



# Auckland *appétit*

*From culinary backwater to the crest of a gastronomic wave, the City of Sails  
is now a world-class foodie destination, reports PETER SWAIN*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON YOUNG

Snapper sashimi, pink  
grapefruit, yuzu ponzu dressing  
and shiso at Ebisu





# SEAFOOD

Chef Brandon Phillips and Kenneth Harper, at Seafood BBQ, with the fresh catch, a hallmark of their Auckland Fish Market eatery

**G**ourmands agree: Auckland's cuisine, trending steadily upward for a decade, is now a match for any city in the southern hemisphere.

The revolution was kick-started by the 2000 and 2003 America's Cups, with the attendant panoply of heavy-hitting sponsors, the world's media, enthusiastic spectators and hungry sailors, then given added impetus by the 2011 Rugby World Cup and this year's round-the-world Volvo Ocean Race. Encouraged by sporting success, as well as urban and dockside regeneration and an increasingly prosperous and cosmopolitan clientele, Auckland's restaurateurs have upped their game. Led by internationally acclaimed





*This page, clockwise from left: mixed sashimi with coiled pickled cucumber, obiko, ginger and sesame dressing, beautifully plated at Ebisu; Dine's elegant surrounds; Gareth Stewart, head chef at Soul; the restaurant's Bluff oysters with traditional mignonette, horseradish and lemon*







Top: the laidback scene at the portside Wynyard quarter;  
bottom: an oenophile's delight at Big Picture Wine

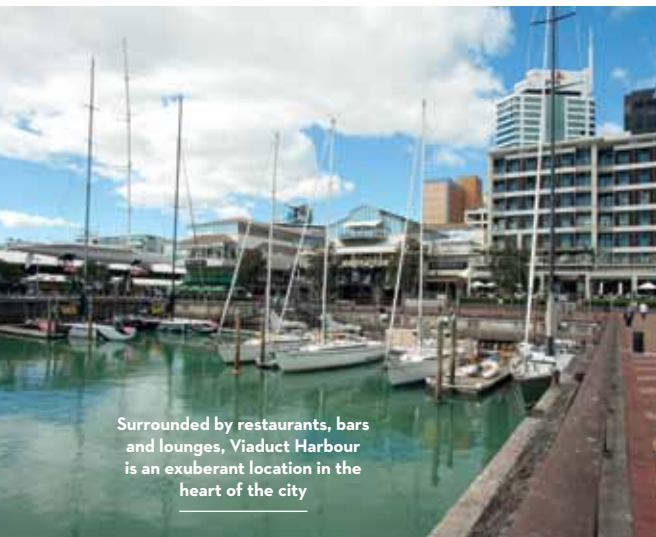
chefs such as Peter Gordon, occidental palates and superb local produce are being creatively enhanced by oriental flavours. Together with the recent rise to maturity of superlative Kiwi wines like Central Otago's Pinot Noirs, the result is epicurean heaven. These four *quartiers* currently dominate Auckland fine dining.

## BRITOMART

The rejuvenation of this historic transport district continues apace with the arrival of **Roxy**, a seductive new fine dining offering in a one-time movie theatre on Fort Lane. With the accent on wild and local, Kiwi chef Sean Marshall's new emporium joins the casual **Everybody's** and vibrant **Imperial Lane** in the same stylish yet relaxed gallery-style venue, but pushes the culinary envelope beyond all expectation. Young razorback pig with caramelised celeriac and ginger bread, and wild venison with red cabbage, coffee and cocoa exemplify the chef's full-flavour style, while the Baba – candied fennel, blood orange, almond, olive oil and sea salt – demonstrate his finesse. Warren Turnbull's elegant **District Dining**, where I enjoyed the balance of an oleaginous kingfish perfectly complemented by wasabi snow and a matched Pyramid Valley Pinot Blanc, has a hot new sibling around the corner. **Mexico** reveals the acclaimed chef's more colourful side, with a younger crowd enjoying the likes of spicy ceviche and lime-buttered corn, or soft tacos with pulled pork, washed down by sangria or one of 11 Mexican beers. Continuing the global theme, the exotically plated Japanese-fusion fare at **Ebisu** is getting raves, with dishes such as seared miso-cured salmon with shiso dressing, and spiced ginger and apple doughnuts with bitter chocolate ganache wowing both local creatives and out-of-towners. Post-prandial entertainment is on tap at the lively **Britomart Country Club**, an astro-turfed popup-style bar complete with late-night DJs, or at the more sedate **Espresso Workshop** where superbarista David Huang works his magic.

## SKYCITY

Clustered around the country's tallest building, with its associated convention centre, hotels and casino, Skycity attracts business types at lunchtime and a more eclectic mix in the evening. Aficionados at Al Brown's superior new oyster bar, **Depot**, go straight for freshly shucked Tio Point oysters, or Cloudy Bay clams, while heavier manna at what is currently one of the city's most hip-and-happening eateries includes milk-fed veal rump and crisp pork hock, terrific with a 2007 Vidal Reserve Syrah. Next door in the Grand Hotel, the soigné **Dine** is Peter Gordon's award-winning signature restaurant. Gordon first made his name in Europe, so his recipe for success combines old-world refinement with home-grown freshness, spiced with Asian piquancy: think miso-marinated Akaroa salmon on roast kumara with sweetcorn ginger purée. Back out on Federal Street, **The Grill** by Sean Connolly is also principally an evening destination, this time with the emphasis on simply cooked, locally sourced red meat and fresh fish. The TV chef's pasture-fed Wagyu fillet with a side order of duck-fat chips is truly memorable, while my John Dory was simply the best I've ever tasted. A few doors away, **Red Hummingbird** has a good selection of beers plus a long



