

-Jamieson reviews the restaurant at the Museum Hotel and a chef who's doing it 'his way'



an indolent summer spent around and eating a lot, it's appropriate to dine at a restaurant named after an animal of the same. Though why you'd choose a restaurant Hippopotamus is less clear. It intrigues, and that's a

only two years ago, the Museum Hotel is already a part of Wellington's fine-dining scene. It boasts a panoramic view, a reputation for good service and the talents of a creative French

chefs' signature entrée, 'my way' – cubes of salmon with a soy gelée, wakame seaweed and a potato-and-crab cake, which was disappointingly short on crustacean.

When it came to dessert, my French guest took over. I had been thinking warm

Our waiter chose another good match from the same winery – a 2008 Tom's Block Pinot Noir – to go with my rack of lamb. The meat was roasted then brushed with wholegrain mustard, and it came with a trio of tortellini filled with tenderly braised meat from the shank. I could be picky and point out that the chef's pasta dumplings were not shaped like tortellini, but I'm not complaining. Doing it 'his way' gave me a cupped centre in which to pour the little jug of soy-reduced jus that came with it.

The lamb followed a first-class snail-and-mushroom vol-au-vent. Snails, which have very little flavour of their own, are usually loaded with garlic. This dish was delicate – tender snail, crisp pastry and buttery sauce – all perfumed with a truffle foam that lapped at the base of the vol-au-vent and was so aromatic I would have been happy just breathing it in.

Which was just as well, because it wasn't my entrée. I chose scallops. They were big, fat and Canadian, which was a little surprising. And, while they tasted just fine, they were served on a potato-and-crab cake, which was disappointingly short on crustacean.

When it came to dessert, my French guest took over. I had been thinking warm

**“tender snail,  
crisp pastry  
and buttery  
sauce – all  
perfumed with  
a truffle foam  
that lapped at  
the base of the  
vol-au-vent and  
was so aromatic  
I would have  
been happy just  
breathing it in.”**

limoncello pudding, but it just so happened that we were dining on the eve of La Chandeleur (Candlemas), which the French celebrate by eating crêpes. Evidently, it is unlucky not to, and so out came the trolley, the Grand Marnier and the matches.

The crêpe suzette performance is the only concession to traditional hotel dining at Hippopotamus and, although perfectly executed, it doesn't quite fit. It is dated and, while I'm at it, so is the decor.

The food and the service deserve better than burgundy drapes and artificial roses, so it's good to hear talented designer Michael Nalder is on the case. Having outfitted a number of Wellington restaurants, including the fantastical Osteria del Toro, it will be interesting to see what he can do with a hippopotamus.

## DIGESTED

**Address:** Museum Hotel, 90 Cable Street

**Phone:** 04 802 8935

**Cost:** Mains average \$35, sides \$10

**Open:** Breakfast and dinner 7 days.  
Lunch Monday to Friday.

**Food:** Classic European cuisine

**Drink:** Neudorf Chardonnay 2008

**Rating:**

