



Owners Tim and Claire Leech with head chef Darren Smith.

## White Salt

**134 West Coast Drive,  
Sorrento**

**Phone: 9246 9221**

**Open: Tues-Sun, lunch;  
Wed-Sun, dinner;  
Sat and Sun, breakfast**



## Worth his Salt

**W**HEN it comes to litmus-testing a restaurant, my husband is the best guide to eating out I know. He's a walking, talking, eating – albeit slightly picky at times, if not downright demanding – gastronomic barometer.

And, after dining out with him for 18 years, the signals are pretty well entrenched.

While I'm going through my mental checklist, I'm also on the lookout for the giveaway signs of my partner.

If he orders a pre-dinner drink, the ambience immediately warrants four stars. If he doesn't pat the head of the waiter who kneels at the table to take the order, or replies "Thanks, but I have other plans" when the waiter says "Enjoy!", the service is about 3.5 stars.

And the food? If he doesn't offer to share, the star rating immediately goes up. And if he orders dessert, that's when I reach for the thesaurus and start looking up superlatives.

On that assessment alone White Salt is up there with the big ones. Not only did our Mark successfully polish off half a dozen oysters (\$2.50 each), a grilled rack of herb-crusted lamb on potato gratin (\$28) and half a citrus-marinated duck breast (\$29), he insisted on finishing off with the chocolate fondue (\$12 for two).

And just in case his doctor is reading this, he did come up with a half-hearted justification: "It's so rare to go out and really enjoy your food."

He was spot on.

White Salt is an upliftingly successful formula, which has filled the niche in casual dining along the coast at Sorrento. This one takes up where the fabulous

Plum and the not-so fabulous NV Cafe left off in a venue that offers ocean views as well as the opportunity to enjoy a late afternoon sip of wine while watching the sun set.

NV had a totally different atmosphere. So heavy was the blokey presence in NV that new owners Tim and Claire Leech spent days scrubbing the sports stars' autographs from the timber chairs.

"The only one we didn't have the heart to erase was Danny Green's," says Tim, who was formerly the manager at the Hotel Northbridge. "I sit on him in my office."

When Tim and Claire took over last November, Tim recruited a South African chef, Darren Smith, who has tweaked the formula on some old classics.

There's a heavy hint of star anise in some Asian-inspired dishes but there are some Mediterranean influences as well.

It's great to see coq au vin back on a menu that is laced with the best quality produce.

A chocolate ganache made from the best Belgian chocolate certainly adds to the produce bill, but is not reflected in the price (\$12).

As for my part in the evening's proceedings – a modest little serving of pan-seared scallops (\$12) and an entree-size chicken and pork wonton laksa (\$14) – I found myself waxing lyrical too.

Both dishes were excellent – in particular the laksa, which came together in creamy smooth sensuousness with just the right amount of bite.

And as for the chocolate fondue, it was a decadent smorgasbord of melted chocolate, vanilla ice cream and sinfully fresh banana, pineapple, strawberries and marshmallow. Now where's that thesaurus?