



*Reviewed by  
Derek Taylor*

*The International Wine and Food Society  
celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at*

## *The Royal Grill*

*Royal Hotel, 267 Smith St, 031 333 6000*

*Chefs: Chris Black, Aubergine Restaurant, Jackie Cameron, Hartford House, Andrew Draper, Harvey's Restaurant, Marcelle Roberts, Café 1999, Grant Parker, The Royal Grill.*

*Two more chefs were in our minds as this great occasion began with a glass of Rapeneau brut rosé Champagne, completing a group of talents you could call the magnificent seven.*

*They were, first of all, Yvonne Cosson the gifted French chef-patron of La Petite Normandie in Ramsgate who was tragically killed last year. Had she lived Yvonne would have won the society's highest award for the past year. An evocative memoir of her achievements was read and, to her memory, we drank a good wine that she would have enjoyed.*

*And in that magnificent Edwardian grill room, memories crowd in of Werner Koch, the great Swiss chef who established the Royal's old reputation for superb food by winning the IWFS award for fine-dining three times – more than any other restaurateur so far.*

*I called him our pope of chefs once and he never forgot to give me a culinary blessing every time we met until – to his family and friends -- his painfully early death three years ago.*

*First up of the five chefs presenting a course each was the Royal's Grant Parker but unfortunately other duties called him away. Nevertheless, his pre-dinner snacks were appreciated: some very pleasant little creations,*

*although I noticed some rather leathery pastry here and there: a reminder that the Royal is now a teaching hotel and its students' skills are not always as good as they will eventually achieve.*

*Then came Marcelle Roberts' excellent composition of organic little beetroots in three contrasting textures. One of them, a shooter glass of beet reduction with a contrasting ball of creamy Gorgonzola floating on top, was exquisite. Rocket and chopped nuts with drizzled walnut oil framed the young beet flavours. An outstanding kick-off of a dish. With it we drank a lively 2008 Nitida sauvignon blanc.*

*Next was Chris Black's tartar of Norwegian salmon and trout surrounded by a beautifully judged tomato consommé. The tartar was memorable and its subtly contrasting flavours were supported but not overwhelmed by the consommé. Altogether, an outstanding dish. Defying tradition, it might have gained by preceding Marcelle's more robust beet flavours but...the fish nearly always comes second and who was I to make such bolshevik suggestions?*

*An impressed and delighted diner, that's who I was, as we sipped the 2003 Domaine Laroche Chablis premier cru Montmains with Chris's tartar.*

*Andrew Draper, fresh from his recent launch of the new Harvey's restaurant, created the third course: langoustine and pigeon breast served on a bed of Nicoise risotto. This was a romp of a dish with an interesting lot of flavours competing. The little curls of langoustine were delicious. My pigeon breast slices had somehow achieved long contact with the anchovies that enlivened the risotto and this invaded their pigeon identity, but that's unworthy nit-picking or pigeon plucking: it was a lively, greatly enjoyable dish.*

*With it came a taste of a very rare 1996 Hautes Cotes des Nuits Burgundy a great old warrior of a burgundy. (If you can find other survivors of this great vintage they would cost around R3 000 a bottle. The society's cellars have been blessed with some amazingly forethoughtful cellar masters.)*

*Jackie Cameron should have been given an honour-guard of pipers or at least a team of Midlands polo players to escort her main course. Starting with Midlands fillets of beef, attentively aged and cared for, she had*

*massaged a Dijon coating into them and then sear-blackened them to perfection.*

*Sliced thickly and finished with shiitake butter, they were supported by an assertive potato mash infused with truffle. Some chefs don't like to give truffles any competition in flavour, after all they cost a lot. But Jackie is a woman of steady nerve and strong seasoning. Her mash was nearly as sublime as the meat under its red wine sauce – which had also been given a supporting waft of truffle -- and the contrastingly crisp asparagus spears.*

*A perfectly balanced, unforgettable and very satisfying dish. The still-muscular fifteen-years-old Chateau Pichon Baron which accompanied it was, come to think of it, honour-guard enough for Jackie's work.*

*Grant Parker's stand-in, Dean Rocke, presented us with a big hotel dessert: a baked chocolate pudding concealing molten chocolate between nutty and citrus shapes, a teenager's dream of heaven enjoyed by a great many guests with strong memories.*

*A glass of Chateau de Roland sauternes refreshed us and then there were only the coffee, truffled chocolates and a magic sip of Cognac Frapin to end a magical evening. The five chefs, it must be remembered, volunteered their great talents and food in memory of Yvonne. She would have enjoyed it as much as we, her fans and friends, did.*

*Readers interested in the IWFS on-going search for the best of fine-dining can contact Mike White on 031 201 5894.*