

The European

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First of all, let us state our prejudice. Yes, we love European tastes, love European wine, but if you are going to do something in Melbourne that's been done a thousand times over, you'd better bloody do it well or get the hell out of the kitchen. Us Melbournians have a reputation to preserve.

In our opinion the European does it well, but not well enough. Maybe our expectations were a little high. Rumour has it that the European is owned by the people who run Syracuse and maybe we'd just expected a "Syracuse in the East". However, unlike Syracuse the food, service and wine list were a bit ordinary.

Melbourne has a lot of good eating establishments that serve tradition flavour filled, dishes - Italian linguini with veal ragu, French duck confit, coq au vin. Stella's, Est est est!, Walters, Syracuse itself. But these restaurants also cater for those who are sick of the same old, same old, and contain items with flavours to challenge and excite, not just satisfy. They also have excellent service with waiting staff who are passionate about their food and know their wines.

So, we could end this review there but in fairness to the European, and those of you who don't share our prejudice, we shall explain;

We started out with a selection of dips and bread - the usual Tzaziki and Hommus which were quite good. The bread was nicely textured and good for dips. We had a lovely dish that was simple but effective; smoked salmon, chargrilled Jerusalem artichoke, baby capers, good olive oil, lemon and black pepper. Quite tasty and reasonably priced at \$8.50.

Saving room for dessert, one of us chose Sheep's milk saganaki - pan fried cheese which was tasty but a little overcooked - it dried out far too quickly. (If you want good saganaki - go to Jim's.) The other had the mushroom risotto which, again was just nice - nothing like the wild mushroom risotto from Italy 1, which has comparable prices.

For those of you who love good coffee and cake, dessert was delicious. A terrific tira mi su with just the right amount of marscapone and good strong full

flavoured coffee. The prices were also very reasonable and a little cheaper than those generally found around town. In this context, the European's strongest point.

Overall, although the menu's dishes spanned the European continent, the flavours and styles were all too familiar. Maybe this will appeal to some of you, but to us it seemed lacklustre and uninspiring.

The wine list was exclusively European. Without getting xenophobic about it, we know and love our Australian wines and don't really know that much about the European wine industry. We asked the waitress for help, maybe a recommendation and she didn't seem to know too much either. They were selling one or two wines by the glass and so we opted for these - a nice dry Soave and a nice red from the Cotes du Rhone. Not bad. The European could really lift its game by having staff who knew their wines, and what goes with what food. If you can't distinguish your restaurant on the basis of your food, then do it on the basis of your wine list and/or your service.

It was our impression that if it intends to rival Melbourne's best, or at least better, the European will have to widen its menu and inspire its staff. Our suggestion would be to check it out by having coffee and cake there one day. Hopefully we're wrong. Maybe we caught them on a bad day. Or maybe they could tell we were lawyers.

Cost: About \$65 for two (three courses and coffee) plus drinks

Open: Monday to Friday; 7.30am - midnight.
Saturday to Sunday; 8.00am - midnight.

If you choose to go for dinner (please do and tell us we're wrong), bear in mind that upstairs they have opened the Melbourne Supper Club which is open until the wee hours of the morning. A good place for drinks when Gin Palace is closed.

The European
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