



Citron Modern Asian Restaurant

3 Macgregor St, Wilston. Ph: 3356 5910.
 Chef: Mark Newman. Owners: Robert Foley and Mark Newman. Lunch, Tue-Sun; dinner, Tue-Sat. Licensed, BYO wine. Most credit cards & eftpos. Wheelchair access. On-street parking.

Food // 8.5 Wine // 6
 Service // 8.5 Ambience // 8

ratings 10: perfect; 9: excellent; 8: very good; 7: good; 6: passable; 5: disappointing; 1-4: woeful.

A fine fusion

Tony Harper was charmed by more than the service in this zesty restaurant

An Englishman and a Californian peddling Asian cuisine – no matter how contemporary the Asian food might be, it's enough to set my alarm bells ringing. Though I'm not saying that it can't be done: there are myriad chefs playing successfully with food cultures beyond their own, and one only needs to consider the dizzy heights reached by the likes of David Thompson and Neil Perry to realise that cooking exceptional Asian doesn't require a native touch.

Nonetheless, I fret if I'm taking my place in a restaurant for the first time, and I can see an obvious cultural mix. That's because of the many places that treat Asian food as something to put on the menu without any sort of attempt to understand the culture or the cuisine.

The Californian in this case is Robert Foley, part-owner and front-of-house leader at Citron in the bustling heart of Wilston, and the Pom is Mark Newman, chef and co-owner. The pair previously had Piccolo restaurant in Ascot, which served very good food with no discernible relationship to the fare they produce at Citron.

Their ability to run a restaurant is instantly apparent. The space is large, airy and welcoming. The greeting, and subsequent service, is first rate. And I truly mean first rate, not just friendly and capable. The skills and demeanour of the floor staff would be at home in posh restaurants, but they are happily devoid of stuffiness and snobbery.

The menu is billed as modern Asian, though most dishes are of Thai origin, and the "modern" tag is more a nod to presentation and composition than any sort of cuisine fusion. And, thankfully, the Englishman knows his stuff. The food is seriously good, abundantly complex and incredibly zesty and fresh. The play between sweet and sour, salty and hot is perfectly executed. It is the sort of food that begs to be shared, one or two plates at a time. That's a traditional approach to eating Thai, and it's an approach for which this menu is designed.

Starters of miang som (crab salad on betel leaves, \$8, left), beef and lemon grass bites (\$6) and ma hor (sticky balls of pork, prawns and palm sugar on pineapple, \$6) provide massive flavour hits, and they really get the pulse racing in anticipation of what's to follow.

The entrees (\$16-\$18) also have a wow factor, but all follow a very similar structural vein – salad sharply dressed with a lime-based agglomeration, with the various proteins treated differently. The mains (\$25-\$33) are far more varied in terms of both form and content, perhaps less enthralling than the entrees, but imaginative, delicious and beautifully executed nonetheless.

A small but capable wine list, thoughtfully chosen to suit the cuisine, completes the package.

In short, Citron offers a fairly sublime experience, with enough excitement packed into each morsel that I went back for more within the month. By definition, it's not cutting-edge food – I've seen it before, although rarely in Brisbane – but it is incredibly well executed, utterly delicious and very inexpensive.

Photographs // Richard Waugh

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