



TERRY DURACK RESTAURANT REVIEW

Hardly rare, but well done

You can blame Neil Perry and David Doyle if you like. When Rockpool Bar & Grill opened its doors last year, it was clear the steakhouse would never be the same again. Suddenly, it was no longer enough to slap a thick porterhouse on the grill, plonk a wire basket of chips into the deep fryer and whack a bottle of house red on the table.

Sydney diners know the significance of marble scores and the difference between Cryovac-packed, wet-aged beef and dry-aged beef hung on the bone to break down the fibre and concentrate flavour. Then there's the debate between grain-fed (resulting in tenderness) and grass-fed (firmer texture, more flavour) fans.

So to open a steakhouse in 2010 calls for vision, bravado, chutzpah and a truckload of money; a fair estimation of what John Szangolies brings to the table. Having established Sydney's Bavarian Bier Cafes, the oom-pah-pah-driven

Lowenbrau Keller, the crowded/rowdy Argyle and the recently hatted Sake restaurant and bar, his latest tilt at Rocks supremacy is the below-ground Cut Bar and Grill in the historic Argyle Cut.

Interior designers Luchetti Krelle, who turned Sake into a glam little geisha girl upstairs, have gone to town by throwing rich, strong colours against the bare brick and sandstone walls, contrasting the clubbiness of studded leather chairs, racks of wine and beautiful butcher's block tabletops with fashionable and feminine feathery lampshades, candles and shapely booths. The low ceilings and subtle subdivisions of the room add to the post-colonial atmosphere.

As well as the obvious, chef James Privett's menu runs the full modern bistro spectrum, from platters of charcuterie and cured meats to Ortiz anchovies on sourdough, Crystal Bay prawns with celeriac and avocado, and the inevitable Wagyu burger. The concentration



Warmth ... the subterranean room is lovely to be in. Photo: Domino Postiglione

solely on wet-aged and grain-fed meat is surprising, something probably done for consistency of quality and supply.

Privett grills all the meats over beechwood and charcoal before finishing them in an enclosed 650-degree broiler, a piece of equipment chefs are madly in love with. Judging by the 220-gram Sher Wagyu sirloin (\$52), from a Wagyu-Holstein cross, it's very efficient, although the thinness of the cut makes it difficult to cook medium-rare and still get a good crust.

A 500-gram Riverine 150-day T-Bone (\$52) comes excellently crusty and medium-rare but with subdued flavour and tight meat. It makes me think the 500-gram Sher Wagyu T-bone would be the best bet.

Then along comes something rather wonderful; a standing rib roast on the bone, roasted for four hours, rested and residing on a silver and rosewood trolley. The beef is expertly carved at the table and presented simply with a ladleful of jus.

A ruby-red 200g slice (\$36) is taken from the extremely rare centre and is a little difficult to chew, forcing me to nibble around the edges, but I applaud the pomp, ceremony and commitment.

The Cut Bar & Grill

Address 16 Argyle Street,
The Rocks, 9259 5695

Open Lunch, Mon-Fri;
dinner, daily

Licensed Yes

Cost About \$160 for two,
plus drinks

13
/ 20

Kingfish carpaccio (\$19) makes an ideal entree, the hefty slices of fish strewn with a colourful carpet of radish, capers and almonds. A side dish of tangy, shaved cabbage and jamon topped with a warm, runny poached egg (\$10) is also enjoyable but an underwhelming, firmly cooked mullet fillet (\$34) that comes with a too-small puddle of sweetcorn puree is like being penalised for not ordering the beef.

As for the extras, the crisp, thin, lightly salty fries with aioli (\$9) are a necessity. A mixed-leaf salad (\$10), straggly and underpowered, isn't. The best accompaniment, of course, is red wine, and the solid, Australian-led, red-leaning list travels well from a classic 1991 Henschke Hill of Grace for \$1200 to a ripe 2008 Chalk Hill McLaren Vale Sangiovese (\$50). To start, you could do worse than a draught

Stiegl from the smartly serviced, overfurnished bar.

To finish, dessert chef Brooke Queitzsch carries off a could-be-complex pistachio- and rose petal-crusted snowball of soft meringue with a curl of smooth and tingly pineapple sorbet, glistening "pearls" of Campari, a ribbon of passionfruit curd and some freshly fallen goat's cheese snow (\$14) by keeping it all light, pretty and fresh.

There is still a sense of ticking-the-boxes about The Cut. It's lovely to be in, with a luxurious, engaging, subterranean warmth and good-looking, try-hard staff. But if you're going to specialise in steak, the steak has to be amazing and I haven't yet been amazed. As the newest steakhouse in town, it's more a case of medium- to well-done than anything particularly rare.

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THE ONE DISH YOU MUST TRY

Sher F1 Wagyu 400-day
fed (marble score 7)
500g T-bone, \$79.