

Follow the breeze to Sirocco for good dining

THE first thing that catches your eye when you walk into Sirocco Noosa is the colours. Beautiful red-orange light shades set the scene and, on every table, candles flicker away inside red mosaic glass holders.

Fresh lemons and pomegranates are stacked in bowls on several tables and, when ready, they will head into the kitchen for pickling or pudding. Outside, across the street, the beautiful Noosa River adds a relaxing, endearing energy to the scene.

Every restaurant has a vision and a dream but there is something about this one that is particularly impressive and, importantly, convincing.

Owned by Andy and Leila, their philosophy is based on, and inspired by, the hot Saharan wind that sweeps across North Africa and the Mediterranean basin and into Europe. And, instead of focusing on one of those areas' culinary influences alone, the food you'll find here comes from every place that wind touches: North Africa, Spain, Italy and Turkey ... to name a few.

Much like the wind blows, it seems this venue is all about reaching its customers in places few are really able to. For one of the diners at our table, for example, eating the classic lamb tagine dish with poached quince brought back long forgotten childhood memories of sweet fruit forbidden to her, as it dangled from a neighbour's fence.

Another commented that her experience there was heartwarming and welcoming, much like a grandmother's kitchen. Personally, I appreciated that from the get-go.

It was authentic, simply because the intention here is genuinely concerned with patrons having a complete dining experience to come together as friends, families and lovers and share, laugh and talk over a table of exquisite food.

The objective – and success – to create that sort of space works magic in my eyes. With the likes of head chef Cainan Johnson, who has carved himself a solid reputation in restaurants like Seasons and Habits, it's hard to imagine that Noosa has been without a venue of this calibre for this long.

So, the menu. Even though it's extensive, it's very well thought-out. With such an extensive palette of flavours, spices and condiments their region of inspiration has to offer, studying the choices it's immediately evident that every dish is unique enough not to be overlapped in an option further down the list.

Our table started with the mezze menu, and chose, to share, Spanish prosciutto wrapped haloumi, roasted truss tomatoes on the vine, asparagus spears and balsamic reduction, the salmon fish cakes with preserved lemon aioli, the marinated mixed olive tasting plate and a house speciality, the barbecue WA octopus, Persian feta, preserved lemons and roast balsamic olives.

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My two favourite parts were the salmon cakes' crust, which announced itself with a stunning, lip-smacking lemon zest the moment it entered my mouth, and the in-house marinated olive platter – with one variety literally melting in my mouth, I couldn't get enough. Guests waxed lyrical about the octopus, all leaning in to have a close-up look, hoping to find the secret to its flavour and tenderness.

For mains, my partner was delighted to find swordfish on the menu, and loved for the Cermoula swordfish tagine with kipfler potatoes, capsicum, zucchini, preserved lemon and cous cous.

I chose the Kilcoy eye fillet with soft, melt-in-your-mouth white polenta, ratatouille, red wine demi and roast gold shallots.

This was, without a doubt, the best steak dish I have ever eaten and, coming from a South African background where red meat was pretty much my staple diet, you can trust me on that one.

Guests opted for the classic lamb tagine, which they polished off in record time and from the specials' boar, the duck pie, which was received with an appreciative silence as they savoured the braised treat fused with star anise, cinnamon quill and mandarin peel and set on garlic mash.

The dessert menu was too divine to pass and we shared the date creme brulee served with rhubarb and rosewater pink pavlova and pistachio pashmak and the warm mandarin syrup cake and vanilla bean cream.

Sirocco is a special kind of encounter and we'll be back. After all, if the likes of Matt Preston from the hit TV show Master Chef returns twice in one week-end for more Sirocco goodness, who wouldn't follow suit?

