



# A cut above

The menu at Etch delivers the oomph and finesse we've come to expect from the team at Bécasse, says Pat Nourse, plus a little intrigue. And the soup is a must.

Where the line is between where the appetisers end and the entrées begin at Etch is hard to say, but investigating it is certainly a pleasurable exercise. I am absolutely going to resist making any kind of joke about the deep-fried skate knobs. Asking the waiter if he was sure there wasn't any other part of the skate you could eat entirely failed to register even the corner of a smile, so I'll content myself with saying they're just little chunks of the fish, deep-fried cleanly and served in a paper cone with little wooden forks and lemon and caper aioli. Shaved serrano ham and Manchego cheese is exactly as described, all porky ribbons and crumbly shards. Confit duck croquettes seem like such a straightforward and sure path to tastiness that it's hard to see why you don't see them more often. Teamed with a perky sauce gribiche, they're perfect to share, though they'd be a little unrelenting as an entrée for one (which is how they're presented on the menu). Ditto the nicely spicy fried squid with smoked paprika mayo. It would be the same deal with the fried goat's cheese, too – essentially croquettes again, this time with the herbal hint of lavender-scented honey to cut the barnyard astringency – but they're appetisers, so that's okay. This is Etch, a new restaurant from Justin and Georgia North and

their team from Bécasse, and it's somewhere you're going to want to eat soon, and probably often. The quote-unquote sardines on toast introduce a concept that will horrify and intrigue diners in equal measures: vintage sardines. Age and fish are two ideas that you don't usually want to see in the same menu item, but some lovers of sardines (and yea, we are legion) find that the longer they sit in the tin, the more their flavour mellows and changes. They're not quite so bold to serve the fish with the tin on the plate here, as with the anchovies at Melbourne's sublime Cumulus Inc., but laying them out with crisp wisps of bread and green apple tartare (that's diced apple in regular English), with a shot of celery gazpacho to chase them with is pretty interesting nonetheless. Listed among the entrées are some of the best fillies in the Etch stable. The apple and beetroot salad isn't one of them. Pulchritudinous as it is, you'd need to be starved or a vegetarian to view it as more than a very flash side dish that got mixed up with the big boys. There's nothing wrong with the spiced kingfish with fennel and orange salad. It looks and tastes pretty much exactly how you'd expect it to, but it's in no way memorable. The same cannot be said for the prawn

**Sharp act**  
Etch is the new venture from the team at Bécasse: owner Justin North (left), manager Tara Sullivan and chef James Metcalfe. Menu offerings include slow-roasted leg of saltbush lamb Provençal with Vichy carrots and Provençal potatoes with aged prosciutto.

PHOTOGRAPHY ANSON SMART

Eating the soup is not entirely unlike eating finely puréed angels, with a few puffy clouds thrown in.

cocktail, a dish of such flair and finesse that it puts a hundred similar retro-takes to shame. The slivers of crisp toast stuff are so interesting, you'll be moved to ask how it is they come to be so tasty. The waiters will explain that it's an ingenious process involving making a flavoursome paste from the leftover bits of the prawns and mixing it into the dough, but you'll merely smile and nod, thinking of ways to get the last drops of sauce out of the bottom of the glass. The grilled quail is meaty and heartily seasoned, freshened up with a spiced pear vinaigrette, but it's no match for the prawn cocktail. Or the soup. Have the soup. There are those who will say it's a bit on the sweet side, but that's a natural consequence of it being pretty much the lifeblood of sweet corn, mixed with blue swimmer crab meat and sherry cream. Lifted and almost floral in its flavours, it's not entirely unlike eating finely puréed angels, with a few puffy clouds thrown in for good measure. Do lick the spoon. The plate, too, if none of the other diners are looking. They could be distracted by the little wings over the light fittings. Or the top hat at the waiter station. Or the vase full of feathers. Or the rather strange and abstract portraits of 1920s starlets lining one wall. Etch is the new inhabitant of the corner of the InterContinental Hotel that was once home to a restaurant called Mint. Café king and paragon of dental hygiene Bill

