

Silent partners

EVERY now and then I think about how lucky I am to eat at so many restaurants.

Certainly some are brilliant, others mediocre, but one afternoon sitting in the sun at Il Cacciatore Restaurant, I was gripped by the guilt monster for always leaving my husband at home looking after the children.

Strangely enough, my dining partner Josephine, was having similar thoughts.

But in a mere moment all thoughts of guilt were gone. The children would have dived into the pond in front of the dining room, and well, it was an extremely relaxing lunch, we didn't need the distraction of partners.

No, we agreed, this was one restaurant that was too good to share with them.

It was a perfect lunch, the sun was shining, the service was unbelievably good, the wine list was well matched with the menu and the food was delicious.

It was a casual affair and the staff realised that we just wanted to be left alone to savour the peace and quiet.

Our food was served up as if by magic and my pizza of the day topped with locally produce labna was stunning, while the aged Hunter beef fillet on a sweet potato rosti with wilted spinach and a balsamic honey jus kept the normally talkative Josephine quiet for a while.

We were dining from the lunch menu which is not only extensive, it also features a range of different dishes to suit all tastes and budgets.

While Josephine's aged Hunter beef fillet was \$32, there were salads from \$12 through to a range of entrees from \$1 to \$16 and lighter meals from \$15 to \$18.

As befits a casual Italian eatery, many of the dishes have been designed to share and the bruschetta menu features a myriad of flavours.

The whole package was wonderful, from the time we entered until we left with advice from those magical waitresses about where to hunt down the wine we enjoyed with our meal.

quick bite

What: Il Cacciatore Restaurant, McDonalds Road, Pokolbin. Lunches from \$3.50 to \$32.

Wines: Fully licensed with numerous Hunter wines.

Functions: Perfect for a gentile soiree.

Open: For lunch on Saturday and Sundays and dinner, with a separate menu, seven nights.

Bookings: 4998 7818.

Who wants the distraction of children and spouses when the food and service are this good? Not **JENNY TARRAN** ...



Verdict: Everything about the Il Cacciatore was brilliant, so brilliant that it is being awarded *Taste's* inaugural **Happy Chef** award for the complete dining experience.

Happy Chefs will be given to cafes or restaurants that stand out from the crowd. An eatery may gain a Happy Chef because they serve brilliant coffee, have stunning desserts or atmosphere, but it has to have that something special to be awarded *Taste's* highest accolade.

So it's fitting that the Happy Chef awards are launched with a restaurant that wins for every reason imaginable.

SERENE: You can find a sunny corner and savour the peace and quiet, as well as the delicious food, at Pokolbin's Il Cacciatore

