



French excursion

Review
Lizzie Loel

FORMERLY the Sheraton and in need of a makeover, Sofitel Brisbane is now a stylish and polished addition to the luxury hotel scene in town.

Thyme2 is a pleasant buffet-restaurant (normally an oxymoron) serving good food in an attractive environment.

It offers authentic versions of many cuisines, including the products of two glassed-in tandoori ovens.

This alone sets it apart from the usual carpeted barn with one wall stacked sky-high with pre-prepared food and so abundant it could feed a small nation.

This dining area fills a large space and offers an appealing a la carte menu.

As well as this and the adjoining Cuvee Lounge, Prive 249 has been added to sit neatly between the two.

Seating about 50 in salubrious surrounds, etched cutlery in gleaming gold and pewter sits a little awkwardly on the highly polished black glass tabletops, due to the clash of two hard surfaces.

It's all very Parisian-swank with stemware and other appointments understated and elegant, including chandeliers subtly encased in semi see-through cylindrical sheaths.

French-born chef Mathieu Astier uses the best of his classical background to underpin the menu but also indulges contemporary preparations and plating techniques.

A single word – the main component – is used to headline each dish, which is fine in most cases but a little odd on a couple of occasions. Egg is an unusual way to start an entree description, but “hen egg deep fried green pea veloute and Iranian caviar” is more reassuring.

Ditto ham, which headlines a wooden board laden with wafer-thin Iberico de bellota jamon with toasted tomato bread. Maybe it's me but when I think of ham, I'm thinking school lunches and Christmas tables; and when I

think jamon, I think yum.

“Forgotten cereal”, another odd starter, is reminiscent of my ravenous week in a health camp a couple of years back, utilising quinoa, a little-known mildly gelatinous starch that is perhaps best left in the recesses of our memories.

But the menu is far better to be understated than brash and no one does understatement better than the French.

Pork is actually a pig's trotter, although this one is moulded into three cylinders standing upright, breaded and fried until crisp. A tuile of parmesan bridges them like a bail on top of the miniature stumps. The green is a refined sauce gribiche and is deliciously tangy if a little spartan. A quail egg halved and filled with egg puree sits as a garnish at the end of the long rectangular plate.

Prawns are blow torched and served warm over a salad of goats cheese, shaves of baby beets and a walnut vinaigrette and this is one gorgeous combo.

My foie gras filled quail resting on grilled artichokes is rich and lovely but outgunned by three fabulous crab, mushroom and ricotta tortellini doused in a voluptuous bisque and teeny droplets of chilli oil. A petite copper pot of perfect pomme puree is my revenge.

It was a Franco-Italian triumph on a plate and somehow managed to remain restrained enough not to overpower.

Prive 249 has, as expected, a top notch wine list and a carte filled with exquisite champagnes and wines from all over the globe, listed in their country of origin.

Dessert is a tarte tatin, a daily soufflé or warm sangria with poached fruit and honey ice cream and a chocolate indulgence.

Prive 249 is clipped and clever, polished and elegant. It's less hotel and more fine dining and really seems to have that expatriate French air about it.

Due to a technical error, the wrong review of Piccolo at Ascot was published last week. The correct review is online at couriermail.com.au



Prive 249

Address: 249 Turbot St,
 Sofitel Brisbane Central
Tel: 3835 3535
Hours: Lunch: noon-3pm, dinner: 6pm-late,
 Tues-Sat
Liquor Status: Licensed
Prices: \$44-and up
Owner: Sofitel Brisbane Central
Chef: Mathieu Astier
Smoking: No
Parking: Yes
Wheelchair access: Yes
Other: Seats 52 guests, all major credit

cards, airconditioned

The score
 Food: 15.5
 Wine: 15.5
 Service: 16
 Ambience: 15
About the score
 0-5 go somewhere else
 6-9 major change required
 10-13 reasonable, room for improvement
 14-16 good
 17-19 excellent
 20 the pinnacle



POLISHED LOOK: The Parisian-swank Prive 249; and (top) the pig's trotter; quail dish; and dining room. Pictures: Steve Pohner