Granger was supposed to set up shop here, but that fell through, so Justin North grabbed the ball and ran with it. He and the Bécasse crew have carpeted the room and played off the hotel setting and the arched windows with touches of decorative whimsy that seem less forced with repeat visits. The menu they have installed is in no way twee, and chef James Metcalfe and his kitchen team back it with all the hallmarks that have made Bécasse great – finesse and oomph in equal measures. They're to be commended for using as much local produce as they can, and now that they have two restaurants to their name, they can do things like buy whole carcasses of Gundooee organic grass-fed beef and cut them up and age them themselves. A main comprising grilled six-week dry-aged wagyu rump and braised brisket of such a beast, with a citrusy café de Paris butter and green beans, presents a solid argument for the merits of grass-fed meat. There's chew where it's wanted and tremendous flavour all over. Rib-eye of the same steer, one of the plats du jour, is all that and more. Slow-roasted leg of saltbush lamb Provençal paints a similar picture, the slices of meat offering flavour for days. Flathead and chips is plated on a wooden stand, much like a sushi platter. The oil is clean, the beer batter crisp, the fish juicily steamed within. The chips, in a little tin bucket, are cooked in dripping and none the worse for it.>



**Sweetness and light**  
At the newly opened Etch, memorable dishes include the sweet corn soup with blue swimmer crab and sherry cream (above) and the banana and mango sherry trifle (top).

## SYDNEY REVIEW



### Inside job

Arched windows and decorative whimsy define Etch's interior (left). Market fruits, jubes, gels and sorbets is a winning dessert (below).

All in all, exceptional fish and chips and, like many of the main courses (but unlike the mostly \$40-plus plats du jour), it clocks in under \$30.

The sweet things are generally inventive and worth your time. I'm yet to love the chocolate velvet with doughnut-like lumps filled with yuzu curd (ie. lemon curd made fancy with the deployment of obscure Japanese citrus). The baba served with 12-year-old Matusalem Cuban rum is good, but more hooch certainly wouldn't hurt. There is, however, no way to fault the trifle, topped with ribbons of mango, rounds of banana, wafers of mango paper and blobs of Chantilly cream. Served in a cut-glass nanna bowl, it's good right down to the sherry-blitzed sponge layer at the bottom. Ditto the Catalan creamed rice. And the lolly tray (not unlike the one offered at Rockpool in recent years). For something light and fresh, meanwhile, the 'market fruits, jubes, gels and sorbets' is a winner. Three fruits – pineapple, strawberry and pear last visit – in a variety of textures, their flavours bright and intact, added sugar kept in check.

Etch has set a cracking pace straight out of the gate, with strong work in the kitchen framed by a comfortable room, smooth service and a wine list that is very much in keeping with the theme of sound value achieved through smart decision-making from the top down. The food has merit enough to warrant the restaurant as a destination in itself, and the pricing, location and hours (trading through from lunch to dinner) make it one of the best pre-theatre options in town. Etch, you might say, is about to make its mark.\*

### ETCH

62 Bridge St (cnr Phillip St), Sydney, NSW, (02) 9247 4777, [etchdining.com](http://etchdining.com) Licensed.

Cards AE DC MC V

Open Mon-Fri noon-10.30pm;  
Sat 6pm-10.30pm.

Price Appetisers \$5-\$12;  
entrées \$16-\$19; main courses  
\$22-\$34; desserts \$15.

Vegetarian Two appetisers, one entrée,  
one main course.

Noise Buzzy.

Wheelchair access No.

Plus High quality, fair prices.

Minus Décor borders on kitsch at times.



## and also...

### SISTER ACT

In keeping with what appears to be a natural habitat of *Die Hard*-esque super-skyscrapers, Azuma has opened a second branch at George Street's Regent Place. Smaller and more casual than the Chifley Tower mothership, the new venue has a focus on sake and, unlike the original, offers kushiage (aka fried things on sticks). Azuma Regent Place, 501 George St, Sydney, (02) 9267 7775.

### MORNING HAS BROKEN

One of the quiet achievers of the Darling Street scene, Balmain's Kazbah continues to offer one of the more interesting breakfasts in town. We're ardent admirers of their greet-the-day cocktails, while the breakfast tagines and the ful medames (the Egyptian breakfast of dried broad beans cooked down to a paste, topped here with chopped boiled eggs and spring onions) are as good as ever. Kazbah, 379 Darling St, Balmain, (02) 9555 7067.



Kimitaka Azuma

### CHILLI ON THE SIDE

Sydney's taste for the non-Cantonese cuisines of China is stirring. Little Hay Street's Sichuan pioneer Red Chilli has opened a second Chinatown venue that's more on the glam side. In addition to favourites such as ma po bean curd and deep-fried spicy chicken dice, new dishes include the fascinating 'inadvertently delicious chicken Maryland'. Red Chilli, 25-29 Harbour Plaza, Dixon St (enter Harbour St), Haymarket, (02) 9211 8130.