

SIMON  
THOMSEN

REVIEW

Mixed flavours ...  
ox-heart tomato  
and fig salad.

Photos: Domino Postiglione

## Still on song

The bands may have gone, but the Three Weeds remains a chart-topper.

Chocolate cake. For once, I'm not thinking about food, but music. But it's because it's dinner at the Three Weeds and I'm seated right where, about 15 years ago, I used to watch bands, including Melbourne ensemble My Friend the Chocolate Cake. I'm feeling a little nostalgic and pondering whether progress is always a good thing.

In this instance, thanks to the talents of John Evans (and his predecessor, Darrell Felstead), it's a very large thumbs up. Sure, this room is where Tori Amos played her first Australian gig and Rebecca Barnard nailed a killer Lucinda Williams cover. But if the music has to make way, I'll take a good restaurant over more pokies any day.

I'm sure Sonia Greig would belt out a tune if asked. She runs the floor with an infectious smile and warmth. Nothing's too much trouble and she'll guide you through the comprehensive, affordable, global wine list.

Behind soundproof glass, the room becomes an equally welcoming oasis from the pub bustle. A sloping roof and taupe carpet add to the cosy feel amid the generously spaced double-clothed tables.

Husband-and-wife team Evans and Greig built a strong following at Northbridge Bistro over the past couple of years before crossing two bridges to start here. Evans's food has simplicity and lightness and is part of a new era of sophisticated pub grub in salubrious surrounds.

He loves herbs and the subtle flavours they bring to a dish. Italy is a key influence and he cooks meat and fish with remarkable skill.

And he knows using decent produce means you don't need too many distractions on the plate. The menu is compact – just four entrees (plus oysters) and five mains, but varied enough to entertain on my two visits.

It starts with the excellent Fuel sourdough roll and an amuse bouche of roasted cauliflower soup, crunchy with breadcrumbs. At first thought, tomatoes and figs don't seem natural allies, yet Evans sends them on a date in a pretty salad with brioche-crumbed Meredith goat cheese (\$19) and balsamic.

The two fruits have a surprisingly close-knit harmony in this Italian salad. Thick slices of ox-heart tomato have a natural sweetness and also enough acidity for contrast against the fig, while endive adds bitterness and the lightly astringent cheese delivers creamy richness. It needs a touch of salt to really delineate the flavours.

His take on brandade (\$19) uses house-made salt "cod" that's blue-eye. There's a whiff of licorice (from star anise) in the soft, long parsley-flecked pave of milk-poached fish and potato. Lemon, echoed in the sorrel on the baked croutons, sharpens things, along with mildly vinegary baby beetroots.

A terrine of Macleay Valley rabbit and ham hock (\$19) is lushly, coarsely textured and speckled with herbs while black ribbons of sauteed trompette mushrooms run through it. Pickled walnuts are the counterpoint.

The star of tonight's show is quail salad (\$19). A scotch egg, cut in half to reveal its golden, unexpectedly liquid centre, crowns a jumble of green beans and manzanillo

olives in a study of contrasting textures and flavours – the sharp salty olives up against the lush little confit quail legs and juicy roasted breasts, with basil producing a floral high note. Evans wraps a quail egg in chicken and pork sausage meat. I could eat a plate of those little gems on their own.

I'd be tempted to say the big slab of Kurobuta pork belly in a duet with the pork saltimbocca is excessive if it wasn't so damned fantastic. The technique on show is just about equal to the benchmark version by Aria's Matt Moran: soft, smooth layers of pressed fat and meat, topped with the crispest, golden skin. Two slices of prosciutto-and-sage-wrapped loin are pink and refined beside the boisterous belly. The caramelised apple has a touch of acidity from being cooked in red wine and cider. Sauteed spinach is underneath to stop your cardiac surgeon getting agitated, while the cider-splashed jus gives it balance.

The fish changes weekly, so you might miss out on barramundi on celeriac puree (\$32), which is a shame. It's sprinkled with a vivacious mix of roman, borlotti and broad beans, plus beurre noisette for naughtiness and celeriac chips for crunch.

Roasted kingfish with yabby and saffron broth (\$29) has a slight nudge of cayenne pepper, while fennel adds the licorice note found regularly in the savoury dishes.

Juicy, pink, sliced lamb rump over crushed Nicola potatoes (\$29) is ringed by a vibrant ratatouille, chopped into tiny pieces. Parsley, chervil, tarragon and chives, with an eschalot confit, add a light touch.

Alas, the apple galette (\$15) with vanilla ice-cream stumbles as we approach the final hurdle. It is impressively fanned around the rich pastry, but the apple's flavour has

### Three Weeds, Rozelle

14.5/20

**The Summary** New chef John Evans maintains the high standards set by Darrell Felstead in this reinvigorated neighbourhood pub, balancing sophistication with simplicity in beautifully cooked bistro-style dishes.

**Value** Fantastic.

**Chef** John Evans.

**Owners** Todd and Diane Salter.

**Service** Warm and smart.

**Food** European.

**Wine** Great range of well-priced global drops \$32-\$195; 13 by the glass.

**Vegetarians** Entree and main.

**Noise** Reasonable.

**Wheelchair access** Yes.

**Prices** Entrees \$17-\$19; mains \$27-\$29; dessert \$15; Most cards.

**Where and when** 197 Evans Street, Rozelle, 9818 2788. Dinner Tue-Sat 6-10pm.

Full scoresheet online: [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au)

evaporated leaving only the sweetness of the calvados and caramel sauce.

And I'd been scratching my head for the familiar flavour in the ginger creme brulee with its toffee top, fresh figs, Ligurian honey and pistachio tuile (\$15), not to mention the strong memories it evoked of a Lauren Murdoch dessert at Lotus last year. A few days later Evans explains he adds Stone's green ginger wine to the brulee. Aha! I think the last time I had that drink was in a rusty nail, probably while watching a band at the Three Weeds. Was it Monsieur Camembert? [sthomsen@smh.com.au](mailto:sthomsen@smh.com.au)

