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The Mouth: Restaurant Ka serves up a meal so delicious, the review is hard to write

At a tiny venue in Darlinghurst, The Mouth discovered a restaurant gem that was more like that of turning up at the home of a mate ... who can really, really cook.

The Mouth

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Succulent oysters at Restaurant Ka. Picture: Supplied

If your humble reviewer may make a confession, this review was really difficult to write.

Because while it is easy to fire slings and arrows at bad dishes and twee decor, it turns out to be a lot harder to put pen to paper after a meal that was, quite simply, lovely.

So, dammit, we really should be marking down Restaurant Ka and its chef-owner Zachary Ng for making this critic's job more difficult than it needs to be.

Yet that would be unfair: Ng, who has a star pedigree that includes cutting his teeth at Sepia, should be congratulated for serving his own food in his own tiny (ten seater) space on Burton Street, Darlinghurst, and doing it with joy.

On a recent night, the atmosphere – just Ng and his team and two other couples at the countertop – was more like that of turning up at the home of a mate who can really, really cook.



Tiny plates, perfectly execute: Restaurant Ka. Picture: Supplied

Except that, as a master of complex processes and smoking and dry ageing and so on, Ng is doing stuff that really can only be accomplished by a pro.

We had pre-ordered a half-dozen oysters, and can only recommend that you do too.



Restaurant Ka si a lesson in what can be done with just a few ingredients and a lot of care. Picture: Supplied

On the night we visited the molluscs were from Merimbula: plump, sweet, saline, with a bitey gingery vinaigrette.

Then, after the obligatory “snacks”, the fun really began.

First, a little ceramic cup containing a few tiles of swordfish belly atop a fusiony admixture of Szechuan peppers and cornichons and, bizarrely, jalapeno. Slightly dissonant, but it works and we wound up with that little 9-volt battery buzz on the tongue.

Then, tuna (fatty and lean, aged in house) on a bed of something crunchy with house-smoked pearls of roe and a horseradish cream. This was very showy, but very good.

What came next almost looked like a disappointment, little noodly ribbons of squid atop a black inky emulsion.

Yet, it was anything but – a sort of Zen throttling back that showed what can be done with just a few ingredients and a lot of care (Ng cleans his calamari in salt water, for example, so as not to lose the flavour of the sea).

There was more – notably a piece of fish (too big) with a “chicken butter” sauce that was every bit as good as it sounds – and a well cooked piece of duck whose sauce, frankly, could have enjoyed a bit more balance.

The best bit? All of this was a relatively good value at \$180 per person, plus drinks.

Do yourself a favour and book in immediately, before it gets discovered and becomes impossible to get into.