

Executive chef Nathan Jackson (far right) has given Bayly's Bistro a fresh new menu.



Pictures: Adam Yip

## Bistro gets standing ovation

The arts crowd flocking to the Ensemble Theatre now has another reason to visit the Kirribilli venue, writes **Laura Albulario**

**K**irribilli's Ensemble Theatre has raised the curtain on its re-vamped Bayly's Bistro, with a new chef, fresh menu and contemporary renovation. Starring as the lead is executive chef Nathan Jackson, freshly plucked from some of Sydney's top restaurants including 3 Weeds Hotel Rozelle, Vicinity Dining Alexandria and the Public Dining Room, Balmoral Beach.

With sittings to compliment show times, the res-

taurant has long played a supporting role to one of Australia's oldest theatres, but Jackson is making it a headline act in its own right.

"It's not just a bite to eat before the show, it's an experience in itself," he says. "We want people to talk about what was on their plate, not just what was on stage."

In response to the brief, gone are the platters of thawed seafood, turkey breast and meat-and-three veg combos, and in their

place is a dynamic, hyper-seasonal menu, reinvented roughly every six weeks to coincide with each new play.

King trout makes its way onto each menu in some form, cured in-house for three days before being smoked and plated with the likes of fennel and blood orange for a burst of freshness. Another favourite, Humpty Doo barramundi, arrives bright-eyed from the Northern Territory every day. Lately, Jackson has been spicing it up with a house-

made Thai red curry paste, fresh ginger and galangal.

Jackson's signature parfait also gets a regular seasonal twist, currently huddled under a wintry blanket of salted caramel, honeycomb and toffee apple.

A contemporary wine list has further boosted the restaurant's foodie cred, featuring about 25 options with nods to some of the top Australian and European growing regions.

"It's high-end bistro-style dining," says Jackson. "It's



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“It’s elegant, concise and delicious, but also needs to be something that we can smash out in an hour”

elegant, concise and delicious, but also needs to be something that we can smash out in an hour. We have 65 customers arriving all at once, and if we run late, the show runs late.”

The restaurant’s facelift pays homage to its show-stopping location — a converted boat shed that hovers over Careening Cove. Wrap-around glass puts glittering water and bobbing boats on full show, reflected in an ornate oversized mirror. With light dancing on every sur-

face, there’s no extra adornment required beyond the parquet tables, uncluttered bar and clusters of hanging ferns.

Tucked down the end of a quiet residential street, the theatre and bistro have remained somewhat of a treasured secret among the local arts set.

While the regulars ensure a full-house most days, there are hopes that the revamp will draw a broader crowd to both the theatre and its buoyant restaurant.

**The Verdict:** ★★★★★

**The Price:** \$\$\$

**What:** Bayly’s Bistro  
**Where:** 78 McDougall St Kirribilli  
**When:** from Tuesday to Saturday  
**Phone:** (02) 9956 8250  
**Web:** ensemble.com.au/bistro



## Masterclass in cooking artichokes

If you have grown your own artichokes, soak them in a bowl of salted water to expel any insects.

Some cooks pull off tougher outer leaves. Generally that is not necessary.

If the artichokes are young and fresh, the stalks can be eaten, otherwise they are cut off at the bottom of the leaves.

Rub lemon on to the part of the artichoke where you have just removed the stalk.

Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil. Cook the artichokes for between 25 and 30 minutes, depending on size. Use a knife to test whether they are cooked properly. It should go in easily or pull off an outside leaf and if the bottom, thick part of the leaf is tender when nibbled or sucked, it is ready.

If eating the artichokes cold, allow them to cool down in the

cooking liquor. Eat with either hollandaise, melted butter or vinaigrette.

Give each of your guests an extra side plate on which to place the discarded leaves.

To eat, pull away the leaves starting at the bottom and suck or nibble the thicker fleshier part at the base of each leaf after dipping into your chosen dressing. The remainder of the leaf can be discarded. When you have eaten the final leaf you will be left with the heart and the choke, a tuft of whitish fibres.

Remove these fibres by scooping them off the flesh with a teaspoon or just pulling them off with your fingers. You are then left with the heart, in a way the whole point of the exercise, which is delicious.

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