

# La Bouillabaisse changes course

LA Bouillabaisse is one of the oldest seafood restaurants in Melbourne, so well-known you would think it an advantage to a new owner, but that is not necessarily so.

It had a reputation as a place with reasonably priced fresh fish of generous portions and with a big boat-shaped salad bar where you could take as much as could be piled in the bowl, and it has taken time for its new image to emerge.

The transformation is to an elegant, sophisticated place, achieved by owner Gary Moore. The change is obvious the moment you walk through the door.

Some seating has been sacrificed to give space to a lounge area. It is a comfortable little place, warm with chairs and couches in soft fabric where diners can enjoy a drink. Nearby is a piano.

Fresh flowers, soft lighting, marvellous service — and there have been radical changes in the style of menu.

"I realised it would take time to become established," Gary Moore says.

"The old clients would come in and were disappointed, it was not as they had known this restaurant. Others who like more sophisticated dining did not bother to try us."

Now after two years the clientele has changed and a solid reputation is growing.

The menu is light, individual. "Modern French" would be the best way to describe the food.

Instead of giving diners a complimentary savory, there is a more interesting idea: a tiny bowl of



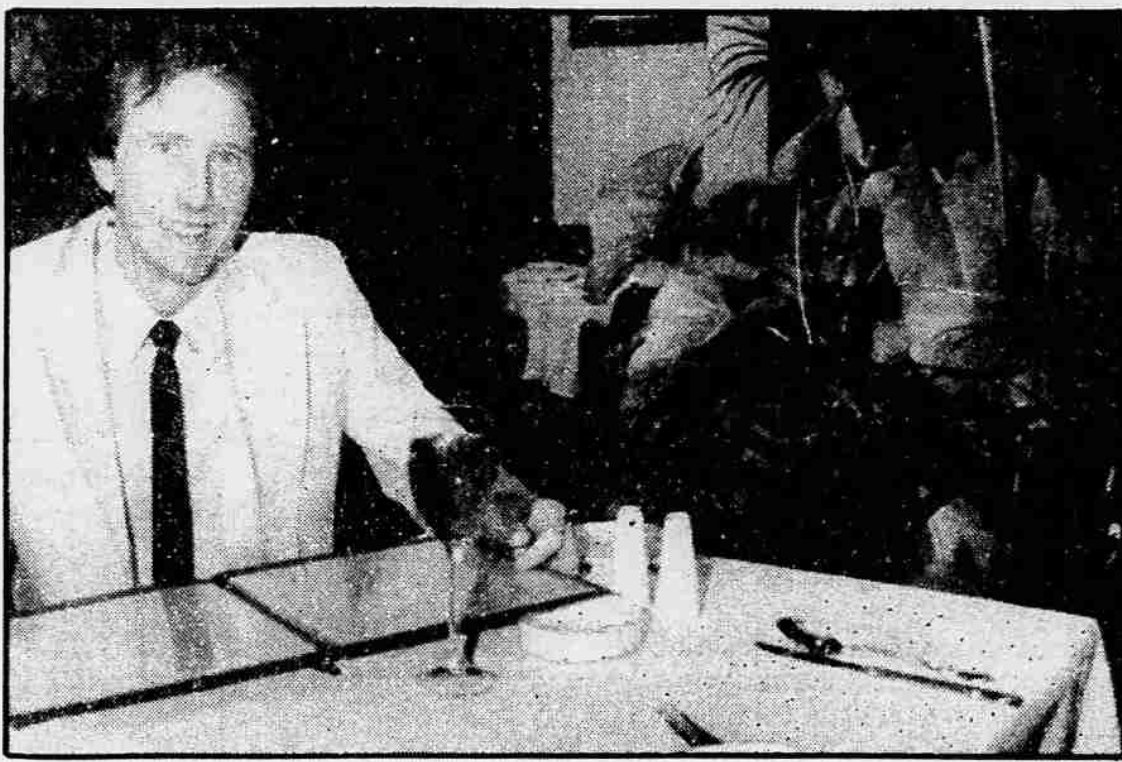
Beverley Sutherland Smith

bouillabaisse is presented to each person before the meal. Fragrant and full of flavor, it has much the same effect on the taste buds as beginning a meal with a great glass of champagne, enough to whet the appetite, but not enough to spoil the dinner.

My companion was a fish expert with regard both to the cooking and quality of the product, not usually given to praising lightly. "Fantastic" was his comment about my dish of rockling. "It deserves a 10 out of 10." A thick fillet was served with a leek and sherry vinaigrette, which was not as sharp as I had feared, and the fish had a texture and moistness that made it a joy.

Other dishes also rated highly and while the menu has recently changed, here are some typical dishes:

Lobster stew. This may sound ordinary, but I can assure you it is not. Modelled on one of the Paul Bocuse dishes, it had sections of tender lobster slices, cooked in their scarlet shell and a collection of perfectly turned vegetables around this in a stock, wine and cream sauce. Vegetables were neither too soft nor too firm — all balanced beautifully.



