

REVIEW

TOPSAIL, 206 BEACH ROAD, ONERAHI, WHANGAREI

The Spy Team's first mission of '08 was very hush-hush. Mr Ed was giving nothing away as the trio sped east.

"Be patient, Boss Hogg and just drive. All will be revealed in about ten minutes."

True to his word (and exceptional navigation skills from The Therapist) your intrepid trio have to outside the stairs leading to the crow's-nest of the Onerahi Yacht Club in Beach Road.

"Very authentic!" noted the Hogg, bounding up the rusting iron companionway, despite the gale force easterly nearly knocking him over.

"Wow!" gasped The Therapist upon entering TopSail and admiring the cosy new interior and gorgeous harbour views.

As we sat on comfy high-backed leather chairs, a lone yacht on the water headed up to secure safe anchorage, whilst Dad 'n' Two Kids in a fizzboat braved the choppy conditions. (Wear your lifejackets, fools!)

TopSail has been around for a few years but only recently chef Ian Garner and his partner Debbie Luen have taken the helm, after a 2-3 year stint at Alana Estate, Martinborough. They've completely redecorated and refurbished TopSail from the deck up.

"Contemporary decor, stylish in its understated simplicity and a very calm atmosphere," stated The Therapist, known and loved for her savviness on matters of interior design.

"A courageous move," said Mr Ed, noting that some of the dining area had been sacrificed to allow several large, comfortable leather couches and chairs – perfect for pre-dinner drinkies.

Debbie quickly supplied the menus and described the Northland Fresh Fish of the Day (tonight, Terakihi), then gave us time to peruse the menu/ wine/drinks list.

TopSail has an excellent and well constructed wine list (16 wines by the glass, and another 24 available by the bottle only – all chosen by Ian and Debbie specifically to complement the menu). Boss Hogg, who fancies himself as a wine buff, was seriously impressed.

The fare comprises seven starters and seven mains; a "well balanced menu with honest, unfussy, modern New Zealand cuisine, using French culinary techniques" – not surprisingly leaning ever so slightly towards seafood.

And, hallelujah, here's the thing! Every single dish has a suggested wine match (mercifully, by the glass). So the three worthies decided, on your behalf, to test the chef's recommendations!

Complimentary fresh-baked breads (served with extra virgin olive oil) arrived, delivered with pre-dinner drinks and a smile from Debbie. The Boss opted for a palate-cleansing **Tio Pepe Fino (\$9)**, that palest and driest of Spanish sherris, while the others chose the **Squawking Magpie Pinot Gris (\$8)** from Hawkes Bay.

A laid-back music mix on CD, led by Eva Cassidy and Jack Johnson, enhanced an already relaxed mood as the main fare began to arrive.

CHOSEN ENTRÉES

Mussels, green-lipped, topped with tomato salsa, herbs, breadcrumbs and cheese. Grilled and splashed with herb oil (\$16). Match: Alana Sauvignon Blanc (\$9). Eight good size mussels, artfully arranged in a circle on a large white plate. Sensationally more-ish, said Ed.

Grilled Spirits Bay Scallops served on ribbon zucchini, tossed quickly with pumpkin seeds and flat parsley (\$18). Match: Rippon Riesling. Tender, juicy scallops, not at all overwhelmed by a wonderful combination of flavours.

Oysters Kilpatrick. Eight Awanui oysters in the 1/2 shell, grilled with thin bacon strips. Splashed with Worcester sauce (\$18). Match: Bubbles (not chosen). Superbo!

CHOSEN MAINS

Terakihi fillets pan-fried in fresh breadcrumbs. Topped with a chunky salsa of fresh mango, avocado and roasted baby sweet peppers finished with coriander leaves. Served with lemon pepper aioli (\$28). Match: Alana Sauvignon Blanc (\$9). Sublime.

Rack of Lamb – Crusted with mustard, herbs and avocado and clover honey. On a bed of pumpkin, swede and kumera steamed with fresh herbs (\$28). Match: Culley Pinot Noir (\$8). Pink to perfection with a lovely infusion from the fresh herbs.

Venison Slices from the backsteak, grilled rare. With beetroot in a Pinot reduction. Served on mashed parsnip and topped with blueberries. (\$30). Match: Browns of Padthaway Shiraz (\$7). A taste triumph. Subtle flavour nuances blended wonderfully into a memorable dish, perfectly matched with the recommended Shiraz from South Australia.



By dessert time it's pitch black outside. Perhaps a couple of judiciously placed spotlights would further embellish views of the harbour and across to Limestone Island?

CHOSEN DESSERTS

Crème Brûlée. The classic vanilla cream custard, served chilled with a crunchy caramel top. Served with poached new season stone fruit (\$14). Wine Match: Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise (\$8) Though the brulée custard was a tad too chilled for Mr Ed's finicky palate, he swooned over the poached stone fruit.

Poached Pear Filled with a citrus and sherry trifle with crème anglaise and a dollop of lemon curd mascarpone (\$14) Wine match: Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise (\$7). A veritable work of art that pear, almost a shame to eat it.

The Boss completed his evening meal with **Blue Cheese Te Mata 'Bayview' Blue with fig and date chutney and oat biscuits (\$14), matched with Botrytis Semillon (\$7)** and his customary espresso (prepared swiftly and delivered with a smile by an ever-cheerful waitress.

The menu hails TopSail as "a casual dining experience in warm comfortable surrounds" but there was nothing inappropriately casual about it. Rather, it felt almost serene – because the people at the helm were in total control.

It seems the captain, first mate and just one other able sea-person were working in near-perfect harmony on a very small ship! No unnecessary or grating noises, no detectable tension, no problems!

A relatively small (24 seater) restaurant, thin and wide and facing the harbour, this venue is not appropriate for large dinner parties. But for a romantic rendezvous, a special occasion or a business dinner, the new TopSail is a gem.

At \$80 per head (food comprising \$60 each), our time aboard TopSail was well worth the fare!

scene magazine rating **8 1/2** OUT OF 10
food quality, value, service, ambience, decor

TWO CONVENIENT LOCATIONS

Drive up 24 Reyburn St (by Resene Colour Shop)

Walk up Cnr Cameron & Bank Sts (by Ojinos Gym)

FREE COFFEE FOR ONE WHOLE MONTH!

Simply fill in the coupons below, present them at either location when you purchase your next coffee and go in the draw for **ONE MONTH'S FREE COFFEE** (maximum one coffee per day during March 08) One voucher per person per purchase.

Name

Cellphone

Have you purchased from GoGo Before? Yes/No

Go Go Espresso may use your contact details to inform you of special promotions in the future. Y N

Competition ends 29 Feb 08. Prize cannot be redeemed for cash.

Name

Cellphone

Have you purchased from GoGo Before? Yes/No

Go Go Espresso may use your contact details to inform you of special promotions in the future. Y N

Competition ends 29 Feb 08. Prize cannot be redeemed for cash.

Summertime.
SCHNAPPA ROCK.

TUTUKAKA • NEW ZEALAND

TELEPHONE 09 4343 774

