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DINE

GOTTA LOVE THE TAPAS TRAIN!

Pintxo delivers great food and service, in a vibrant and sophisticated venue, says KT Woods.



I have to admit that before I went to Pintxo, the idea of a tapas train sounded slightly tacky. My first visual impressions, of bold blocks of vibrant red behind a huge stylized stencil of a bull, dissolve my ill-informed fears of a bad east-west fusion. Like a Pedro Almodovar heroine, Pintxo is all class. And like its owner, Melissa Telecian, this lady is nice on the eye, knows what she's talking about, and delivers the goods.

Pintxo, located just near the Brunswick Hotel midway between Fortitude Valley and New Farm, is celebrating its first 12 months in operation, and appears to have successfully attracted a dedicated following of regulars. It is lively on our mid-week visit, and I'm pleased that we made a booking for the high stools around the tapas train. The front of house staff create a very professional and welcoming atmosphere in a full house. In fact, our waitress's attentiveness makes it very easy to enjoy a glass of wine out the front as we wait for our spot inside to become available.

Brisbane seems to be enjoying the current trend in Spanish style cuisine. The newly opened Ortega, further along Brunswick Street, takes the old Isis space in a fresh direction. Peasant, in the old Barracks complex on Petrie Terrace, is also serving up tasty tapas and great wine to big crowds. My theory regarding our attraction to Spanish food, and especially tapas, is that Brisbane loves a drink but wants to feel more nourished and grown-up than bad bar food and pub grub. So tapas ticks all the boxes – a bit more spice than sushi, as much variety as yum cha, and a lot cheaper than degustation.

The real fun begins once we have taken up our positions to the tapas table. Doing the rounds are a respectable selection of cold tapas, such as small bowls of olives, and montaditos (wedges of bread topped with light blue cheese mousse with pear crisp & wild rocket, or sundried tomato & chickpea puree with pickled garlic). The hot tapas items prove more stimulating, and materialise upon ordering in lightening

speed. The kitchen works at a cracking pace to keep up with our demand for aceitunas fritas (fried green olives stuffed with almonds and red peppers), gambas y pancetta (marinated prawns wrapped in pancetta with romesco sauce) and empanadas (hand-made pastry parcels with beef and lamb, or spinach and béchamel filling) served with a vivid green mojo verde (a green herb and olive oil sauce). The stellar dish of the night is the scallops sautéed in cava, a creamy champagne sauce. The scallops are super fresh and sweet, and cooked to perfection with the rich and

moorish sauce.

There is a wonderfully friendly and informal quality of the tapas train, which also serves as a huge communal dining table with high chairs. It allows the right balance of a cosy meal with friends and some fun cross-table banter with other diners. We eventually retire to the tables in the more formal dining area for coffee and freshly made churros (Spanish doughnuts), which are served with a dipping pot of rich dark chocolate sauce. It is a perfectly sweet and intense finale to a surprisingly engaging evening.



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