

The food is so spectacularly good here, it's amazing Wellingtonians aren't heading over the Rimutaka Hill in droves to get to it.

One for the road



**David
Burton**

WHILE there are excellent reasons to live in Martinborough, seeking your fortune in the restaurant trade is probably not among them.

Soon after Brasserie One opened at Aylstone Boutique Retreat 17 months ago, my wife and I arrived for lunch on a Saturday, only to have chef patron Jurgen Synnman turn us away, explaining it was not worth his while to open up the restaurant for just the two of us.

Learning my lesson, I made the return journey over the Rimutakas last Saturday, this time for dinner, having made a formal booking several days in advance; there were eight other guests, but even so the restaurant was still half empty – a very poor turnout for a Saturday night.

This might not be so very surprising for a provincial restaurant (and a rural one at that) but for the fact that the food here is so spectacularly good that I'd have thought word would have spread about the district long ago.

But right now, the cause of genuine excitement among Martinborough's rural contractors is the opening of an Apache Jacks franchise at the Pukemanu Tavern; for while the portion sizes at Brasserie One are generous enough, there are no nachos or burgers on the menu, you see.

South African by birth, Jurgen has worked at Tom Aitkens in London and The Fat Duck in Bray, most recently spending two years at Wharekauhau Lodge at Cape Palliser.

Here he met his partner, Sharon Pittard, who now runs the front of house at Brasserie One. By limiting the seating to 30, she is able to work alone, her seemingly unruffled, relaxed manner belying a steely efficiency.

The dining room, fitted rustic style with tongue-and-groove walls and clunky black iron chairs that were all the rage 20 years ago, is perfectly presentable, and during the day, I'd imagine, there would be vineyard views over the Martinborough Terrace.

But the best reason for Wellingtonians to make the pilgrimage is for the cuisine.

The menu is small – just four entrees, four mains and three desserts – but that was fine, since every one of our dishes proved an epiphany.

Seeing the snail entrée listed on the menu as the “chef's best dish” was good enough for me: I've eaten my fill of tinned French snails in my time, but these were exceptionally puffy and delicious. Warmed in garlic oil, they were mixed into a risotto with a copious amount of creamy butter and parsley coulis – a clever reinterpretation of the classic French dish.

The Famous One Duck Trifle I could have eaten until I burst: as the name suggests, it's an entree of many layers – onion fondue, strips of cured duck breast, duck liver parfait, sweet corn custard, chives, brioche cubes and finally, a reduction of Madeira. The cumulative sweet-savoury effect of all these layerings was amazing.



Memorable: The cuisine at Brasserie One is worth the pilgrimage.



BRASSERIE ONE

Aylstone Boutique Retreat,
19 Huarangua Rd,
Martinborough
Ph (06) 306 9800 or 0277 522 522

Fully licensed
Open for dinner Thurs-Tues
6.30-9.30pm, lunch Sat-Sun
12-3pm

Price range of mains:
\$29.50-\$35.50

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

Ambience: ★★★★★

Wine list: ★★★★★

Cost: \$154 for two (excluding wine)

“Roast Pork, Chorizo, Pea Puree, Apple, Crackling” is classic understatement: the pork is actually cured in salt and hung before being roasted and cut from the bone to make it especially tasty, ham-like and juicy. The rest of the dish is self-explanatory, apart from the rectangle of crackling.

Like any conscientious chef, Jurgen roasts his crackling under a weight, the difference being that he then finishes his on a cake rack in the oven. Thus exposed to heat from below, the skin puffs even further, resulting in the lightest, most delicious crackling I've yet tasted.

Fish of the day was that creamy, much under-rated species, gurnard. This was served with lemon puree, sage risotto, some beans, peas and a couple of nicely sautéed prawns. As should be evident by now, this is French influenced food, appropriate to wine country and well matched to Brasserie One's small but carefully selected list of local wines, such as Gladstone's Auld Alliance, a Bordeaux blend with rich, spicy fruitcake flavours and a long, lingering finish.

Jurgen Synnman is vying with Wendy Campbell at the French Bistro and Kent Baddeley at Parehua Country Estate to produce the very best cuisine in the Wairarapa; so to call this restaurant Brasserie One is not so much cheeky as possibly true.