



**Oliver's – Australian Fine Cuisine**  
**Corner Spence & Abbott Streets**  
**Cairns**

**Open daily from 6pm to midnight**  
**4041 1221**

**Words by Janet Arnold**

**Cuisine:** Cairns is renowned as an international tourist destination – now there is a restaurant that captures the European art of fine dining. Oliver's menu is extensive with a strong leaning to local produce served in exciting flavour combinations, and is changed every six weeks or so to introduce new recipes.

**Setting:** Oliver's is tucked away in Spence Street, just around the corner from the Casino. The depth of the restaurant is deceiving as it is divided into three distinct dining areas. Our host Oliver – an amiable German whose pride in his restaurant is obvious from the start, met us on the pavement. Guests can dine al fresco on the pavement, face the entertaining galley kitchen or in the tropical hanging-plant courtyard inside. We chose the courtyard, which is fortunately fully covered as the heavens opened up later in the evening. Adorning the walls are many framed black and white photographs of early Cairns, including some of the infamous eateries that locals and tourists once frequented.

**Entrée:** While deciding on our starters, our hostess Stephanie – a gracious Frenchwoman with an

amazing recall of the menu and the wines – served us a glass of Taltarni Taché sparkling Pinot Noir/Chardonnay from Northern Tasmania (\$9.50). On Oliver's recommendation, my husband Steve chose the rocket and pea cream soup with bunya nuts served on top of an oyster royale custard with roasted parsnips (\$12). I went outside my comfort zone and ordered Red Emperor carpaccio (raw fish) with passionfruit coriander dressing, served with a pea soup flavoured with Cajun spices foam (\$22). The passionfruit was an amazing combination with the finely sliced fish, although I did concede to preferring Steve's warm pea soup to the cold version.

**Mains:** We deliberated for some time (helped along with a stunning 2006 Rymill Sauvignon Blanc from Coonawarra, \$36). Eventually I settled on lamb shanks cooked oriental style, served with a mint flavoured couscous and seasonal vegetables in a spicy broth (\$29). This dish had been simmering for five hours and it showed – the meat just fell off the bone and the flavours went through everything. I thought I had the winner this time, until Steve gave me a small slice of his prime beef fillet (from the Tablelands) with a crust of macadamia nuts

and rosella jam, crispy aniseed myrtle polenta and braised spring onions (\$36). He says that if he could cook steak that tender on his barbeque, I would do anything for him – a bit of an exaggeration, but he'd get away with quite a bit!

**Dessert:** Usually, if we were as full as we were at that point, we wouldn't even look at the dessert menu. Decision making was taken out of our food and wine soaked minds by a selection of three different desserts – floating island on wattle seed custard and caramelised macadamia nuts (\$9), thin banana pie baked with cinnamon and vanilla, served with a bunya nut and caramel milk shake (\$12) and a combination of three chocolate delights: ginger and chocolate foam, chocolate ice cream and bunya nut brownie (\$14). It was a close race but the banana pie won.

All in all, a most enjoyable dining experience. The head chef, David Bres was head hunted from a Michelin Star restaurant in Luxemburg by Oliver. The kitchen is a united nations of talent, and did I mention that each dish was a visual work of art? CL



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