

A COUPLE of decades ago young chef **Katrina Ryan** left Sydney, where she had owned her own restaurants and held posts like head chef of Rockpool, with her husband **Mark** (also a chef) to raise their young family in the less frenetic surrounds of sunny Queensland.

She made a name for herself as a teacher at the revered Spirit House Cooking School in Yandina about two hours north of Brisbane. Her culinary reach around Asia is extensive and her ability to impart that information impressive, so it seemed logical for the pair to open their own cooking school, **The Golden Pig**, in semi-industrial Newstead, in Brisbane's inner north about six years ago. A casual cafe at the front of the former motorcycle workshop came next. This year the Ryans decided it was time to launch back into the restaurant industry. After looking for another spot they decided to use the same location and condense the cooking school to a couple of nights of the week while the restaurant operates in the same space on the other nights. So if you're looking to learn you can book into classes such as French bistro cooking, Spanish tapas, Greek, Vietnamese, curry making and even a nose-to-tail pig butchery cooking class taken by Katrina and butcher **Chris Luxton**. And for those who prefer to sit back and be cooked for, the menu between Tuesday and Saturday shows influences from China, Thailand and Japan among others. Entrees include scallops in ponzu miso butter, tea-smoke salmon with fresh coconut on betel leaves and bao with twice cooked masterstock pork, chilli caramel and yuzu mayo. There's a massaman curry of sweet potato in the "medium plates" section alongside crispy Sichuan chicken and the quintessentially Queensland-meets-Asia classic crispy skinned barramundi in a fragrant yellow broth with galangal and Thai basil. Mark is a former chef and building designer who redesigned the space to work as both cooking school and restaurant.

Reclaimed furniture and a jungle full of greenery give the place a cosy, retro vibe, with the original concrete workshop floors and a giant mural (a golden pig included) above the kitchen. There's a strong line-up of craft beers on offer at the bar as well as an Asian-inspired array of cocktails and a wine list that includes some French varietals and riesling styles that marry so well with Asian food. 38 Ross St, Newstead; phone (07) 3666 0884.

For a capital known as "The River City" Brisbane has struggled with providing its residents and visitors with ample riverfront restaurants. Notable absolute waterfront venues include Bar Alto at New Farm, Alchemy and Jellyfish in the CBD, Stokehouse at Southbank and newly opened Three Blue Ducks also in the CBD. Now, at the opposite end of town, comes **Patina**, at the heritage-listed Customs House formally known as Customs House Restaurant. The kitchen brigade is headed up by chef **John Offenhauser** (ex-chef de cuisine and sous chef at Marco Polo at the Treasury Hotel) who has created a share-style menu with a focus on locally caught seafood and seasonal produce. Offenhauser works closely with hinterland farmers and grows his own mushrooms down in the cellar of the building. The menu is largely comprised of share plates derived from broad Mediterranean influences - think chargrilled octopus with smoked tomato, olive, basil and mozzarella, salad of spring beets, baby leeks, artichoke and creme fraiche, and slow-cooked lamb shoulder with black garlic hummus, harissa yoghurt, pomegranate and flat breads - but there's also a detour into Asia and beyond with dishes like tempura asparagus, soy cured egg yolk and ABC sauce. 399 Queen St, Brisbane; phone (07) 3365 8921.

Dan Arnold left Brisbane for France to gain knowledge and over the ensuing seven years that's exactly what happened. He first worked at the three Michelin-starred L'Esperance and then as sous chef of Serge



Vieira which boasts two of the coveted stars. He also boasts the Bocuse de Bronze Asia-Pacific 2016, and is the 8th ranked chef in the world following the Bocuse d'Or World final in 2017. Not bad for a boy from Brissie and now he is returning home with wife **Amelie** to open his eponymously-named offering in the all-new **Alex Perry Hotel** opposite the Emporium complex.

Light and spacious, the room is simply and elegantly furnished with much time and no expense spared with the cutlery, tableware and napery, all of which is first rate. The menu is a choice of three "experiences" or set menus as we diners call it. Experience one is an individually priced collection of dishes, including a charcuterie plate, Paris-style gnocchi with winter vegetables, flank steak with roasted celeriac and horseradish sauce and a confit leg of duck and lentil ragu. This is only available at the bar on Friday and Saturday nights so that leaves Experience three and five for those wanting lunch or dinner "a table".

The smaller set menu starts with yam carpaccio (after some delicious little amuse bouches that change regularly) with confit jerusalem artichoke and black truffle and hazelnut sauce which is followed by a saddle of Sovereign lamb, roasted celeriac and a jus gras.

Experience five offers torched king fish with toasted sesame and soy, smoked potato and pork cheek cannelloni, line caught blue eye with charred cabbage, potato crisps and red onion and a simply delicious charcoal duck breast with a braised leg, pumpkin and smoky braised onion petals.

The food is seriously technique-driven and unabashedly French, and yet it avoids the heavy and sometimes downright stodginess of some French fine dining. Arnold has a deft and light touch, understands balance and nuanced flavour combinations, and has a special talent for the production of beautiful sauces and emulsions, something some would argue is the most important part of the dish. 959 Ann St, Fortitude Valley; phone (07) 3189 2735.

Top: Duck from The Golden Pig.
Far left: Gyoza from The Golden Pig.
Left: Papaya Salad from The Golden Pig.

