



Picture: Simon Wilkinson

# STELLAR performance

IT'S ALWAYS HAD THE VIEWS – NOW THE STAR OF GREECE HAS THE TALENT TO GO WITH THEM

**A** poached fillet of flathead sits in a golden pool of saffron, with a croquette, salad bits and a mysterious deep-fried lattice balanced on top. You pick up this “whitebait cracker” to take a bite and rows of little black eyes stare back at you. Crunch. Yum.

It's a real “look at me” dish – one that demands, not for the first or last time, that you shift attention from the luminous cobalt and jade sea below.

What a view it is. On a sunny afternoon I can't think of another dining room that can lift the spirits in quite the same way as the Star of Greece. The little iron-clad kiosk that's grown up to be a restaurant on the cliff-top at Port Willunga is the dream of tourism execs, the place you want to take visitors to show what a great life we have here.

In the past, it's fair to say, what happens once you sit down hasn't always lived up to the promise of this packaging. Newish owners Doug Govan (who runs the famed Victory Hotel down the road) and his partner Nikki Seymour Smith have had more than a year to fix that – despite a couple of life-changing personal hurdles along the way. Things seem to have settled on all fronts and today, coincidentally, they are getting married at the Star.

So what have they changed? The place is more elegant and clean for a start. The bright, beachy colours and bric-a-brac have been replaced with a



WORDS SIMON WILKINSON

Hamptons palette of white-on-white. Arched mirrors along one wall reflect the sea view and there is now a small paved deck outside.

Doug's wine list has just this week been judged the state's best in *The Advertiser's* food awards, so suffice to say it's clearly put together by someone who loves his drink.

In the kitchen, young chef Sam Prance-Smith has recently spent time in London with Heston Blumenthal, and it shows as he brings together unlikely flavours such as pumpkin, coffee and almond – as a dessert – and pulls off a few textural tricks with crumbs and gels. The same creativity is evident in his artful plate arrangements. Overall, it's an appealing package.

That pumpkin, for instance, is a sublime, silky mousse, its natural sweetness playing off a subtle blend of

## HOW IT RATED

**FOOD 32/40**  
**STAFF 7/10**  
**DRINK 9/10**  
**VALUE 15/20**  
**X FACTOR 18/20** **81**

### STAR OF GREECE

1 Esplanade, Port Willunga; ph 8557 7420.

**Owners** Doug Govan, Nikki Seymour Smith. **Chef** Sam Prance-Smith. **Food** Modern Australian. **Drinks** Fully licensed; BYO corkage \$20. **Hours** Lunch Wed-Sun noon-3pm Dinner Fri-Sat 6pm-9pm (Lunch and dinner 7 days from Dec 26 to end of Jan). **Entrees** \$18.50-\$19.50. **Mains** \$28-\$34. **Desserts** \$16.50. **Cards** Eftpos, Visa, Mastercard, American Express. **Parking** On site. **Seats** 52 inside, 18 outside.

### MUST TRY

Butter poached flathead, carrot puree, whitebait cracker, saffron emulsion, above.



festive spices, intriguing on its own but taken somewhere altogether different by an equally smooth coffee ice-cream, an espresso gel and praline crumbs.

And the flathead is the best fish dish I've had for a while, the flesh just set by poaching in butter, the saffron emulsion and a deep orange carrot puree all in harmony, the contrast of a crumbed sphere of brandade and the playful whitebait chip.

The plates sometimes reveal a lack of maturity by including extra, unnecessary elements, such as the sheet of “sugar crackling” on top of a solid puck of pork cheek and crumbed sweetbreads. A lovely crab broth with shreds of meat and plump little mussels floating about doesn't need the extra salt of the speck batons. And a rare duck breast with almond cream and cocoa is a top-flight contemporary bistro offering, whereas the braised leg looks and tastes like something from another era.

If all this complexity is worrying you, rest assured the fried squid is still the bee's knees and comes with nothing more than aioli and salad. Stick with that, if you will, but I reckon you will be missing out on experiencing the work of a serious young talent.



**THE ADVERTISER FOOD GUIDE 2013**  
166 restaurants reviewed in the book (\$14.95) or on an iPhone app (\$4.49).



## NIBBLES SWEET TREAT

Consultant chef Pierrick Boyer has put an elegant stamp on the dessert menu at the new Onyx lounge, including his signature passion brownie gateaux, above, to go with small food and cocktails. Open from 5pm Mon-Sat, at 164 O'Connell St, North Adelaide; ph 8361 7711.

DIANNE MATTSSON

## BOTTLE STOP

TONY LOVE  
TASTE THE HISTORY

If you venture into the south-western suburbs heading west on **Oaklands Rd** you'll come across a **vineyard** that is one of the last plantings in greater **Adelaide** to still go into a commercially available bottle of wine. (**Penfold's Magill Estate Shiraz** is the other.) Planted in **1907** by the **Hamilton** winemaking family, the hectare of old grenache and shiraz fronting the old **Marion Swimming Centre** is now managed by the **Patritti family winery**, whose nearby **Dover Gardens** production and cellar-door base was once surrounded by their own vineyards before being acquired for housing, forcing the Patrittis to plant in the **McLaren Vale region**. The **Patritti Marion 2009 Grenache Shiraz (\$18)** is an extraordinary bottle of history, carrying rightfully the “**Adelaide**” regional denomination. Co-winemaker **Ben Heide** (with **James Mungall**) says they can always tell that one hectare from hundreds of tasting samples, the wine is so distinctive. It's **rich, gloriously crimson fruited, cherry and plum flavoured**, with arguably **a bit too much oak at the moment** that will integrate more in the next **five to 10 years**. In a serious, **heavy bottle and under cork**, there's a sense of its grand statesman-like presence. At that price buy several to find that moment of perfect balance.

For a taste of the “**new**” era, the **Patritti 2010 Old Gate Shiraz (\$18)** from Blewitt Springs in the McLaren Vale region is gold class, sweet, sunshiny shiraz, with oak, yes, but less demonstrative, and grainy tannins that will make this a stayer as well.

