

restaurant

WITH TONY HARPER

It's magic

With a superb river location and an imaginative chef, discover an Aladdin's cave for gourmands in the heart of the city

Alchemy: the transformation of base metals into gold. Well, I don't know if there is any correlation, in either a figurative or a fiscal sense, between the definition and Brad and Angelica Jolly's new restaurant of that name.

Considering its gorgeous location, almost swimming in the river, I reckon their landlord might be the one practising the arcane arts. But whatever the rent, it's probably worth it. The restaurant is a true beauty, perched a smidgin above the boardwalk with a terrace and two dining rooms looking out to the view. Its recesses reach into subterranean space like an Aladdin's cave for gourmands. A really nice area is dedicated to a bar, and I've no doubt it will find favour as a Friday night hangout.

As for the food, I have absolutely no qualms about Brad Jolly's cooking – it's exceedingly good, and his menu brings a welcome touch of adventure and imagination to the highly successful, but at the same time quite predictable, run of Eagle Street riverside restaurants.

It is modern food based on the classics, creatively interpreted, immaculately cooked and sharply presented. I turned down sauteed scallops with spiced apple, walnuts, onion puree and white wine sauce (\$21) and confit duck with pickled cucumber salad and glazed figs (\$21) for the slice-roasted veal loin with creamed tuna and crispy caper dressing (\$20). I'm a sucker for vitello tonnato, and Alchemy's version is subtle and exquisitely balanced.

Among the mains is a pot roast pheasant with a herb lentil vinaigrette, root vegetables and a spiced prune jus. It's \$68 for a serving for two, and I can't think of anything that sounds even remotely as enticing. But, alas, I was there to review, and I'd be shirking

my duties if I didn't have a different main from my wife's. So for me it was slow roasted duck breast with clove and honey, braised red cabbage and sauce tapenade (\$39), and for her pan seared loin of lamb with smoked bacon risotto, feves (broad beans) and morel jus gras (\$38). Both were excellent.

The service we experienced was spot on, with just the right amount of chatter and neat adeptness when it came to the mechanics of waiting. The tables are devoid of cloths, which I don't object to, but I wonder if it is a little out of kilter with the fairly serious tone of the rest of the Alchemy experience. On the night of our visit, one of the dining rooms wasn't being used, and it was unset and cluttered with stacked chairs and unkempt tables. It's a small point, but the room is in full view of the restaurant and it's just a touch sloppy for a place of this calibre.

The wine list also needs work, particularly the glass list which has a very limited choice of mostly average wines. The bottle list is more expansive and does have quite a few gems, but it's mostly fairly basic stuff. Wine lists do tend to grow and develop, and I'm sure the list will improve.

Overall, Alchemy is a seriously good venue with exceptional food and an incredibly good position. It's not cheap, but even if it were overlooking a council tip, food of that calibre would deserve the prices being asked.

Alchemy Restaurant and Bar

175 Eagle St, city.
Ph: 3229 3175.
Chef: Brad Jolly.
Owners: Brad & Angelica Jolly.
Lunch Mon–Fri, dinner Mon–Sat. Licensed.
Most cards. EFTPOS.
Off and on-street parking.

Food // 9
Wine // 7
Service // 8
Ambience // 8

RATING GUIDE

10: perfect; 9: excellent;
8: very good; 7: good; 6: passable;
5: disappointing; 1-4: woeful.