

EAT OUT

LIZ LOVE



QUICK BITE

What: The Albion Hotel

Where: 72 Hannell Street, Wickham

Prices: Entree \$11 to \$19 (oysters \$14 for six, \$24 for 12)

Main: \$20 to \$27 and check the specials board

Dessert: \$8 to \$12

Chef: Grant Muir

Wines: Small wine list, several by the glass

Hours: Seven days a week for lunch and dinner

Extras: Salads, creamy garlic mash, beer-battered chips, steamed greens, all \$7

Vegetarian: Clearly marked on the menu. One entree, three breads, three mains (if the prosciutto is removed from one item)

Bookings: 4962 2411

Bottom line: Entree, main, dessert for two, about \$100

RAISING THE BAR

It says something about the pub culture in this town that in a climate that is a long way from the boom times of yesteryear, so much money has been poured into the stylish renovation of this historic hotel.

It's Friday night and the punters are fronting up for the end-of-week drinks and raffle. It's

also entertainment night with acts that change from week to week. If that's your thing, then a wagyu beef burger (\$15), steak sandwich and chips (\$12) or chicken burger (\$14) with a beer at the bar, or

a glass of bubbly with a dozen Port Stephens oysters in the courtyard won't break the bank.

For something more formal and substantial you can't go past the dining room with its pleasantly laid-back style. Tonight it's doing brisk business with the kind of food you might get in a "gastropub" in the Old Dart. The

adjacent bar is close enough to pick up wines by the glass or bottle, but far enough away that your quieter dining experience is not disturbed.

Entrées can be as simple as a bruschetta, soup or oysters, or more complex like parmesan- and herb-crusted whiting fillets on a roast tomato and herb salad (\$12), or barbecued haloumi with roast capsicum, rocket and a chilli and lemon dressing (\$12).

Or, you might choose the Yamba prawns and Nova Scotia scallops (\$19). Three plump prawns cap four tender golden grilled scallops sitting in a puddle of herb-flecked beurre blanc – no smears of sauce here. In fact, a spoon would not go amiss.

Four-cheese ravioli (\$19) are plump pasta pillows filled with pecorino and ricotta. They are tumbled through melting blue castello and shreds of roasted pumpkin and roasted capsicum to form a light sauce, with shaved parmesan on top. Basil, baby beet leaves and baby endive provide a pleasantly bitter counterpoint.

The osso buco (\$20 including a complimentary glass of shiraz) from the

specials board is slow-cooked and gelatinous and falling off the bone but I miss the lemon and parsley tang of the gremolata found in the more traditional osso buco alla Milanese. Creamy and al dente risotto underneath would be nice with saffron but earthy flavoured mushrooms go a long way to compensate.

Bangalow pork fillet (\$25) has a crunchy dukkah crust and the North African notes are further underscored by a bed of couscous dotted with currants, shredded mint and pine nuts and a yoghurt, cumin and honey dressing. The fillet is sliced to reveal pink, well-rested and tender meat.

The refrigerated cabinet holds a tempting array of desserts. Some, including the wicked chocolate mousse, are made in-house. The espresso with the affogato pours rich and strong over vanilla ice-cream. A shot of Frangelico is just icing on the cake.

There is always something happening at The Albion. Why not return on a Tuesday for trivia night or Wednesday for a special midweek dinner menu.

CUT ABOVE PUB GRUB: The Albion's dining room, above, and the four-cheese ravioli, below. PICTURE: NATALIE GRON



TABLE TALK

LOGAN TURNER, CARRINGTON PLACE

Your favourite dish?

The unique flavour of fresh whitebait hinted with citrus sake and pan-fried, topped with soft herbs, is unbeatable. I'm also looking forward to the new winter menu that features lovely slow braises cooked in our stone hearth oven. I'm particularly fond of the beef cheeks with warm polenta cake and roasted mushrooms.

Where do you like to eat?

It all depends on the mood. I really enjoy the Asian flavours at Sesame's (A Taste Of Asia) at The Junction and the family feel of Il Volcano on Hunter Street. On special occasions, Bistro Tartine can't be missed for an all-round dining experience with great French tones and outstanding service.

What's on the menu at home?

I love clean flavours that all come together on the palate. Fresh ingredients thrown through a simple sauce then tossed through pasta is always a winner. Normally this is followed with a homemade dessert to satisfy my sweet tooth, complemented with a good wine.

Logan Turner is head chef at Carrington Place, Carrington

