

The surroundings and the food are upmarket, but the prices at this new Pyrmont eatery are decidedly down to earth, writes **Guy Griffin**.

Up at the Point Hotel in Pyrmont a grizzled wharfie sits with his fist around a schooner. He's telling me the old suburb "just isn't the bloody same anymore". Too many "cake-and-coffee yuppies" he says. No sense of community.

Was he right? I had to find out.

Pyrmont's years of urban decline are certainly behind it. Web companies, big telecoms and dynamic boutique advertising agencies are "rebirthing" the suburb's derelict warehouses and heritage terraces. The so-called New Economy is spawning an infrastructure of apartments, restaurants and funky cafes.

Just check out the amazing \$1 billion Jacksons Landing project on the former CSR site. There are 1800 residents of this self-styled urban village. Most are cashed-up empty-nesters sharing landscaped gardens, foreshore promenades, a community centre, gymnasium and swimming pool.

You could say sugaroom is the village diner. The understated Neil Bradford-designed bar/restaurant occupies the ground level of this new precinct, a few steps from the water's edge at Johnstons Bay.

Chef-owner Greg Anderson and his Brazilian-born partner Patricia Nunes obviously have a thing for harbours. Both disembarked from mega-yachts this year after stints as private caterers to the likes of Greg Norman and the Getty family.

I'm here at sunset because it's a magic hour. The bay is bathed in pink light, the stevedore cranes and container terminals opposite are silhouettes, water taxis dart to their destinations, beacons wink. An elderly Chinese fisherman and his tiny granddaughter are on the wharf, baiting a line. This is a rare, peaceful corner of the inner harbour.

The bar is filling up with Jacksons Landing locals – well-to-do, middle-aged, quite a few Singaporeans – and some young after-work diners from a nearby ad agency. Then there's me on the banquette, enjoying a pre-dinner glass of 2001 Kooyong Massale pinot and a bowl of more-ish roasted taro, kumara and beetroot chips.

I drag myself away to the dining room. At a few tables are couples who have brought their own wine. In this smart room it seems incongruous to find a bottle in a paper bag,

hot

but it's a generous gesture by sugaroom's owners to their Jacksons Landing neighbours.

There's generosity on the plate, too. Six massive, shucked-to-order Coffin Bay oysters arrive. Eating these deep-shelled, briny behemoths is a sort of extreme mouth sport, although some diners who like to go shell-to-mouth might want the option of leaving out the eye-watering champagne vinaigrette.

A meaty, delicious peppered beef carpaccio with horseradish aioli, rocket and parmesan could easily be a thin person's main meal. At a fixed price of \$12, starters like these ensure repeat business.

The restaurant offers a smart wine list of boutique New World wines and one or two accessible European ones. There are so many good wines at a nice price by the glass that a bottle can be unnecessary. Again, a gesture with class.

The friendly flavours of my pan-fried saltwater barramundi served on an oxtail raviolo mesh beautifully with a warming '03 Antinori Santa Cristina sangiovese/merlot. A slightly sinewy roast milk-fed veal, with creamy potato puree and delicate young broad beans, is blissfully married to an '04 Rolf Binder cabernet/merlot.

All main meals, excluding blackboard specials, are \$24. If this is the new Pyrmont, bring it on, I say.

Suddenly I want to nip back to the Point to tell that cranky wharfie what I've found: that the New Economy might be rebirthing an old-fashioned sense of community in his suburb. But first, a Valrhona chocolate pudding and double espresso.

Photography Sahlan Hayes
and Quentin Jones



sugaroom
Shop 2/1 Harris Street,
Pyrmont.
Phone: 9571 5055.

Licensed and BYO.
All major cards.
Open Mon 6-11pm,
Tues-Sat noon-11pm,
Sun noon-5pm.
Entrees \$12, mains \$24
(blackboard specials may
be more), desserts \$10.

Above
Pan-fried saltwater
barramundi served on an
oxtail raviolo.