

FOOD FOR THOUGHT TOQUE • 5 Old Bells Line of Road, Kurrajong Village, 4573 2724

Daring to be different

THE VERDICT

- **Food:** French
- **Drink:** Licensed & BYO (bottled wine only)
- **Dress:** Casual
- **Expect to pay:** \$48 each for two courses
- **Value for money:** ★★★★★
- **Overall rating:** ★★★★★

TRUE TEST

A test of a restaurant is when food quality remains high despite the chef being away. In that regard, Toque passed with flying colours.

I had heard good reports about the food David Falson (ex-Bathers Pavilion, Balmoral) was cooking at this, his first, restaurant. Two of us arrived unannounced, as is the procedure for this column.

Our meals lived up to the hype and I was pleasantly surprised later when I asked to meet Falson and was told he had the flu and that 19-year-old apprentice Adam Boylson had done our cooking. That's the sign of a professionally run eatery.

Falson opened Toque – named after a tall chef's hat – three years ago. He admits his menu is daring for far-western Sydney but says he likes to “keep things interesting”.



Master's apprentice ... chef David Falson (standing) and sous chef Adam Boylson from Toque restaurant at Kurrajong.

Pictures: JOHN FOTIADIS



DISTINCTIVE DISHES

It was Toque's adventurous menu that was the attraction, with dishes like risotto of baby cuttlefish and squid ink with sesame and leek bird's nest and poached quail egg, along with Cajun seafood gumbo.

We shared entrees of roasted beetroot and truss tomato soup (\$16) and braised beef cheek rillettes with caramelised eschallots and spinach puree (\$18). Traditional French rillettes are made with pork, which is chopped, salted and cooked in fat, then shredded and served cold.

Toque's version was a mound of fall-apart beef cheeks, rib-stickingly rich and presented warm. As a fan of rillettes and terrines, they weren't what I expected but were very good.

Even better was the soup. The vine-ripened tomato thickened the beetroot and this simple dish starred. It was sprinkled with shiso, a spicy, basil-like Japanese herb, and drizzled with green olive pistou. Warm, crunchy ciabatta bread was perfect for mopping up.

My partner decided on a second entree, Roman-style baked semolina gnocchi (\$15) served with caramelised pumpkin, chanterelles and sage beurre noisette (nutty butter). Substituting semolina

for potato made this fluffier than your average gnocchi. Skilfully, flavour was not compromised.

GREAT GREENS

I chose boudin blanc (below) wrapped in prosciutto with truffle mash and cavole nero in raspberry vinegar reduction and whipped sour cream rouille (\$36).

Boudin blanc (white) is made of pork but without the blood. Toque's house-made version was first class, but I could have done without the adornments. Pots of mustard would give the excellent sausage more opportunity to shine. And at \$36, this dish was over-priced. A side of steamed seasonal vegetables (\$6) comprised the

most sensational beans I've tasted in ages. And an accompanying raspberry vinaigrette, again with a sprinkle of shiso – often used to garnish sushi – married well.

We shared dessert of campari and blood orange bavarois (far left) with bitter chocolate sauce, candied blood orange peel and salad of cumquats (\$14.50). An hour's cooking in sugar syrup converted the otherwise sour, humdrum cumquats into a wonderfully sweet foil for the tangy blood orange.

Toque, in a lovely old weather-board building, has vaulted wooden ceilings and stained-glass windows, with spectacular views over the Kurrajong Valley.

"Cooking shows have made people more knowledgeable about food these days," says Falson, who also organises cooking classes. More power to him!

JEFF COLLERSON