Owner Gary Moore at La Bouillabaisse: seating has been sacrificed to provide lounge area.

lasagne with Moreton Bay bugs and fresh tomato sauce, fresh and light. A whitening had been poached, simple but perfect and some beurre blanc was served alongside.

Gary Moore mentioned that one of the most popular shellfish dishes is crayfish rolls, fine pieces of crayfish wrapped in spinach and filo pastry and served with a lime sauce.

Usually, desserts are not considered such an important feature in seafood restaurants but this one features such sweets as a bavarois or fruit and a tart.

## Enchanting Lake House

each of them is a small vase filled with a mixture of flowers from the garden.

The garden will eventually provide some of the produce, too, since fruit trees have been planted, and there is already a vegetable garden. I suppose that the garden already provides the kitchen, since herbs are used liberally, and every dish (from the butter to the dessert) has its own herb garnish.

Alla Wolf-Tasker is the chef. She is known in Melbourne for her catering (Intimate Banquets) and her cooking classes, and she is clearly a woman who knows what she is doing in the kitchen.

Lake House opened in January. It offers a fixed-price menu which changes every month. It's a fairly small menu, but well-balanced in its choices, and there are always a few additional dishes.

For example, when we were there, the listed entrees were a smoked fish pate, a chicken and herb terrine, soup of the day, seafood of the day. But we could also have chosen a chicken liver and bacon ragout or rabbit rillettes.

The soup of the day was tomato and Jerusalem artichoke, served with a herb tartlet. The soup was astonishingly good, the acidity of the tomatoes lightening and balancing the earthiness of the flavor of the artichokes; the accompan-

fish of the day was poached trout with a leek and sorrel sauce.

Two things were evident from that selection. The first is that Alla Wolf-Tasker is one of the cooks who knows just how to handle meat and fruit combinations so that the fruit doesn't dominate.

The second is that Victoria's licensing laws are often very inconvenient.

When we left Melbourne it was bitterly cold, the sort of wintry autumn day when you want hearty food and a good meaty bottle of red wine to warm you. By the time we got to Daylesford, the sun was shining, the air was warm and what I really wanted to eat was that poached trout. But the wine we had brought was quite the wrong thing for it; so I had the lamb.

Perhaps anyone going to a BYO restaurant should travel with a mini-cellar in the boot. But how much simpler it would be if all restaurants were able to sell their patrons some wine. It is strange that we in Victoria compel licensed restaurants to carry a full range of wine, beer and spirits. Why can't some restaurants carry a small selection of table wine if they wish?

Anyway, I don't regret the lamb, which was finely sliced and prettily arranged in a generous crown, and cooked exactly to my taste (the faintest hint of pink still in the

A wine to try

Sarah Gough

IN recent years sauvignon blanc has emerged as "the" fashionable white wine variety. Its devotees love the intense, pungent aroma of asparagus and freshly cut grass that sauvignon blanc exudes on the nose and the tremendous depth of flavor, steely backbone, and crisp finish.

As a result of the recent surge in popularity and demand, more good quality locally produced sauvignon blancs and imported Sancerres, Pouilly Fumes and dry Bordeaux whites (also made from the variety) are becoming available at merchants around town.

But one of the most exciting sauvignon blancs to appear on the market recently has sneaked in quietly, with very little fuss or fanfare, from New Zealand.

Produced by the Selak family and their Australian wine maker, Kevin Judd, from fruit grown on their vineyard just north-east of Auckland, the Selaks 1983 sauvignon blanc-remillon is made in the fume style.

It has the pungent leafy nose that is the hallmark of fine Sancerres and Pouilly Fumes and the same powerful, intense varietal fruit on the palate, with any undue steeliness or austerity checked by subtle smoky oak.

This makes it an attractive accompaniment to seafood, especially scallops, oysters or kiwifish, the name New Zealanders have given to their large, juicy, fleshy mussels.

Duke and Moorfield in North Melbourne have imported the wine and are selling it for around \$8.75 a bottle.

## A way with figs

THE FIG is the oldest fruit of which we have certain knowledge, if the Bible is to be believed. Adam and Eve, aware of their nakedness after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, covered themselves with fig leaves.

They grow well in the Middle East and right round the Mediterranean. They also grow well in Melbourne, and those people who are blessed with a fig tree in their garden probably are seeing the last of the fruit for the season.

My dream garden has a fig tree spreading broadly in it. (It also has a grape vine and an almond tree, which makes it rather biblical, and a lemon tree and an apricot tree.) I think the tree looks grand, lovely grey wood and those big leaves which look like Matisse cut-outs, and the fruit is wonderful.

But there are innumerable varieties of fig. Even the prized eating figs come in all sizes, shapes and colors. My own favorite — I wish I knew the name of the variety — is rather small, quite a dark green with purple-blend bluish. But there are also golden figs, and green ones and black ones and purple ones.

