



FOR THE past five years young gun chef **Ben Devlin** has been one to watch. The recipient on many awards, including Young Chef of the Year, Devlin has been head chef of the much-lauded Brisbane riverfront venue, **Esquire** since it opened several years ago. He did a "stage" at Noma before Esquire and was one of the few to be asked to stay on in a paid position, which he did for a couple of years. He left to pursue his love of baking and brewing, holding events under the 'Beerkerly' banner, which combines fabulous baked goods with craft beer. Then came the offer from the Brisbane-based sisters, **Siobhan** and **Elisha Bickle** who were renovating an old '50s block of flats at Cabarita Beach, just south of the Queensland border. The sleepy coastal hamlet is now home to **Halcyon House**, a beautifully decorated boutique hotel, bar and restaurant named **Paper Daisy**. Paper Daisy's line the whitewashed walls as you enter the breezeway, which leads into the bar on the terrace of the restaurant. It's the perfect location for breakfast or lunch because you look through a bank of sheoaks at the silken sands of Cabarita and the crystalline waters beyond. At night it's balmy and warm, crickets hum in unison and the pool, lit from within, sparkles appealingly.

Devlin has an uncanny ability to make food that is perfect for the location. In Brisbane his fish and beef cooked over coals was arranged in a more formal style befitting the elegance of the venue. Here he channels the coast and perhaps the local fishermen from which he procures the freshest fish and seafood. Grilled white fish is baked in paperbark on a bed of seaweed and a fine coating of white onions. Cooked slowly to translucent and almost melting, the onions add punch and sweetness; the fish is meaty and flakes at the touch of a fork. King prawns are coated in green puffed rice with chilli



and ginger pickle salad. There's a tonne of fresh mint leaves and cucumber slices that, with the chilli, add an Asian nod and a freshness that is freshness on a plate. Glazed, slow-cooked lamb is shredded and served with roasted gem lettuce with capers and almonds. It's another stunner and goes perfectly with a salad of tomatoes with black garlic, eschallots and chunks of creamy mozzarella. Seasoning is perfect on everything and there's an effortlessness to the food that lulls diners into a true sense of relaxation. I think there's a bit of duck syndrome going on here, however, cheerful staffers gliding about, to and from the kitchen which, on the surface seems ridiculously calm. The level of quality and finesse of every dish is so apparent its obvious there's plenty going off behind the scenes. And it's all good! 21 Cypress Crescent, Cabarita Beach; phone (07) 6676 1444.

New to Brisbane is **Jane-Therese Mulry**, a chef with an impressive international CV and experience in one of Queensland's most exclusive resorts, Qualia on Hamilton Island. She is the new head chef of **Madame Hedges**, the renamed restaurant within the vast **Cloudland** complex.

Recently Mulry has spent time in Thailand cooking at the prestigious Siam Hotel and is now bringing a pan-Asian flavour to the new menu.

Expect to find delicious steamed dumplings of Sichuan beef with a fresh coriander and mint dressing or coriander-imbued vegetables with a spicy tomato dipping sauce. Barbecue duck

pancakes are soft and warm, blackened ginger cobia is soaked in squid ink then seared with butternut pumpkin puree, broccolini and a cucumber and peanut relish.

You'd expect the goat curry to be heavy but this version is anything but. Light and aromatic, the goat is tender and juicy, redolent of cumin and other aromatic spices and comes with a little pot of dhal and a freshly baked roti. 641 Ann St, Fortitude Valley; phone (07) 3872 6600.

Travelling north to balmy Cairns, there's a new player in the **Harbour Lights** complex, overlooking the Trinity Inlet called **The Boatshed** that offers a vast, broad-ranging brasserie-style menu. Smaller share plates of ceviche of red emperor, cheese croquettes and barbecue corn on the cob are tasty and not so small (portions are big in this part of the country) and so is the whole Portuguese-style chook, dry rubbed with lemon, garlic and housemade marinade before being barbecued and served on the crown.

It's never cold in Cairns (by southern standards) but the indoor/outdoor decor is protected from the onshore winds with clear, pull-down blinds for when things get blustery. The decor gives you the impression you are dining on a very nicely appointed deck, somewhere deep in the tropics. Shops 7 & 8, Cairns Harbour Lights, 1 Marlin Parade; Cairns; phone (07) 4031 4748.

Above: Dish and interior decor of Paper Daisy Restaurant.