



Straight to the Source

This is country dining with class, writes **Dan Stock**

It's the public holiday no one asked for but we're all happy to take, which means it's the perfect weekend to get out of town. As if we need an excuse.

And there's arguably no more delicious a food destination than Kyneton, but an hour up the Calder.

Of course this is nothing new, but as far as towns Pop. 6629 go, there are few that are quite as jam-packed with good things to eat, with a food scene that's constantly evolving.

Newcomers include Tim Austin's mod Italian place La Bonta, French bistro darling Midnight Starling with ex-Jacques Reymond chef Steve Rogers in the kitchen, and the homely day-through-nighter Wedge Street Food and Wine where comfort is writ large in roast chook.

The seeds to this thriving hub of sated hungers were sown by Annie Smithers a decade ago, when her eponymous bistro and farmhouse cooking drew fans from town and country to this country town.

She sold out of Kyneton a few years ago — Du Fermier in Trentham is where you'll still find her cooking from the heart and garden out back — handing over the keys to Tim and Michelle Foster who kept not only Smithers' spirit alive in this Piper St shopfront, but her name until last year.

So now it's Source Dining, with a clever motif of



SOURCE DINING

72 Piper St, Kyneton
Ph: 5422 2039

Open: Lunch Thur-Sun;
dinner, Thurs-Sat

Go-to dish:
Squid ink noodles

Source Dining's top-notch country fare includes squid ink noodles with seafood. / EUGENE HYLAND

horticultural drawings turned into vintage vegetable art adorning the brick walls that complement the blond-and-blue Scandi furniture of the dining room.

A sense of place is heralded by Michelle's menu missive introducing the seasonal changes of garden and land, executed with the endearing guilelessness of the country.

The other thing Michelle

writes is the wine list, and it's one of the real gems to be found anywhere, let alone these parts. An excellent range of locals — for there's great wines to be found around the Macedon region — is complemented by a good showing of Yarra Valley and South Australian bottles, reflecting the duo's heritage (Coonawarra) and recent home (Tim was exec chef at the Healesville Hotel).

A wonderfully annotated list filled with nicely priced drinking, it's a document of spring-in-your-step beauty, with accessible tasting notes for every bottle and glass.

The welcome is warm, unaffected, though service doesn't trade softly spoken charm for knowledge or skills. Jackets taken, stools by each table for ladies' bags: it's a thoughtful package that lives up to \$40-plus main courses.

Tim's cooking shows deference to both product and technique, employing an espuma here, a sprinkling of dust and a gel or two there, but is just as comfortable serving up a potato-topped fish pie bubbling from the oven with a simple salad to the side.

But what a pie. Generously filled with chunks of snapper and salmon and meaty prawns, the seafood swims in a béchamel of silken grace, the buttery whipped potato adding just the right amount of comforting heft. Radicchio

with real bitter bite and a few orange segments provide sharp foil to the pie's richness (\$36).

More seafood — this time squid and local trout — features in another highlight to start. Within a twirl of elegant squid ink noodles, flakes of smoked trout and slivers of confit squid are bolstered by an oyster and mussel or two, with fine slices of pickled radish and sea succulents adding a sharp juiciness. It's a lovely dish (\$22).

Sutton Grange beef is a tricky interpretation of tartare, with nashi and pickled kohlrabi adding crunch and bite to the subtly sweet meat to be scooped by excellent potato crisps. As far as twists go, it works (\$20).

Excellent tangy sourdough hits the table still warm from baking, though is cleared away efficiently without the offer of more before main course. It's the only annoyance of the meal.

McIvor Farm pork is transformed into a crisp-and-wobbly plate of colour and comfort, with a rainbow of beetroot — pickled strands, slivers of golden, a dice of red — adding to the deep purple braised cabbage. Crisp sticky skin topping fatty jowl meat comes under slow-cooked shoulder meat wrapped in panko and crisp-fried (\$40). It's an excellent plate, though bettered by a side of brilliant broccolini tossed through lemon rind, almonds and white anchovies, that alone is almost worth a visit (\$9).

The offer of coffee with or after dessert is as welcome as the cinnamon-spiked sponge-light apple financier, served with calvados caramel and apple cider vinegar ice cream where the elements are kept in restrained harmony (\$18).

A choice of petit fours — a blood orange jube, sticky panforte — is a class finish to a class act in this classy food town.



ROASTED FREE RANGE PORK CHEEK