

CHEEK, SHANKS AND SKIRT.....

It was perhaps inevitable that chef Paul Pairet would emerge in Australia as he has in a sense, been travelling south all his life.

Now the culinary inspiration at one of Sydney's more stylish restaurants - Mesclun, at Kings Cross - Pairet has adapted a formal training to the bolder southern influences that have surrounded him. From the Catalan flavours that pervaded his childhood to the more southern influences of Arabia and Spain.

What once jostled for attention on his palate, today comes together in a food style that is distinctively his. Inspired by the combination of early influences, enabled by the discipline of training and working in Michelin-starred French restaurants, Pairet has taken on the mantle of the formidable reputation built at Mesclun, but remodelling the mantle to create an exciting and different culinary experience.

Hovering above the courtyard of the Crescent on Bayswater overlooking but aloof from the bustle of Kings Cross, Mesclun provides that inviting combination of well-mannered surroundings and service with food that is bold and brightly flavoured and visually arousing.

Particular to his personality is his ardour for the shape of things. Pairet is drawn to the inherent beauty of the food - the avocado, the capsicum, the lamb. When preparing an avocado it seems

unnatural to slice or halve it (as is the traditional way) because it alters its form. So he removes the stone without damaging the shape, and in place of the stone, a small salad of roasted macadamias, croutons and crisp pancela, chosen to contrast the texture of the avocado - perhaps in its own way a tribute to its simple beauty.

The Catalan Capsicum. Roasted. Over-roasted, without a single tear to the flesh, naked on the plate, but for a salad of just-boiled egg, anchovies and parsleyThe lamb shank which Pairet believes 'Is the best of the leg of lamb' rises majestically - braised, barely clinging to the bone, cloaked with a sesame paste, a scattering of green and purple basil leaves and a summer's tomato sauce. Punchy, assertive flavours that leave the Soul of the food safe. What may appear as an enforced dish to some, is a natural rendering for Pairet.

Paul Pairet's long journey south, both culinary and physical, was worth waiting for. The culinary exploration is from ended; it's still only five years since Pairet was chef of his first kitchen. But those who have tasted the results hope, the man himself will stay put for a long time, cooking food that humours the senses and bewitches the palate.

See Mesclun page 36

