastry and below-par ice cream meant the dream run stumbled. And the wine list needs work – the by-the-glass list lacks depth, there aren't any half-bottles and the imported wines travel a fairly dull path.

Minor gripes aside, Prive 249 is a fabulous restaurant. It is only a few weeks old and already it manages to thrill. Its future looks promising indeed.