



Thirteen years after **The Lion** opened its doors to Adelaide's notoriously fickle public, the hotel has created a presence bordering on iconic. I'm sure owners **Tim Gregg** and **Andrew Svencis**, experienced much knee trembling and nail biting in early years following their visionary (and expensive) transformation of the 1870s Lion Brewery, but these days the concept can be summed up by two words: roaringly successful.

The process has been quite simple. Win 12 peer industry awards during this time, including AHA National Best Overall SA Hotel in 2009. Distil the creativity of a 40-chef brigade, then liberally infuse this knowledge with executive chef **Murray Smith's** vast experience. Seek and nurture top-end niche growers and suppliers and look for wine and beer producers, hard-wired to progressive innovation. Constantly educate and update staff on every aspect of the hotel's food and beverages. And practise 'real hospitality' in all the hotel's operations.

The star attraction is undoubtedly the dining room, a plush contemporary space, totally at home within its heritage shell. The menu embraces what has become known as modern Australian cuisine, but is finely tuned to sharing tastes. Small plates, pastas and entrees dominate the savoury starter selections. Miso-cured kingfish with chilli-roasted pineapple, dashi jelly, wasabi and yuzu, and rabbit boudin with saffron tortellini, porcini puree, baby onions and licorice typify choices. Six stand-alone main offerings come next, including an intriguingly named 'Butcher's Choice' - a revolving door of guest appearances

of beef cheeks, sweetbreads, pork ribs and other rarely seen restaurant treats. Desserts return to the 'share and enjoy' format. With temptations such as chocolate chilli spring rolls with vanilla creme and baked chocolate, and blackberry pudding, botrytis jelly and Grand Marnier pannacotta, it's not hard to see why. 161 Melbourne St, North Adelaide; phone (08) 8367 0222; www.thelionhotel.com.

Entering the bar of **The Apothecary 1878** is a somewhat surreal experience - a 19th century Europe meets 2010 Australia sort of thing. An authentic 132-year-old London pharmacy has been dismantled, shipped, rebuilt, then shoehorned into a terrace apartment within the old, circa 1880, West's Coffee Palace. Mahogany cabinets, filled with mid-20th century medicinal curiosities, are embellished with 18-carat gold leaf, and drawer handles shimmer with hand-cut crystal.

It's tempting to linger to enjoy a glass or two from their formidable beverage list. But the restaurant beckons, so it's down a tight curved wooden staircase at the rear, to the cellar below. My immediate impression was that I'd been transported to a subterranean red brick-lined room in Paris or Barcelona, although a wall-length wrought iron lattice cage securing 1200 fine wines has a distinctive Moroccan feel. Apron clad staff, directed by the unflappable and gracious **Paola Coro**, glide between tables, informing, advising and attending with warm professionalism.

The menu is very Mediterranean-centric. Chevre with witlof, walnut and raisins, chargrilled cotechino with lentils and salsa verde, or pan-fried duck livers with rosemary and cider vinegar, plus a slew of others in the same delicious ilk. Desserts are to die for. Don't miss the brown sugar pannacotta with plum and walnut praline. And, as expected with one of the best wine lists in town. An intimate treasure. 118 Hindley St; phone (08) 8212 9099; www.theapothecary1878.com.au.

No more than half a kilometre away, **Rachel Triggs** and **Paul Saturno** have travelled a radically different path, breathing new life into an ageing 19th century watering hole. Their efforts have resulted in **Benjamin on Franklin**, a hotel

whose makeover has merrily skipped along an Alice in Wonderland bias.

Fantasy and fun have been 'cut and pasted' with unexpected elements and quirks to tantalise and catch the eye. A clutch of deco pendant lights drops from a huge shadow box behind the front bar, while walls, from front to rear, display hundreds and hundreds of period-framed family photos. Of whom, you ask? Well, their families and yours, and probably mine too! Using 1500 crystal pieces, installation



artist **Nicholas Folland** has created 'Hole Lotta Love', guaranteed to take your breath away. Punch bowls, flutes, cake stands, platters and glasses have been collated into a floating cloud, swirling serenely in its own soaring atrium.

The rear garden is where (I think), the Mad Hatter throws tea parties. White chiffon-clad private booths with vast open rear, timber doors, inviting everyone to nowhere, would be the perfect retreat for talking rabbits or even Alice herself.

The dining room decor returns to more familiar 18th century sanity. Leadlight, overstuffed chairs and other comforts, plus a menu featuring dishes Adelaide diners adore. Soft shell crab with aioli and fresh lime wedges, pork loin with baby carrot, apple puree and a fennel and rocket salad or traditional steak frites - 300g waygu rump with hand-cut pomme frites topped with maitre d' hotel butter and jus, to name a few. 233 Franklin St; phone (08) 8231 4380; www.benjaminonfranklin.com.au.

Left: Benjamin on Franklin courtyard. Right: The Lion.