

A match made in heaven

The attention to detail in menu, wine and decor make Merricote stand out from the crowd



MARY-JANE DAFFY
DISHING IT UP

Finally – a dining destination in the charming High Street, Westgarth strip. This is exciting. And oh what quirk Merricote has injected into a locale known for its small-town sentiment. It's in the digs that housed the previously popular Jules Bar, except only the bones of the old bar still exist.

Husband and wife team Bronwyn and Rob Kabboord have created a series of separate dining areas that shine with personality. It's all in the details. Porcelain animals wrapped around rolled serviettes sit happily on light wooden tables. Concrete floors are softened by Persian rugs, and a zigzag of tiles distracts from a waiters' workbench of cupboards and shelves.

Inside the smaller second dining room a feature wall stands out above the open fireplace. The black wall is littered with Rob's copper pots and pans collected over his many years manning various kitchens. "They'd spent a lot of time in cupboards," Bronwyn says. They've now found a worthy home.

Faux grass has been rolled out to cover the courtyard and is adorned with white wooden chairs and tables. It's *Alice in Wonderland*-esque with a whimsical wall mural of the countryside, and large white animals dotted throughout.

"It's our living room," Bronwyn says of the design. "We just wanted to do our thing."

The duo have bounced around enough venues to know what works. Rob spent time in the celebrated kitchens of Sydney restaurants Claude's and Quay, and most recently fired up the stoves at Prahran's Hotel Max, with trained sommelier Bronwyn cracking the whip out the front. Now it's their stage and Bronwyn has lost little time flexing her talent for booze selection.

There's a healthy list of beer. Canada-brewed Sapporo comes in a 650ml can (\$15), there's a rich De Molen Amber Ale from Holland (\$9), and a 3 Ravens 610ml longneck (\$14) represents the local area, having been carted down the hill from Thornbury.

The wine list may be short, but it's incredibly interesting. Bronwyn has sourced the best pairing to Rob's food, pulled from all corners of the globe. A glass of Hochkirch biodynamic riesling (\$8.50) is the perfect palate cleanser with the duck rillettes (\$7).

Rob's talent in the kitchen is evident. His hearty European fare is given a modern angle without the flashiness.

And for \$7 the serving of rillettes was huge. A royal blue pot held soft shredded duck with a subtle gaminess and richness that four vinegar-laden cornichons cut through. Paper-thin buttered sourdough cracked under the weight of the meat.

I couldn't pass up a dish titled the garden pea "floating island" (\$16). A layered circular stack of al dente disks of vibrant green asparagus,



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Merricote

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Hours Thursday to Saturday, noon to 3pm,
Tuesday to Saturday 5.30pm to 10pm

Perfect for

- Indulgent cheese lovers
- A family affair without rigidity

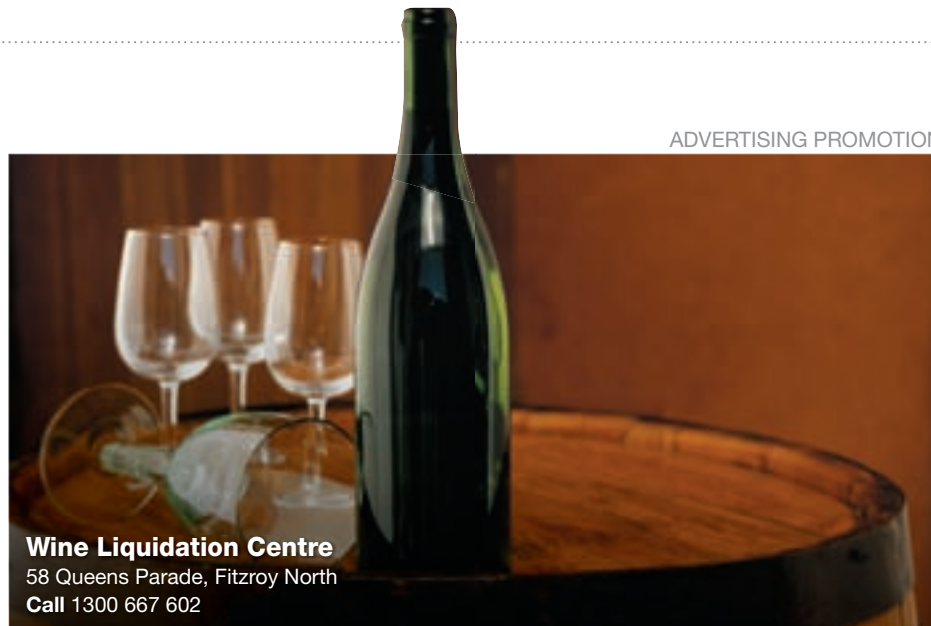
cucumber and peas was topped with surprisingly light aerated creme.

For my main, three John Dory fillets (\$28) came perched on balls of spritely cucumber, soft celery and sticky sweet dates, the crispy skin of the Dory yielding to a wonderfully white fleshy centre.

But the piece de resistance was the cheese trolley. Yep, a cheese trolley. Wheeled out from seclusion, a wooden trolley was filled with blue, brie, cheddar, French, ashen, gruyere, smelly and soft goat's cheeses. It's all served up table-side with whichever condiment is seasonal – on this occasion, it was quince paste.

Bronwyn and Rob, welcome to Westgarth. Food lovers, welcome to Merricote. ■

*Got a favourite spot you'd like to share?
Email mary-jane.daff@fairfax.com.au*



Wine Liquidation Centre

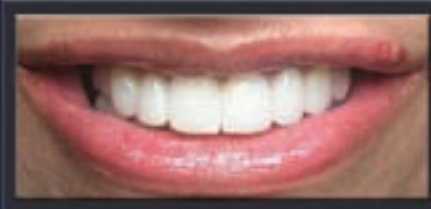
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No need to whine about wine prices

At the Wine Liquidation Centre award-winning wines rest peacefully in their bottles until once, every six to eight weeks, the warehouse opens its doors to an excitable public. This Fitzroy North warehouse tries to keep a cork on the dates it allows the public inside, as the space can get rather tight with such a good selection on offer. With wine prices set to rise following a bad grape harvest last year, the hunt for bargains will be even more competitive. Top-quality drops including Evans and Tate, Penfolds, Wolf Blass and Rothbury Estate pack the warehouse shelves. The Wine Liquidation Centre reduces all stock prices to about half their recommended value. The family-owned business is able to offer these prices as it cleverly stocks wines at the end of vintage, lines that have been deleted or their export orders reduced, or labels that have been re-branded. On the big day, browsers will be encouraged to sample a range of warehouse products as more than 100 wines are popped open for tasting. Cheers!

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