



Herald Sun food reviews: How is the food reviewed

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## The Mayfair at Sofitel is a stylish supper club

Dan Stock, Herald Sun

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The Sofitel Hotel's forecourt is possibly Melbourne's most uninspiring restaurant vista.

It was, therefore, quite the feat of magic/sleight of hand that Pei Modern, the David Mackintosh/Mark Best restaurant that held court here for the past five years, managed to be as lauded and applauded as it was.

It was a stark, uncomfortable room with an awful outlook. But stellar cooking served by some of the best in biz managed to overcome those fairly serious handicaps.

But Pei is no more; in its place The [Mayfair](#), which makes the most of the view by shutting it out completely.

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And by doing so, along with thickly draped tables, fresh blooms, sparkling crystal and a seance-worth of candlelight, has transformed into a late-night supper club and the city's most romantic dining room.

I'm smitten.

With jazz on the speaker — or performed in the corner on weekends — The [Mayfair](#) is channelling 1930s glamour, which is, thankfully, more true to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s version than Baz Luhrmann’s. Though that’s not to say there’s no razzle dazzle for the backlit bar twinkles bright, sprits in crystal decanters shining like a Star of Wonder beckoning thirsty believers into its arms.



📷 Owner Joe Jones shakes a mean cocktail at The Mayfair. Picture: Eugene Hyland

Behind the bar, co-owner Joe Jones (Romeo Lane) who’s a dichotomy of permanent ink and white-jacketed class and is shaking and stirring seriously classic drinks (see the 19th century rye, vermouth and champagne-topped Chicago Cocktail) without a nose in the air (see rum, cream and honey shaken into a Bee’s Kiss). It’s dark, moody and you’d happily come here just for a drink.

Out front, at least this night, restaurateur David Mackintosh, who it appears has distilled every lesson learnt in his career that’s behind, among others, MoVida and Rosa’s Kitchen, SPQR and IDES, to create a subtly beautiful, elegant-yet-louche dining experience.

Whether fresh flowers and flannels in the facilities, the offer of still or sparkling “house water” (that’s gratis) to begin, quiet guidance through the menu or, of course, jackets waiting at the door upon exiting, this is an understated masterclass of sweating the small stuff.

He’s joined by Elle Frederick, who’s admirably looking after the wine, delivering suggested tastes of wines by the glass because “you don’t want to be drinking something you don’t like”. Nice.



📷 Black Pudding gets dressed for dinner with rum-sautéed pears and piccalilli. Picture: Eugene Hyland

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The French-leaning list is a perfect match with the bistro menu of Ron O'Bryan (The Vine, East Brunswick Hotel, Church St Enoteca) that's filled with much you want to eat, executed with precision.

For instance, you won't want to miss a saucer-sized crumpet, made in the pan to order so it's at once crunchy and fluffy. This becomes the buttery air bed for chunky spanner crab mixed with a vaguely curried mayo, and topped with herbs. It is completely, utterly, delicious (\$24).

House black pudding comes as a thick rectangular brick, its inherent rich sweetness kept in check by punchy piccalilli atop. This euro breakfast staple comes dressed for dinner with rum-sautéed pears and a sprinkle of pain de epices (spiced crumbs, \$20).

The red gum fired grill is the workhorse for the kitchen, being put through its paces in group 1 winning form. A whole dory, plate-sized and served under a cloak of butter and capers, is perfect, its flesh flaky and sweet and fall-off-the-bone (\$48).



📷 Whole dory with frites on the side makes a perfect supper. Picture: Eugene Hyland

A few steaks are offered up to a 600g, \$78 O'Connor's cote de boeuf, but the 220g Rangers Valley bavette, with charru crust and blushing inner, proved ample and excellent (\$33). Good pinky finger-sized frites (\$10), dunked in béarnaise served to the side are happy partners, though a half head of cauliflower, roasted soft with a chestnut puree, also proved a good match (\$10).

Go with a group so you can snare one of the leather-backed booths along the wall — which are the pick of the room, no doubt — and tackle one of the bigger, impressive dishes.



📷 The Mayfair is one of Melbourne's most romantic dining rooms. Picture: Eugene Hyland

Such as the queen of the birds — a Milking Farm Yard chicken — which comes with jus gras and artichoke for \$96, or a roasted lamb shoulder with spring veg (\$78).

But when you do, leave room for dessert, for the creme brulee is one to seek out. A tooth-stickingly thick toffee crust covers custard that languidly drips from the spoon with all the urgency of a teenager getting out of bed (\$14). It's a winner.

A separate menu after 10.30pm puts the supper into this club. Scrambled eggs late at night? Makes every bit of sense. So, too, does steak frites with optional fried egg, or "bowl of pasta". Well, certainly as much sense as another martini, for that's what Gatsby would do, after all.

With an eye on the future by channelling the past, The [Mayfair](#) is pure class.



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