

## CAFE

## Putting on the ritz

with Alison Cotes

**H**IGH tea is one of the most civilised meals. And when it's presented exquisitely — as it is at High Societea — the experience verges on greatness and is worth the expense.

This place is no cheap teabag-and-sandwich-in-a-hurry. You pay for what you get, and here that means a true sense of occasion.

Nor is it the place for badly-behaved children, and at \$10.50 their special children's menu featuring Vegemite and cheese straws, fairy bread, smiley cupcake and a chocolate chip cookie, washed down with a berry spider, should be kept as a reward rather than a bribe.

Try as I might, I could find nothing to fault here. There are fresh roses everywhere, fine English bone china (a different pattern at every table), white linen tablecloths, attentive waiters with sexy French accents, a huge bowl of strawberries on the sideboard, and 15 different kinds of tea, including the Marco Polo blend of Chinese and Tibetan flowers and berries from the house of Mariages Freres.

If you want to go the whole hog (hardly an appropriate phrase in this context, but never mind), try the Royal Ascot Tea served on a three-tiered cake stand so high that we had to move it aside so that we could see each other.

On the bottom tier were tiny chicken sandwiches, rolled smoked salmon and crumbly-hot savoury tarts, while the second tier held baby pikelets and tiny scones as exquisite to taste as they were to look at. They were served with double cream, naturally, and the only

kind of jam fit to grace such a display, made from pure raspberries.

By the time we reached the third tier, however, we realised that we had over-ordered, for we managed only a few of the selection of petits-fours, sweet tarts and chocolate treats, and had to take the chocolate plaque home to impress the family.

All this cost \$25 each, and included a glass of Pimms, but did not include the tea, which was another \$3.50 a pot. A less elaborate selection costs \$20 a person, again not including tea or coffee (which is filter, not espresso).

Delicious as this was, it probably wasn't the best choice for lunch, as there were more sweet treats than savoury, so another day we chose selections that were slightly less decadent.

The roasted aubergine tart (\$14.50) was an absolute triumph, from the golden flaky pastry shell (chef Olivier Sofo trained as a patissier, and must be one of the best in Brisbane) filled with black mushrooms finely chopped, topped with wilted spinach and crowned by a thick round of eggplant sauteed to just the right texture, the whole concoction surrounded by just enough olive tapenade.

It was hearty but not so filling that there wasn't room for a slice of cake — and you've never seen cabinet cakes like these, for Sofo makes them all himself. A vanilla cheesecake, an almond and quince tart, a rich crumbly chocolate cake and some finely decorated sponge cakes, all using lots of rose petals and spun sugar in the decoration, were tempting, but I am always drawn to the famous Paris-Brest, and this was one of the best I've ever had.

The waiter explained the provenance of this French triumph, that it was made to celebrate the famous bicycle race between the two cities, which accounts



EXQUISITE . . . flourless chocolate cake and three-tiered stand, at High Societea, below. Pictures: Drew Fitzgibbon

for the wheel shape of the choux pastry, which is then split and filled with pastry cream, in this case chocolate and vanilla, and topped with a strawberry, red and sweet all the way through.

My friend was drawn to the steamed prawn salad (\$16) and house-made duck liver pate with apple cardamom compote and calvados jelly (\$14.50), and nearly decided on the lobster medallion sandwiches (\$19.50), but in the end settled for something comparatively simple, a trio of sandwiches filled respectively with roast beef fillet, smoked salmon, and leg ham and brie, with the usual additional bits, but accompanied on their tray by a glass full of fresh green salad with a choice of dressing. The price — \$15.50 — seems a lot for sandwiches, but these were so perfect that we didn't begrudge a cent of it.

High Societea completely bowled us over. We went back a second time just to check that it was as good as we thought, and it was even better. It's only been open a few weeks, but we couldn't find any wobbles in either service or food, and as the Ascot push has already discovered it, it would be a good idea to book if you plan on going.

Because it's not often you find perfection, at any price, and I've never been to a better tea shop, anywhere in the world. It's just as good as the Ritz.



## HIGH SOCIETEA

**Address:** Bonney Place, 318 Junction Rd, Clayfield  
**Phone:** 3357 4299  
**Hours:** Tues-Sat 9am-4pm  
**Liquor status:** BYO bottled wine, corkage \$1.50 per person  
**Prices:** light meals \$14.50-\$16; high teas \$15-\$25; children's tea parties \$10.50 per child; pot of tea \$3.50; plunger coffee \$3.50  
**Owner:** Kathy Heath  
**Chef:** Olivier Sofo  
**Parking:** plenty off-road  
**Wheelchair access:** yes  
**Other:** all credit cards except DC;

table service; 15 per cent surcharge public holidays; airconditioned; toilets shared with doctors' surgery; noise level low

## The score

**Food:** 18  
**Service:** 18  
**Ambience:** 19  
**Value for money:** 14  
**About the score:** 0-5 don't bother; 6-9 needs serious improvement; 10-12 reasonable; 13-14 good; 15-17 very good; 18-19 exceptional; 20 perfection