

adelaidegrapevine

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TO the casual visitor the **Caledonian Hotel** is nothing exceptional. It has a good dining room, Bartons restaurant, with above average pub food and a strong focus on high-grade steaks. A further clue might be the range of Scotch whiskies in the front bar and the solid wine list. But it is the wine-matched dinners that really set the Caledonian apart from anywhere else in Adelaide, possibly Australia.

Food and wine matching dinners are pretty commonplace these days, though nearly all of them are fancy affairs, with fancy prices to go with them. Not so at North Adelaide's Caledonian Hotel, which manages to turn out an extraordinary 70 or so food and wine matched lunches and dinners a year - five courses of very adequate wine-friendly food matched with up to a dozen or more wines, everything in generous quantities. And not just wine - the list includes whisky and champagne matched dinners as well, just to keep things really interesting. They are the result of a unique collaboration between hotel proprietor **Fiona Nairn** and her head chef **Mark Johnson**, neither of whom claim any great foodie credentials but share a tremendous passion for the task they've set themselves. Together they've visited some of the best restaurants in Australia and overseas, seeking new ideas and flavours, considering dishes that might have seven or eight elements to them and working out how they can recreate perhaps two or three of those elements, using the best produce they can afford and still charge pub prices for, Nairn says, "something better than pub food". The average price of the wine dinners is \$88 - five courses, a dozen or so wines. "It's all about making the wine jump out of the glass," Nairn says.



She makes it work through tough discipline at all levels: balance across the courses; not too much acid or sugar - although slight sweetness in a sauce brings out the fruit in the wine; no chilli; an average 300g of protein, sometimes using secondary cuts especially if it's 9+ waygu. The Caledonian Hotel, 219 O'Connell St, North Adelaide. Open for lunch and dinner daily. Check caledonianhotel.com.au/category/wine-events/ for wine dinner details; phone (08) 8267 1375.

Since he was first named McLaren Vale Bushing King nearly 40 years ago, an honour he's twice repeated, winemaker **Steve (Serafino) Maglieri** has been one the region's most respected winemakers. So when he took over the former McLaren's on the Lake and renamed its restaurant **Serafino**, as well as making it the headquarters for his Serafino Wines, it was no surprise that the food matched his reputation for wine.

It's an extensive property centred on a large dam, or lake, that built an early reputation as a prestigious venue for weddings, conferences and other major functions, offering extensive accommodation on the side. With the Maglieri family in charge, the restaurant also has lifted its game with chef **Sarah Contin** producing dishes that are skilled and generous in all senses. As well as a strong Italian influence, Contin's menu also shows the result of spending 18 months at Adelaide's acclaimed Peel Street restaurant, famed for its Mediterranean/Middle Eastern style. A simple starter of hommus brings a decorative plate featuring Kabuli-style fried chickpeas, pomegranate pearls and mint, while slow-roasted lamb shoulder comes with smoked eggplant puree, garlic yoghurt and dukkah. Main courses include "nomad chicken", a wonderfully mess-looking dish with white bean cassoulet, chunks of dark morcella - a Portuguese-style black pudding, crisp chicken skin and cherry tomatoes, while a bowl of slow-braised venison shanks on a bed of pearl barley with vincotto, orange and figs is equally generous and satisfying. Serafino, Kangarilla Rd, McLaren Vale. Open for lunch Thursday-Saturday, dinner Monday-Saturday; phone (08) 8323 8911.

Major renovations, which include a fully enclosed deck area and extended balcony, haven't disguised the fact that the **Star of Greece** is basically a glorified tin shed perched on the edge of a cliff,



overlooking Port Willunga beach and the bones of the wrecked ship that gave the restaurant its name.

The truth, however, is that it's come a very long way from the days it was the local bait shop, especially under the ownership of **Nikki and Doug Govan**, who also owns the much-lauded Victory Hotel, not far distant at Sellicks Hill. The restaurant is now more boatshed-style, surrounded by big, foldaway windows that provide sensational views of the coastline below. In summer, a seat on the balcony will be especially hard to get. The "go to" dishes here that have never left the menu are the salt and pepper squid, quite likely caught in the waters below, and the beer-battered fish and chips - King George whiting from Kangaroo Island just over the horizon.

Alternatively, if you didn't go for the oysters with pickled shallot vinaigrette, you could start with grilled scallops with blood orange and red onion, followed by a main course of wild barramundi with grilled mushrooms on a bed of Jerusalem artichoke puree and a scattering of garlic chips. The extensive and well-priced wine list is McLaren Vale biased but, fortified by Doug Govan's formidable list at the Victory Hotel, includes a strong French representation. Star of Greece, 1 Esplanade, Port Willunga. Open for lunch Wednesday-Saturday, dinner Thursday-Saturday; phone (08) 8557 7420.

Top: Serafino restaurant interior.

Middle: Serafino chicken.

Left: Pork belly and parsnip puree from the Caledonian.