

eating out

Carry me back

A superbly executed menu in sumptuous surroundings is part of a welcome restoration of a heritage building, says David Burton.

UNTIL the recent development of Chew's Lane, the public has never had the opportunity to linger in the precinct's classiest address — the six-storeyed Free Gothic high-rise on the corner of Victoria St.

Built for the Colonial Carrying Company at the height of the British Empire in 1927, the building's grand lobby has always exuded a mildly intimidating sense of confidence and wealth — and thanks to clever renovation as 3C restaurant and bar, diners now get to appreciate its architectural details close up.

I'm not normally a fan of mezzanine-floor dining rooms, which often have a cramped atmosphere. But I'll gladly make an exception for 3C, where the mezzanine elevates diners up amongst the arches of the Gothic windows. Being in the widened, flattened (as opposed to pointed) Tudor style, these arches look almost modern.

They marry effortlessly with 3C's modernist plate glass railings and spectacular sculptural lampshades, which float over the atrium like ghostly dinosaur bones.

The colour scheme uses various shades of chocolate: from the dark wooden tables to the chairs (Thonet, with cream leather squabs) and the gorgeously rich reddish-brown carpet, it all looks good enough to eat. Even the backrest of the leather banquette resembles a giant slab of Whittaker's bittersweet Ghana, its over-sized, flattened shape a funky update on Victorian buttoned leather.

Tantalising glimpses of embossed silk wallpaper are lit by sleek modern lamps. It's the gentlemen's club revisited — chunky, masculine, austere — possessing, in its own way, an elegance comparable with the art deco magnificence of St John's Heineken Hotel and the Classical interior of Logan Brown. Even the view couldn't be bettered elsewhere along Victoria St: from the window seats, you look



nitty gritty

3C – Colonial Carrying Company
 Chews Lane Precinct,
 56 Victoria St
 Phone: (04) 913 1224
 Fully licensed
Open: lunch and dinner
Price range of mains: \$21.50-\$31.50
Food: ★★★★★
Service: ★★★★★
Ambience: ★★★★★
Wine list: ★★★★★
Cost: \$101 for two (excluding wine)

Food at 3C is elevated above the ordinary.
 Picture: MAARTEN HOLL

out on the colonnade of metal nikaus that wrap around Wellington Public Library.

We dined here on a Tuesday night, and the ambience seemed perfect for a romantic tete-a-tete — though I could imagine that on a busy night the din might be funnelled through the atrium from the public bar below.

In the spirit of the Colonial Carrying Company, 3C promises to bring us “the best from the corners of the world”.

From Nice comes the 3C Tuna Nicoise, a typically modern interpretation of the famous salad, using seared fresh tuna in place of canned, and including cooked potatoes and green beans, which everybody expects and loves, despite the protestations of the late Jacques Medecin, who wrote in his 1962 classic, *Cuisine Nicoise*, “never, I beg you, include boiled potato or any other boiled vegetable in your salade nicoise”.

Like all the food here, this salad was notable for its precise knife work and presentation: the tomatoes had been deseeded and cut into thin crescents, the beans pulled lengthways through one of those fancy cutters, the hard-boiled egg neatly sliced and stacked to one end of the long rectangular plate.

Again, in the deconstructed ratatouille that accompanied the Moroccan chicken, the tiny cubes of aubergine could have been measured with a set square, while wafer-thin rounds of zucchini had been cooked through at the last minute, and so retained their crunch.

Enquiring from our obliging waiter exactly how hot was the Moroccan chicken, the reply was “medium-spiced”. Actually, I'd have rated both the chicken and its accompanying harissa butter-dressed Israeli couscous as extremely mildly spiced, but that is a matter of per-

sonal taste. Again the cooking of the chicken breast (or to be precise, chicken supreme, since the wing stump was left on) was technically perfect — succulent within, but with a crisp, golden brown skin on the outside.

The mild spicing made the chicken all the more compatible with a deliciously juicy, cedary, cigar-box perfumed 2004 Barossa cabernet sauvignon from Limb Vineyards — just one of many treasures from the cellar.

Having been roasted and then properly rested, lamb cutlets were rosy all the way through, yet oozing not a drop of bloody juice — and so tender they could have been cut with a fork. Rubbed with mustard and herbs, and served with kumara mash over a subtly minted pinotage jus, the dish was representative of our meal as a whole — conservative, but elevated above the ordinary by fine craft skills.

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French 3:	5.45pm-7.45pm	Thu 25 Sep to 11 Dec
Greek 2:	6pm-8pm	Mon 15 Sep to 8 Dec
Italian 2:	6pm-8pm	Tue 9 Sep to 25 Nov
Italian 3:	6pm-8pm	Mon 15 Sept to 8 Dec
Italian 3:	12.30pm-2.30pm	Thu 18 Sep to 11 Dec
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