

European retro flare



THE FIND

with Cath LAWRENCE

'There's only two kinds of food: good food, and bad food,' Christian Hauberg, of Pulp Kitchen, says. And good food is definitely what comes out of his

European and retro-styled kitchen. He has a simple philosophy: find the best ingredients possible, and prepare them simply and well. He has a network of suppliers seeking out quality ingredients, such as Byron Bay Berkshire pork, and a cheesemonger who organises airfreight in from Europe. Resting secure in their capabilities, Hauberg feels free to relax and just get on with the cooking.

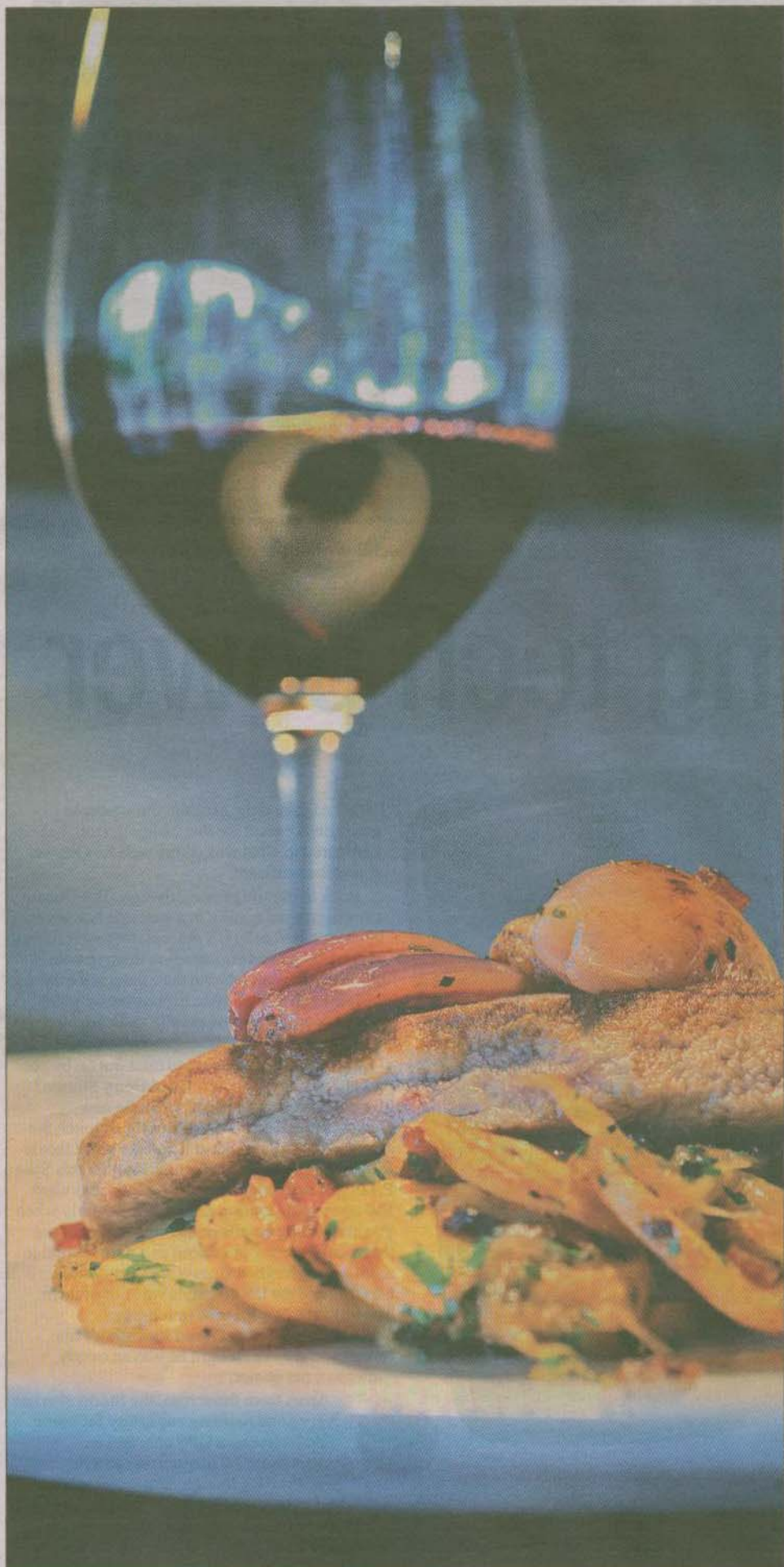
Pulp Kitchen is a genuine bistro, a style ubiquitous in Europe but very rare in Canberra. It's owned by Hauberg, a Canberra native who has lived in France for several years. He's trained in fine dining, and includes a stint at Sydney's Level 41 in his resume. But when he came home to Canberra and opened his own place, Hauberg decided there was an important unfilled niche in the Canberra market for mid-priced, not too formal, European dining. Pulp Kitchen is casual and simple in fit-out, it doesn't break the bank to eat there, and the food is reliable and simple with occasional luxury specials.

Hauberg has stocked his menu with classic French, Italian, and British retro food. You'll find silky home-made pasta and meatballs, a tender steak with pepper sauce and french fries, a prawn cocktail with sweet fresh prawns on the crisp shredded iceberg. This is not mod Oz in any way. There's not a coriander leaf or a shard of lemongrass in sight. The closest you'll get to a chilli is the tabasco in the Bloody Mary granita served with the oysters.

I'm especially taken with the liver and onions (\$17 small, \$25.90 large). I love this dish. It's simple and very old fashioned, and prepared beautifully. The tender slices of calves' liver are lightly pan fried, just to a soft pink inside. The onions are melted to soft dark sweetness, and some strips of lean bacon are tossed through.

Golden coins of crisp-edged sautee potatoes accompany it. I like to add a sprinkle of the house Murray River pink salt to these, and order a side of green beans. Liver has a terrible reputation, and unfortunately it's often deserved. I, too, remember dismal over-done liver from my college days, with all the texture and flavour of an ancient disintegrating rubber thong. I promise you that when liver is properly cooked, this does not happen. Even so, for some of the older generation, it's poverty food. For some of the younger, it's icky offal. Of all the nose-to-tail eating options, liver is one of the most widely acceptable. Many of us already enjoy a liver pate, sometimes without even knowing what it's made of. Calves' liver is tender and delicate in flavour, and Hauberg really knows how to cook it right. I recommend that you suspend your skepticism and give it a go. As Hauberg says, it's time to introduce this to the new generation. It's not new and exciting; but it is old and good.

■ Pulp Kitchen is at Shop 1, Ainslie shops, Wakefield Gardens. It's open for lunch Tuesday-Friday, noon-2.30pm, and dinner Tuesday-Saturday, from 6pm.



Pulp Kitchen's liver and onions is simple and delicious.

Photo: Karleen Williams