



**TERRY DURACK
RESTAURANT
REVIEW**

Cracking feed by the seaside

If you want to know what's really going on in the northern beaches, read the signs nailed on the power poles. "Happy Birthday Fiona" reads one handwritten poster on the upper reaches of Barrenjoey Road. "Yay! Alex is 21" another says. Around the next bend, it's "Happy Birthday Bevy." And then, "Alfonso Ales now cooking at Jonah's!"

OK, I made up that last one, but Ales has had quite an impact on the local fine-dining scene since arriving fresh from Bilson's in June, even considering that Jonah's pretty much is the local fine-dining scene. There are sunny cafes and cosy diners galore but the luxe Relais & Chateaux ocean resort has been the sole standard bearer for high-rolling, big-night-and-day-out dining.

Ales (pronounced Ah-less) comes well credentialled, having cooked with three of Europe's three-starriest chefs - Michel Guerard, Martin Berasategui and Ferran Adria - before shipping out to Australia.

His cooking draws on southern European influences, parlayed across a menu that single-mindedly names dishes for their major ingredient and its provenance. The titles (oysters, NSW; octopus, Fremantle WA; squid, South Australia; and truffle, Manjimup WA) act like, well, signs on power poles for the diner.

But do you go for lunch or dinner? Lunch if you want the views overlooking Whale Beach; dinner if you have a designated driver or are staying the night. Lunch, then. Either way, you could sell your window-side table for some serious money. The mesmerising view keeps me occupied until bread arrives - sadly a touch dry on one side - closely followed by an amuse guele of marinated kingfish that makes a chirpy little kick-start.

More admiring of the view follows, before the arrival of a dramatic dish of "Iberico Gran Reserva Joselito jamon, Spain" (\$28), the glossy, nutty, pink slices jumbled on a thin raft of sourdough



Positive outlook ... the view is as mouth-watering as the food.
Photo: Quentin Jones

toast. Lest that sound like casual pub fare, its plate mates are a lovely, leafy salad and precision-placed fried, salted Marcona almonds on traces of a gazpacho-like salmorejo emulsion. It's a simple dish that stands or falls on the quality of its few ingredients. In this case, stands.

"Scallops, North Atlantic" (\$30) heralds three big, fleshy, seared scallops on a shreddy chop of celeriac and apple remoulade lurking under a perfect tuile disc and a gratuitous spoonful of Avrugia caviar. Quenelles of lime-flavoured sour cream make it a neat package of complementary flavours and textures.

The dining room is beachhouse-meets-boardroom: plush, cushy, mildly anonymous and neutered by colours that Giorgio Armani would find acceptable.

Sometimes, at restaurants such as this, you order what you think will be a beef dish or a fish dish and you get a DNA sample of unrecognisable dibs and dabs. Not so, here. Order the Black Angus scotch fillet from Rangers Valley (\$48) and you get a terrific steak, all chatty and crusty on top, relaxed and ruby-red within, with just enough intramuscular fat to make it interesting. Good chefs

Jonah's

Address 69 Bynya Road, Whale Beach, 9974 5599, jonahs.com.au
Open Lunch and dinner daily

Licensed Yes
Cost About \$180 for two, plus drinks (two-course Flavours of Europe menu \$55 a person, Mon-Thurs)

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instinctively know when to leave well enough alone. A pool of red wine jus pumps up the volume just as a midden of crunchy sweet potato, potato and beetroot crisps adds sweetness, tempered by roasted garlic and smooth Jerusalem artichoke puree.

"Cod, local" (\$45) is actually a very good piece of blue-eye trevalla, first salted, then slow-cooked in olive oil and teamed with a creamy garlic veloute, a roll of bright-red piquillo pepper filled with salt cod brandade and Miroesque streaks of herb oil and piquillo pepper puree. It seems only fair to bring out its Basquaise charms with a near neighbour; an easygoing, floral, fruity 2009 Pazo de Senorans Albarino (\$15 a glass/ \$78 a bottle) from Galicia.

The wine list is a highlight of dining at Jonah's; a vast sprawl

across the world of wine, along with predictably high prices.

Dessert is also a highlight - the puffiest, fluffiest baba, flavoured with bourbon and teamed with a terrific chestnut sorbet, vanilla-poached pears and a transparent sliver of glazed, dehydrated pear.

This is high-level precision cooking - colourful, direct, light and aromatic, able to pick up on trends and still deliver a cracking feed.

The dining room lags a bit behind the kitchen in spirit and energy, and pacing feels slow, as if deliberately geared to holidaying diners. An imminent new restaurant manager, Christopher Dobbins, from the Michelin-starred Sante Restaurant in California, will be welcome; then all the signs will be in place for a great, all-round northern beaches experience.

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THE ONE DISH YOU MUST TRY

Bourbon baba with chestnuts and pears, \$16.

QUALITÀ TRADIZIONALE

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