
First look: Adelaide's Orana restaurant

Is this Australia's most Australian restaurant? Jill Dupleix and Terry Durack visit Jock Zonfrillo's new indigenous-inspired eatery.

December 4, 2013

Jill Dupleix and Terry Durack

A flight of stairs leads up from the heart of Rundle Street, Adelaide to an extraordinary new 25-seat restaurant called Orana. 'Welcome'.

Inside, the space is furnished with streamlined mid-century furniture, the walls claimed by free-hand Italian artist, 2501, the pitched ceiling riddled with holes. There is no menu, just a door to a small kitchen. The first things to come out to the bare table are twisted, grey-green twigs of fried saltbush, immediately branding themselves as our very own salt and vinegar chips. It's the very best way to start a meal in Australia, ever.

Then Spencer Gulf prawns, their up-turned bellies holding drops of dill oil. Lozenges of Wagyu intercostal topped with a slurry of bittergrass. Pearl meat on a spoon with Dorrigo pepper. Coorong mulloway with native cherries and sea parsley. Starchy, blond folds of white yam, like discarded linen napkins. Kangaroo with native pepper. Coconut, with coconut ash and native currants. Ribberries with frozen gin. We eat with our fingers. We drink wine, from Beechworth, Adelaide Hills, Coonawarra, Austria. Taste things called three-cornered garlic, sow thistles, cinnamon myrtle, wild peas, chocolate lily. What is this stuff? Why isn't it on every menu, out there in shops, in our own kitchens?

It's easy to feel ignorant here. We should feel ignorant. We ARE ignorant. These ingredients grow wild, under our noses. We blather on about cutting down on waste, yet ignore, for the most part, what is growing on our own land – that would have to be as much a waste as tossing out 60,000 chickens.

And this, coming from the hands of a Scottish bloke who only got here in 2000, but who has immersed himself as much as he possibly can in this country and its people. He knows these powerful, distinctive, often astringent flavours from the ground up, and it shows in every well-judged composition. He knows the supply lines are fragile; the connections raw. It's important to him to not just take from the land, but at the same time to give back and heal. And this food is healing, in so many ways, not least that you get up at the end of a matched degustation dinner with energy, feeling as if you have eaten lightly, naturally and healthily.



Orana's chef and owner Jock Zonfrillo.

Photo: Matt Turner

Because Zonfrillo can cook. He's instinctive, inspired, and never once gratuitous. The food sparkles with life and energy. It feels very Australian. This is what he had been hoping to do at Penfold's Magill Estate in South Australia before that arrangement imploded; this timely, genuine evocation of our own wild and indigenous plants, grasses, and animals. It's a great missed opportunity for them, but Orana sits very comfortably in Rundle Street among the Thais, Greeks and Italians. It feels right here.

Downstairs, the team has opened Street-ADL, a laid-back Adelaidian bar with streetwise street food at its core: slow-cooked kangaroo shoulder, pulled and stacked into soft rolls; pork ribs glazed and fried in quandong and bush tomato, riberry cocktails. It's an easy first taste of country, an open door into native flavours and ingredients. But when you're ready for something entirely new; book upstairs.

It's what's been missing, since Andrew Ffielke's Red Ochre Grill in Adelaide, Raymond and Jennice Kersh's Edna's Table and Jean-Paul Bruneteau's Rowntrees and Riberrries in Sydney; since helpful books on the subject were written by Juleigh and Ian Robins, Jean-Paul Bruneteau, Vic Cherikoff, Andrew Ffielke, Benjamin Christie and more. Restaurants around the country are specialising in wild and native ingredients as part of this self-awakening – Tukka in Brisbane, Purple Goanna in Sydney, Jalaymba at Daintree, Charcoal Lane in Melbourne - as well as a growing number of chefs and home cooks, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, inspired to work with what we have. All are welcome.

Orana, 285 Rundle Street, Adelaide 08 8232 3444

booking@restaurantorana.com

Street-ADL, Ground Floor, 285 Rundle Street, Adelaide (no bookings)



Wagyu topped with a slurry of bittergrass.

recommended

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