

restaurant review

THE BEACH HOUSE RESTAURANT
891 COVE ROAD, WAIPU COVE



Photo: Bryce Zhang

"GOOD GOD!" SNARLED MR ED TO BLONDE SPY. "WE'VE BEEN STOOD UP!" INDEED THEY HAD. THE OTHER TWO DINNER GUESTS HAD GONE AWOL.

They could have got lost, of course. After all, if you didn't already know where to find this upmarket dining venue tucked away at the back of a motel complex in a coastal hamlet, you might never find it on a dark night.

"How sad. Looks like it's you and me to check this one out alone, Blondini! I wonder if much has changed since last time?" That was in May 2006, when BHR had exceeded expectations when operated by founding chef-owner Mark Lane, whose style was "fusion" cooking.

The Beach House is much the same inside (though we hear big changes inside and out are imminent) – walk past the snappy bar/reception area to sturdy wooden tables and plush padded chairs. There's seating for about 40; large and impressive local artworks are on the walls – and a constellation of LED lights in the ceiling.

Mr Ed and Blonde Spy rendezvous at an eatery in a coastal village

A mix of soft jazzy-blues music played as our hostess found a cosy table discreetly away from the ten or so other diners. She promptly supplied the wine list and *Waiwera mineral water* (\$9 per 1L bottle). BHR offers an attractively-priced Sunday Special set menu that changes weekly (\$38 a head covers entrée, main and dessert). Clever thinking.

The Wine List here is disappointingly small but of impressive quality. Only one of each variety is available by the glass, though – and it's pricey at that. Try Pol Roger bubbly (\$27 glass) Kumeu River Chardonnay (\$75 per bottle).

Blonde Spy opted for *Beetroot Salad* (*Salt roasted beetroot salad with gorgonzola, walnuts and fig vincotto dressing*). Superbly presented

– on a large round platter with a deep hole in the middle for the salad! The combo of chunks of walnut, beetroot wedges, pungent cheese and tart salad dressing was 'delishimo', with slightly garlicky croutons and crispy parmesan wafer.

Mr Ed ripped into *Meatballs* (*Italian meatball bruschetta with basil and parmesan*). Four modest sized meatballs on top of a wide slice of home-made ciabatta-style bread, spread with bruschetta. Lovely.

For her main course Blonde Spy chose *Pan fried hapuka fillet with crumbed scallop and crab salad*. Truly memorable: two small hapuka fillets; three crumbed scallops with mayo; one large oyster in its shell; and a crabmeat with smoked tabasco and tomato aioli dressing – all arranged around the outside of a large white plate with half a lemon in the centre and a delectable salsa on the side. Delightful.

Mr Ed went for *Scotch Fillet* (*Roast Scotch with mustard crust, parsnips mash and gravy*). Juicy and tender fillet, creamy mash, separated by perfectly crisp fresh runner beans.

We finished with *Eton Mess* (*Berry, pavlova and cream*) and *Orange Pannacotta* (*with mandarin caramel and ice cream*).

Throughout the stay, table service was thoroughly professional, attentive, efficient and controlled, the atmosphere relaxed and mellow. Chef-owner Trent Warren, whose 20 years experience includes stints at Auckland's *Toto* restaurant, appears to be maintaining the high standard set by his predecessor. At \$52 a head, The Beach House was superb in the value-for-money stakes. Roll on spring and the chance to enjoy the extended open air courtyard and new à la carte menu. ■

scena magazine **8**
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