

Sunday Star Times Newspaper 27<sup>th</sup> May 2007

Review by Geraldine John's

## Main Course

### Marriage helps restore Geraldine John's faith in Auckland's Eight.Two

Coro St fans can relax. Mike Baldwin is alive and well. Clearly his fans and family don't know, he's dining alone tonight.

It is understood if Mr Baldwin, his look-alike, or anybody else for that matter, would wish to keep this address with the ridiculous name that does not translate well into text – and is hard to find in the phone book – a secret.

Perhaps a bigger surprise than the sighting of a dead soap star lies in the abrupt turn-a-around in thinking that I have had about the North Shore and restaurants within. Read on.

Number 82 Hinemoa St has been open for just over a year. News of a new chef there forced me back across the bridge.

**Nigel Marriage** is the new bloke. You may have seen him in the British reality series *Return of the Chef*, when he was cooking for John Burton-Race (three times a Michelin man – and a love rat too), who was setting up a restaurant in Dartmouth.

Before that Dartmouth past, British-born **Marriage** had a deli in Milford. And now he's back.

I gave **Eight.Two** a middling review when it was new. I hadn't been back since. Until tonight, when there is instant delight. Number 82 seems to have grown into itself. All the bits that seemed too new and awkward have adopted a composed repose. The blond wood, the white linen napkins and the greeny suede offers a sense of comfort.

**Marriage** has already made his mark on the menu, contained to a tight, appealing selection for each course.

There is hot goat's cheese and honey-glazed pear (\$14.50), which demands to be had as a starter. The Duke, fresh back from an international assignment, will do the confit duck leg salad with apples and celeriac (\$16.50).

He wants the chicken breast on watercress risotto (24.50) next, so I will get chef Marriage's take on tuna nicoise (\$25).

It is rare indeed to find \$20- something prices- especially at an address so smart and where the food is disproportionately high in quality and content. From the four dishes before us (preceded by cauliflower soup with pancetta and chives) we can find nothing but goodness, brightness and freshness – all the things you go out to dinner for.

Everything is in tune with its beautifully plated counterparts. The wait sorts know and like their work – and we like that, as we do the wine list. **Marriage** had brought all the best bits of Michelin without alienating or frightening his diners.

So, yes, we will have dessert too. And the feijoa and apple crumble with vanilla bean ice cream is an epiphanic experience.

As was the night. It does you good to get out and challenge some of your prejudices occasionally. And it goes to show that **Marriage** can be good for you too.

**Eight.Two 82 Hinemoa** Street, Birkenhead, North Shore Auckland

Phone: 09 419 9082

Hours 6.00pm Tuesday – Saturday.

Food: Modern New Zealand

Service: Thoroughly Good

Wine: Tight-ish, fun

Ambience: Smart-neighbourly

Bathrooms: Swish

Rating **4.5 stars out of 5**