

# Brilliant in the burbs

Regular readers will know Pulp Kitchen was named our 2009 Restaurant of the Year. This accolade wasn't for the finest of haute cuisine. Rather, we recognised Pulp Kitchen as a superb restaurant of its own kind.

We've come back on this ridiculously hot and humid evening to check out what has happened in the year since. It's mid-week and the place is cheerfully busy though not packed. The air conditioning is just holding its own in this high-ceilinged room. Pulp has had a lick of paint, but there's been no major fluffing up; it's the same painted concrete floor and view of the half-open kitchen behind the industrial-look service bar.

Owner and chef Christian Hauberg obviously feels that it's just right as it is.

It's a casual feel here, immediately relaxing. Simple wooden bistro chairs and tables inside, weatherproof furniture and cafe umbrellas outside. The clatter from the kitchen and chatter from the guests is muted enough for conversation.

I love how the menu is organised, with most dishes available in small or large sizes. Many can be tweaked to be vegetarian or gluten-free on request.

But wait, where's the offal? Ah, there it is on the blackboard – pan-fried calves' liver with an onion tarte tatin. I'll have that, no question.

The wine list isn't long, and is deliberately structured around mid-priced wines – a few European, a few local, a dozen by the glass. Plenty in the \$30-50 range, and just one bottle of French champagne breaking the \$100 mark. The beers, ciders and spirits are interesting – not very many, but a few seriously good



Cath Lawrence

choices, like the Le Pere Jules French cider.

We settle on an Italian sangiovese, the 2008 Contina Tollo Rocca Ventosa. Our waiter apologises that it's warmer than it should be, which is true. Room temperature recently has been rather excessive. But it's not too bad, and this dark soft wine with cherry notes is very drinkable.

My partner starts with the house terrine (\$18), a richly flavoured slab of coarse chopped pork, topped with a hefty layer of belly fat. I've got the asparagus with melted Morbier cheese (\$15). Good, hearty, no-nonsense foods, these. Both come with house-made Melba toast, thin-sliced off a whole loaf and baked golden crisp. The serving is generous for an entree, or light for a main.

For our main course, we've chosen to have small servings, and a green salad (\$9). My partner has the gnocchi with veal ragout (\$18/\$29), while I have the aforementioned liver (\$17/\$28). His is good; meltingly tender chunks of veal with the supple gnocchi, flavoured with chives.

Mine is divine. The pan-seared salty crust, the soft rare meat inside, it's an explosion of umami. I'm rendered speechless for a few moments, beyond a few incoherent yummy noises.

By the time you read this, there should be a new menu and the liver will be in the form of "pan-seared calves' liver Hemingway" with potato croquettes. More offal and game too, at

which Hauberg so excels – veal sweetbreads; pork crubeens with blood sausage; and southern-style fried rabbit.

All is very well so far, but it takes too long for us to get our dessert orders in. It's nobody's fault. The heavens have opened, and the waiters are rushing to get everything off the outdoor tables and find seats indoors for the dozen or so slightly damp diners who were braving the heat. It's quite the light show here by the window, as lightning crashes and the rain pelts down. Inside we're now cheek by jowl, exchanging a few friendly words on the weather with our new neighbours.

My partner predictably goes for the cheese plate (\$19). It's no-frills presentation: a small piece of each of five cheeses, a little dab of quince paste, and a basket of that Melba toast. The cheeses are the focus, as they



Pulp Kitchen chef and owner Christian Hauberg

deserve to be. A French brie and washed rind, a Spanish hard and blue, and an Australian soft goat cheese, all excellent – even if a bit warmer than ideal. It's that room temperature problem again. Maybe Hauberg needs to invest in a couple of eskies for days like these.

I'm a little disappointed that the chilli-roasted pineapple dessert from the web menu isn't on the actual menu. Instead, I choose the chocolate and saffron trifle (\$16), with some trepidation as trifles often seem to be a let-down in fine restaurants. Not so here, this is fabulous. The large serving in a conical glass is topped off not with custard, but with a bicolour pair of mousses. The chocolate is rich and dark and not very sweet; the saffron's summer-meadow warmth complements the chocolate without being overshadowed. Deeper down, a layer of alcohol and

cherry juice-soaked sponge finger covers the preserved cherries and a little layer of cherry jelly. It's playful while still respecting the traditions; I like that. And it goes very nicely indeed with a pedro ximenez sherry (\$11).

We're drawing to the end of our evening now, and the rain is slacking off. My partner is sipping on a Tasmanian whisky from Hellyers Road (\$10), which he's chosen over the couple of Scottish single malts out of curiosity. It's proving rather good. As driver, I've had to be more cautious and must leave some of my sherry behind. We're hatching plans to come here by bicycle next time. And also to make sure that next time is not as far away as last time.

>> Cath Lawrence is a data analyst and writes a food blog. [thecanberracook.blogspot.com](http://thecanberracook.blogspot.com)



## Pulp Kitchen

**Address:** Shop 1, Wakefield Gardens, Ainslie shops

**Phone:** 6257 4334

**Web:** [pulp-kitchen.com.au](http://pulp-kitchen.com.au)

**Owner:** Christian Hauberg

**Chef:** Christian Hauberg

**Hours:** Lunch Tuesday-Friday noon-2pm, dinner Monday-Saturday 6pm-9pm

**Licensed:** Yes, plus BYO \$5 a person

**Vegetarian:** Good choices

Calves' liver with onion tart tatin at Pulp Kitchen, above; chocolate and saffron trifle, right; and asparagus and Morbier cheese, far right.

Photos: Richard Briggs

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