Surrounded by restaurants, bars and lounges, Viaduct Harbour is an exuberant location in the heart of the city

of the pack, Judith Tabron's much-lauded **Soul** caters for the rich and infamous, ladies and bankers who lunch, and sailors who celebrate. With one of the most varied fine dining menus in the city, offerings such as the hot seafood plate for two, with chargrilled banana prawns, beer-battered snapper, saffron-buttered scampi, scallops and Serrano

wine and novel cocktail list, making the bar the perfect end to an evening in the shadow of the Sky Tower.

## WYNYARD

On the North Wharf waterfront opposite the fishing boats that deliver much of its provender, the city's very latest family-friendly hospitality hub, an erstwhile warehouse district, is enjoying its first winter season. The breezy weekend barbecue at the **Auckland Fish Market** has been so successful, it's now going seven-day. Diners choose from market delicacies such as hapuka steaks or salmon fillet piri piri, take them to the grill, watch the chef at work, then settle down in the covered courtyard to enjoy. There's even an interactive guide to fish names in different languages. Just across the way on Jellicoe Street, **Big Picture Wine** provides the perfect vinous accompaniment to any feast; it also stages tastings, and sells notable NZ vintages at cellar-door prices. Carnivores delight in nearby **Marvel Grill**, whose central open-plan kitchen serves up lamb rack, venison and prime steer steak with lashings of cheesy mash and caramelised onion on the side. For the more adventurous, **Urban Turban** provides the tastes and atmosphere of Bombay street food, with bottomless butter chicken and lamb masala particular crowd-pleasers, enhanced by a variety of seating styles both inside and out to suit most occasions.

## VIADUCT HARBOUR

Ranged around a marina chock full of svelte America's Cup-type racing yachts, this grand neighbourhood had led the gastronomic way in Auckland for a number of years. Ahead

ham, tick all the taste bud boxes. A by-product of Food TV, **The Foodstore** is a newer but equally successful entrant in the epicurean stakes. The pungent local abalone, called paua, heads up the signature favourites, with white chocolate Jaffa with Grand Marnier bubbles and chocolate caramel sorbet, accompanied by a Pegasus Bay Finale Noble dessert wine, the perfect way to round out any occasion. Gourmands, including Gordon Ramsay, also gush over the Simon Gault-helmed **Euro** across the way on Princes Wharf. The TV Masterchef's 11-course degustation menu is a series of taste explosions presented as works of edible art, so if apple salsa gazpacho laced in dry ice or mandarin frozen in liquid nitrogen appeal, this is the place. For late night revelry, **Snapdragon's** DJs set the local tone. This gastro-bar has a clubbable games room, a glamorous 1930s-style sitting room and a terrace from which to watch the sun set over the harbour – the perfect end to any Auckland day. ■

## Address book

### ROXY

7 Fort Lane;  
+64 9 929 2701;  
roxy.co.nz

### THE GRILL

90 Federal Street;  
+64 9 363 7067;  
thegrillnz.co.nz

### EVERYBODY'S

7 Fort Lane; +64 9 929 2702;  
everybodys.co.nz

### RED HUMMINGBIRD

84 Federal Street;  
+64 9 363 7078;  
redhummingbird.co.nz

### IMPERIAL LANE

7 Fort Lane;  
+64 9 929 2703;  
theimperiallane.co.nz

### AUCKLAND FISH MARKET

Corner of Daldy & Madden Street;  
+64 9 379 1490;  
afm.co.nz

### DISTRICT DINING

50 Customs Street East;  
+64 9 368 5315;  
districtdining.co.nz

### MEXICO

23 Britomart Place;  
+64 9 366 1759;  
mexico.net.nz

### EBISU

116-118 Quay Street;  
+64 9 300 5271;  
ebisu.co.nz

### MARVEL GRILL

32 Anzac Street;  
+64 9 486 2249;  
marvelgrill.co.nz

### BRITOMART COUNTRY CLUB

31 Galway Street; +64 9 303 2541;  
britomartcountryclub.co.nz

### URBAN TURBAN

39 Jellicoe Street;  
+64 9 309 9990;  
urbanturban.co.nz

### ESPRESSO WORKSHOP

11 Britomart Place;  
+64 9 302 3691;  
espresso-workshop.co.nz

### SOUL BAR & BISTRO

Viaduct Harbour;  
+64 9 356 7249;  
soulbar.co.nz

### DEPOT EATERY AND OYSTER BAR

86 Federal Street;  
+64 9 363 7048;  
eatatdepot.co.nz

### THE FOODSTORE

Market Square;  
+64 9 377 0125;  
thefoodstore.tv

### DINE BY PETER GORDON

90 Federal Street;  
+64 9 363 7030;  
skycityauckland.co.nz/  
Restaurants/dine

### EURO

143 Quay Street;  
+64 9 309 9866;  
eurobar.co.nz

### SNAPDRAGON

204 Quay Street;  
+64 9 357 6147;  
snapdragonbar.co.nz

Afternoon bustle at the fast-paced Depot Eatery and Oyster Bar

