

neutral bay bar & dining

THE WINNING COMBINATION OF FABULOUS FOOD, SMOOTH SERVICE AND THE FEELING YOU'RE IN YOUR OWN LIVING ROOM, MAKES NEUTRAL BAY BAR & DINING A STAPLE SYDNEY ESTABLISHMENT.

Food, like fashion, can be a very fickle business. One of the biggest challenges new restaurants face is finding a point of difference, a unique edge that sets them apart from the rest and something that keeps patrons coming back as opposed to following the masses to the next 'in vogue' eatery. For Neutral Bay Bar & Dining, that edge is as simplistic as it is charming: a relaxed environment, akin to dining in the comfort of your own home. Celebrated Chef, Alex Kearns (formerly of the eminent Giebe Point Diner) had this goal from the get go – for his customers to feel as though Neutral Bay was their second home.

Walking in to the restaurant is a little like walking in to your grandma's kitchen. Greeted by a banquet of preserved jars filled with olives, pickled onions and capsicums and a string of leather booths, you can't help but feel a sense of comfort and incredibly welcome. Yet the feeling of a family gathering is fleeting as you realise you are standing at a beautiful bar with a delicious menu (including goose liver pate and a charcuterie selection) and a killer cocktail list to boot.

The main dining area also maintains the homey atmosphere with private wooden booths on one side and the other hosting the open kitchen,

blurring the boundaries between chef and diner. This is where Executive Chef Alex Kearns brings his personable and palatable modern Australian creations to life.

To start we opted for the broad bean, pea and pancetta salad topped with an egg poached to absolute perfection. As my fork punctured the yolk, it emptied its runny golden goodness all over the salad, adding the final integral flavour to the exquisite combination. The salumi board with its excellent array of European meats was also superb. Prosciutto, salumi cante and capocollo were served authentically on a simple wooden chopping board, and made for an excellent salad accompaniment.

When it came to the mains, I was drawn to the New Zealand snapper. The fish was cooked beautifully with brittle and salty skin and moist flaky flesh, and came with a delectable mix of chickpeas, chard and romesco sauce. The charcoal grill was also a winner, offering a selection of premium Australian produce, including the South Australian Coorong Angus grass-fed scotch fillet (240g), the dry-aged sirloin on the bone (500g) and the Rangers Valley 300-day grain-fed rump (240g). We ordered the grill medium rare and found the selection tender, flavoursome and melt in your mouth magical.



WORDS Heidi Mortlock
PHOTOGRAPHY Courtesy Neutral Bay Bar & Dining

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Neutral Bay had the wine covered too with an impressive and extensive selection of local and international varietals. France's Rhone Valley and Argentina's Mendoza feature heavily alongside Australia's own Barossa Valley. No grape is left unturned. Despite the well-travelled international reds and whites, two favourites from the list were the product of vineyards much closer to home – the Man O War Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand's Waikato Island and the Quealy 17 Rows Pinot Noir from Victoria's Mornington Peninsula.

As a food critic you're obliged to order dessert to complete your dining experience. This is no chore. The coconut floating island sampled was served with delicious pineapple sorbet and a vanilla anglaise to die for. We also selected the dark chocolate pudding and found it to be an absolute requisite. Soft and warm, it dissolved on the palate and was perfectly matched with a crunchy hazelnut and chocolate sorbet that, despite its richness, found us cleaning up the plate.

Obviously menus have a vital impact on the longevity of a new haunt, but service also plays a key role in a restaurant's success. Finding great food together with great service can be a laborious task. Without trying too hard, the Neutral Bay waiters are attentive and the service is quick. Team that back with the private yet sociable booths, fantastic wine list and beautiful plates and you've found a gem of an eatery that's shaped a smooth edge all of its own.

BOX BRIEF

WHERE ■ 132 Military Road, Neutral Bay

CHEF ■ Alex Kearns

CROWD ■ Although diverse, the crowd is linked by a common appreciation for good food and a relaxed environment

TASTE ■ Modern Australian

HOURS ■ Wednesday to Monday, 5pm-late

WORTH IT ■ It is a great addition to the booming Neutral Bay dining circuit. It also garners favour with locals who can pop into the cocktail bar for after work drinks

NOT SURE ABOUT ■ No background music – a little light music would add to the ambience

