

BREW

Hop on board

Beer emerges from the bar and ventures into the dining room.



Good cheers ... Pilsener served with crisp skin ocean trout with honey at Garfish; Amber Ale with duck confit with wild mushrooms, baby herb salad and port jus at Bistro Stock.

Beer is consumed with meals often enough in front bars across the country but is it grown up enough to be invited into the fine dining area? Plenty of us would like to think so and, indeed, some even claim beer's greater versatility allows it to go places that wine just can't reach.

Imagine confit of rabbit, slow-cooked in ale, served with a malty amber ale. Or a dessert built around whole pears poached in porter with mascarpone and shaved chocolate, served with a strong, dark ale. Both matches were served at a recent dinner held at the Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel to celebrate 20 years of in-house brewing.

At The Wharf Restaurant, executive chef Aaron Ross introduced a beer-themed dinner by saying he'd prepared "all the classic dishes you have with beer: pizza, something deep-fried, something Asian and pork", each course matched with a pair of beers selected by Lion Nathan chief brewer Bill Taylor.

What followed was decidedly more sophisticated than it sounded - spicy sausage pizetta (with Hahn Premium), tempura oysters with cucumber relish and mirin-soy dipping sauce (Kirin Ichiban and Hahn Super Dry), Sichuan-spiced spring chicken (James Squire Golden Ale and

Beck's) and a pair of suckling pigs, carved in front of diners (James Squire Amber Ale and Toohey's Old Black Ale).

Beer really comes into its own with tapas-style servings, exemplified at the Redoak Boutique Beer Cafe where the ever-changing tasting boards feature combinations of house beers served in 125ml shot glasses matched with four dainty dishes. Grilled scallop with pilsener, beef carpaccio with bock, potato rosti with strong ale and raspberry jelly with the signature Framboise Froment are recent pairings.

Meanwhile, the James Squire Chef's Match competition, which runs until the end of August, has 20 eateries serving special two-dish menus - entree and main - matched with two James Squire beers. The participating restaurants and gastro-pubs will be visited by anonymous judges from Restaurant & Catering NSW and the winner

stands to collect \$2500 plus a stack of James Squire beers.

"We deliberately chose un-hatted restaurants to give the up-and-comers a go," says Balzac chef-owner Matthew Kemp, who is co-chairman of the judges. "It's all about getting these guys to start thinking about creating dishes that work with the particular beer matches."

Malt Shovel master brewer Chuck Hahn, his co-chairman, says: "Judges score each dish on flavour, innovation and passion." Before the competition kicked off, he gave a masterclass to the chefs using the five James Squire beers.

They were encouraged to be as creative as possible with their matches and extra points will be awarded for "the James Squire spirit", which Hahn says is "an overall good feeling" and "how enthusiastic the staff are about our brands".