
Sunday lunch: Public Inn, Castlemaine

September 17, 2011



One of Castlemaine's best ... the Public Inn. Photo: Louise Cooper

CASTLEMAINE has become a real foodie destination and, according to the locals, the Public Inn is one of the best places in town.

Owner Hayden Winch, a local lad, greets us warmly and shows us to our table at the front. Having worked at Daylesford's Lake House and with Asian and Middle Eastern outfits, he knows how to run a restaurant professionally.

The Public Inn is bright and stylishly decorated with a wall of oak wine barrels designed by artist Helen Bodycomb. Behind the wall are tanks of small-batch wines made by local vineyards especially for the restaurant. If you're not sure what to order, you can have a taste.

Winch thinks of this as a high-end provincial bistro rather than a gastropub although the bar menu seems good value and popular.

The Public Inn is family-friendly and our daughter is offered a choice of three simplified dishes and opts for the boned free-range chicken stuffed with mushroom, thyme and shallot (\$17.90). Our son has the adult version served with spinach puree and potato (\$32).

I'm intrigued by the carrot risotto (\$31.90), cooked with herbs, hazelnut crumbs and Holy Goat fromage frais from nearby Sutton Grange. It's flavourful with interesting textures and the goat's cheese adds a lovely creamy finish. A bottle of Best's Great Western Riesling 2010 (\$39) goes well with the dish.

My partner can't resist the Daylesford pine mushroom oxtail ragout with orechiette (\$32.90), again perfectly cooked.

To finish we share a coffee bean panna cotta and macerated Turkish black figs with red wine and treacle (\$13.90). It has a real caffeine hit and immediately jumps to the top of my favourite desserts list.

Reviewed by Mary O'Brien, who was a guest of Tourism Victoria

The Public Inn, corner Barker and Mostyn Streets, Castlemaine, phone 5472 3568, Monday-Saturday noon-10pm, Sunday 11am-10pm. To stay: nearby options include The Empyre Boutique Hotel, see empyre.com.au; Apple Annie's, see appleannies.com.au; Millduck Strawbale B&B, Harcourt North, see millduck.com.au.