

# THE ROVING GOURMETS

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SBF: Best of the Best

## Best of 2009

THE restaurant business is constantly evolving. Emerging chefs, exciting menus and new players that come and go with the tide.

In Auckland the restaurant scene is as diverse and sophisticated as any in the world yet despite New Zealand being a world leader in food production the standard of cuisine from many of the restaurants that we reviewed during the year was something of a hit-and-miss affair.

Why restaurants come under the critical eye of restaurant critics can be a constant aggravation to the restaurant trade, but well written reviews are plain for all to see informing readers of what's new, who's who as well as removing the risk to diners of what might otherwise be an unsatisfactory dining experience.

So for the critic what are the measures that make for a first-class restaurant?

The ultimate test will always be location, creation of mood, interesting and innovative menus, standard of cuisine, gracious and friendly service executed by experienced and knowledgeable waiting staff, and above all else value for money.

One restaurant that stood out as the best of the best was SBF at Langham Hotel with their seafood buffet. The Langham Hotel has long been a serious player in the colourful gastronomic history of Auckland and every Friday evening SBF lay's on a culinary feast with a selection of seafood that is a playground for gourmets and gourmands alike. Other stand outs were Barolo (Langham's other restaurant), Cibo, Cin Cin, Mae Glong, Q at The Westin, The Café at Hyatt Regency, The Engine Room, Two Fifteen, White at the Hilton and VBG.

Conversely as with previous years we encountered a constant flow of irritating annoyances that are becoming all too commonplace. Annoyances like side dishes at inflated prices, bland and boring vegetables, exorbitant wine prices (300% mark-ups were not uncommon), excessive corkage costs (as much as \$15 in some restaurants), the unrelenting hard sell for bottled water, few wines by the glass, poor product knowledge from front-line staff and our number one pet hate – mediocre service.

- **Best of the best:** SBF (Langham Hotel)
- **Best service:** Cibo
- **Best wine list:** O'Connell Street Bistro
- **Best steaks:** '08 Esk Valley winemakers chardonnay, '08 Astrolabe sauvignon blanc, '08 Craggy Range riesling, '08 Cottage Block cut cane pinot pinot gris, '08 Montana showcase viognier, '08 Villa Maria private bin gewürztraminer, '09 Esk valley verdelho, '05 Providence Matakana syrah, '06 Esk Valley malbec/merlot/cabernet/franc,

'08 Villa Maria private bin East Coast rose, '04 Sleeping Giant merlot/cabernet/franc, '07 Mitre Rocks pinot noir

- **Best menu:** Two Fifteen
- **Best soup:** French onion (Cin Cin)
- **Best entrée:** pan seared scallops, apple puree, chorizo and burnt lime butter (White/Hilton)
- **Best main:** razor-back wild boar, butternut and pumpkin risotto (The Café/Hyatt)
- **Best dessert:** brulee and rhubarb (Cin Cin)
- **Best breakfast:** The Café (Hyatt)
- **Best brunch:** Viva Café
- **Best lunch:** box lunch (Q/The Westin)
- **Best yum cha:** Grand Harbour
- **Best seafood:** SBF (Langham Hotel)
- **Best steaks:** Jervious Steak House
- **Best pizzas:** Al Volo
- **Best ethnic:** Bowz (Teppanyaki), Barolo (Italian), Delicious (Italian), Empress Garden (Chinese), Fatima's (Arabic), Gion (Japanese), Java Room (Indonesian), Jimmy Wongs (Asian), Kabuki (Japanese), KK (Malaysian), Little Bali (Indonesian), Mae Glong Thai (Thai), Mondial (Spanish), Monsoon Poon (Asian), Mutiara (Malaysian), Oh Calcutta (Indian), O'Sarracino (Italian), Pearl Garden (Chinese), Red Elephant (Thai), Rikka (Japanese), Satya (Indian), Soto (Japanese), St Tropez (French), Tabou (French), Thai Friends (Thai), Toto (Italian)
- **Best fine dining:** going, going, gone!
- **Best value for money:** SBF seafood buffet (Langham Hotel)
- **Best chef:** Cristiano De Martin (White/Hilton)
- **Best up and coming chef:** Jeremy Schmid (Two Fifteen)
- **Best host:** Jeremy Turner (Cibo)
- **Best waiter/waitress:** Ara Noronha (The Café/Hyatt)
- **Best bistro:** Andlamo
- **Best café:** Mondial Café
- **Best pub meals:** Piha RSA
- **Best fish and chips:** Oceanz
- **Best hamburgers:** Murder Burger
- **Best sushi:** Hayashi
- **Best lunch bar:** The Chiller
- **Best gourmet shop:** Nosh
- **Best deli:** Ripe
- **Best markets:** La Cigale Parnell
- **Best bread bakery:** Wild Wheat
- **Best cup cakes:** Icing on the Cake
- **Best yogurt:** Piako
- **Best sorbet:** Mino
- **Best muesli:** Brookfarm
- **Best butcher:** Westmere Butcher
- **Best sausages:** Janssens
- **Best pies:** Jesters
- **Best experience:** The Food Show
- **Best tea:** Sir Thomas Lipton
- **Best coffee:** ILLy

*"Bon appetite for 2010"*