What do you do with the tonnes of fruit that a good-sized tree seems to produce? Italians eat them at the start of a meal with thin slices of prosciutto crudo. Alice B. Toklas marinated them in port, used the port to baste a roasting duck and then put the figs around the duck and continued to baste the dish with veal bouillon.

She said it was "a very pretty dish... a satisfactory combination of color and flavor".

But the figs are most commonly kept for dessert. I have rather mixed feelings about that. I can't imagine anything lovelier than a white china bowl filled with figs



Rita Erlich

that have just been picked, though perhaps a white platter laden with figs and purple grapes is just as beautiful.

The taste of freshly picked figs is so good that it seems silly to try to improve on it. But then, the taste of figs and raspberries together is magic. Quartered figs with whole raspberries, very lightly sugared, or with a raspberry puree. With cream? It's a pity to mask the flavors and the colors, but cream whipped and flavored with curacao isn't such a bad idea.

Or perhaps, instead of the cream, a few drops of curacao or cognac. It must be good cognac, and you need only a little to heighten the flavors. The fierce spirit known as "hospital brandy" which is too often used in cooking is a terrible mistake.

Marcel Boulestin has a recipe for flamed figs. The figs are peeled, and flamed with curacao and brandy. While the spirit is burning, keep pricking the figs with a silver fork and shaking the pan. By the time the flames have died down, the figs will be warm and soft. Very simple and extraordinarily good.

Figs can also be stewed (sometimes all right), baked, pickled (add an orange and a lemon) and turned into jam, and if there are still lots of figs left on the tree, leave them to the birds. Birds adore ripe figs.

WHAT AN enchanting way to spend an autumn Sunday: sitting in a comfortable restaurant eating delicious food, gazing out through big windows at autumnal trees, watching ducks and swans on the lake, strolling out on to the wide verandah between courses.

Lake House seems to have everything going for it. It's very much its owners' place, since they built it themselves in exactly the style they wanted.

The white weatherboard building with its corrugated iron roof looks very like the wooden houses which abound in Daylesford and the area, although the large skylight and the width of the verandah suggests that it isn't quite like all the other houses.

Allan Wolf-Tasker built it himself over three years (the caravan in which the family lived is still on the grounds). He is a talented man, and not only as a builder. His paintings hang on the walls of the restaurant, and he is also a very pleasant host and waiter.

The restaurant is on the lake side of the building, a large, light room with interesting ceiling angles, a big central fireplace, and two doors opening out on to the wide verandah. A cushioned bench runs along two walls, and is covered with the same striped material used for the tablecloth overlays. The tables are a good size, and on

## Out of town



Rita Erlich

ing tartlet, with its bright green filling, was equally good.

The seafood dish of the day was a scallop mousse in filo pastry, with avocado. It looked lovely, the sauce was deliciously rich and buttery, but there was no definable flavor in the mousse. It had been a controversial dish in the kitchen, apparently, and would have been taken off the menu except that Alla Wolf-Tasker knows that the local people like to order seafood when they go out. It wasn't a bad dish, simply disappointing, particularly from a kitchen that sets itself high standards.

The main courses were a boned saddle of baby rabbit with prunes and shallots in a red wine sauce; fillet of pork in light pastry with apples and pine nuts in mustard sauce; roast fillet of lamb with rosemary-flavored sauce (and figs because they were available); the

meat). Lovely sauce, too, and the whole plate perfumed by a sprig of rosemary. The rabbit, which was garnished with a lovely bright red spray of hawthorn berries, was splendid: the meat tender and moist, the flavors blending well.

A nice, although under-salted, assortment of vegetables is served on a side plate.

There was a choice of five desserts. We had the iced chestnut cream gateau with chocolate sauce (rich, but a bit dry), and the poached quince with quince ice-cream and a mango and persimmon sauce.

Baked quinces are garnet red; but quinces poached or in ice-cream are a very soft apricot color, and the sauce was bright orange. Most of the desserts have a fruit component: the white chocolate ice-cream and the sorbets are served with fruit, the chocolate tart comes with a fruit coulis and cream, and there was also a mascarpone bavarois with autumn fruit (figs, pears, raspberries, walnuts).

The cooking here is just right for the style of the place. It relies (with the exception of the seafood) on local and seasonal ingredients; it is attractively and thoughtfully presented; flavor combinations are interesting but not outlandish; and servings are generous but not gross. It is very good country cooking — and it wouldn't be at all out of place in metropolitan Melbourne.

Lake House is open only for Saturday dinner and lunch on Sunday and public holidays. It will be closed during September, when Alla Wolf-Tasker will be leading a gourmet tour of France.

LAKE HOUSE RESTAURANT, King Street, Daylesford, Tel (053) 48 3329 or (03) 500 1552. BYO. Open: Saturday dinner from 7.30 pm; Sunday and public holiday lunch from 12.30. Owners: Allan & Alla Wolf-Tasker. Chef: Alla Wolf-Tasker. Cards: None. Seats: 36. Cost: \$48 for two (fixed price).

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