

| > atlantic province

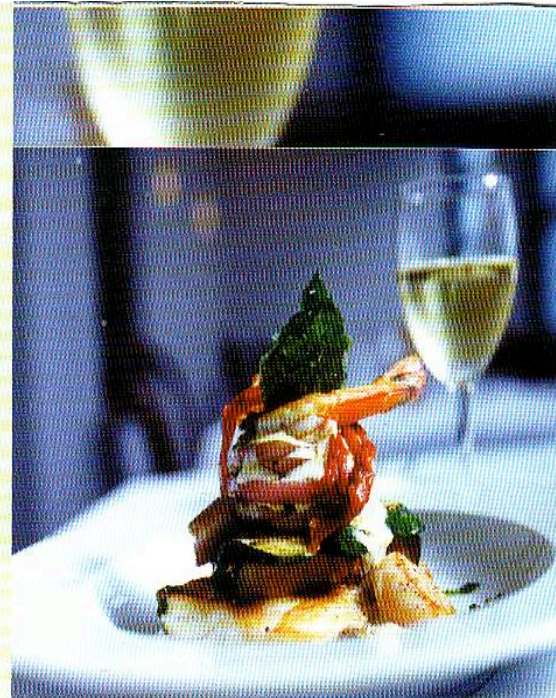
At 8pm on a chilling Monday evening, my associate Simon and I swim into the blue blackness of Atlantic, possibly the most prestigious seafood restaurant in Manuka, Canberra. Co-owned by Nik Gravias and David Wood, along with ex-Bilson's chef, James Mussillon, Atlantic is sparse but cozy. We are seated right where I can catch motions of the chefs doing laps around a silver, clean kitchen; on the wall between them and a leasngly visible row of wine racks, hangs an art-work of tiles with yellow flowers jutting from each.

Perusing our menus as Pelorus Sparkling Chardonnay (shipped from New Zealand) pops bubbles to our lips, we're having a difficult time selecting from the extensive array of tempting entrees. I narrow my selection down to the Veal Sweetbreads with Spinach, Cheddar Pancake and Thyme Jus and the Fan Fillet Ostrich with Crisped Pancetta and Truffle Oil. Thal is until my eyes glimpse the South Coast Oysters with Lemon and Herb Vinaigrette. To this my mouth responds with a series of soft pleas.

Simon is meanwhile looking a little worried, being vegetarian with an appetite. But within moments, our smiling waiter has whizzed over to discuss the menu with us, and the dubious gaze in the eyes opposite me is transformed to a settled and anticipated glee. He orders a Mushroom Risotto to be followed by a Vegetable Crepe Stack.

When my oysters arrive on a large white plate, I dash them with lemon and small spoons of vinaigrette. One slips into my mouth, slides down, followed by a whirl of dancing taste buds. For a moment I'm speechless, until a slow, soft groan escapes and I reach for the final drop in my glass of sparkling before ordering a '97 bottle of t'Gallant Pinot Gris.

Over the crisp white, I tune back to the present room and to Simon, who's chatting zealously between expressions of pleasure. My chosen main, as recommended by our waiter, is the Atlantic Mixed Fish with Provencale Vegetables. It surfaces as a neat stack of fresh, light fish of soft texture, brightened delicately with a delightfully bouncy sauce. Simon's crepes look equally impressive and the conversation is inspired rather than halted by our taste sensations. Creamy



Atlantic mash complement the meal followed by a tossed mixed leaf salad to calm the palette.

For dessert, we are joined by a third party, Nicholas, who arrives just in time to taste and proclaim the last of my Atlantic fish.

More menus. Simon lays his eyes on the soufflé, which states to take twenty five minutes to bake. Believe me, it is worth waiting for. In perfect time, coffee comes: short, strong and accompanied by petit fours. One of the chefs I earlier noticed lapping in the kitchen, cruises out for a quick goodbye and sends us on our contented way. And now we're back in the whipping, but somehow transformed reality, of the frosty Canberra winds. *Ruby Boukabou*

**Atlantic Restaurant is located at 20 Palmerston Lane, Manuka, ACT.
Telephone: 02 6232 7888.**