



## Style and substance

Asian food in a distinctive setting is met with enthusiasm by **Tony Harper**



### OBSESSION CHINESE RESTAURANT AND BAR

5 Little Stanley St, South Bank.  
Ph: 3844 3373 Owner: Joyce Chiu. Chef: Tong Chan. Lunch & dinner, daily. Major credit cards & Eftpos. Wheelchair access. On-street and paid parking.

FOOD // 7.5 WINE // 7.5  
SERVICE // 8.5 AMBIENCE // 7.5

RATINGS 10: perfect; 9: excellent; 8: very good; 7: good; 6: passable; 5: disappointing; 1-4: woeful

I've been to Obsession before, years ago, but it was quite a different restaurant. Even then it was pushing the theme of modernising – possibly westernising – Chinese cuisine; however, it had a less polished, less plush environment in which to do the pushing.

After a substantial makeover, Obsession has taken on an exotic air with lavish, bound menus, linen-clad tables and immaculately attired wait staff.

Then there's the contents of the menu, which at times veer wildly from the Chinese path into Malaysian, Indonesian and Thai. Covering an array of Chinese provinces and styles, the menu is descriptively alluring and at times inventive.

After choosing four mains for three diners we were talked into ordering a starter which, while it seemed like madness to accept, appealed to my sense of adventure. In the end it was the dish of the day – dried anchovies fried with red onion, pine nuts, chilli and brown sugar (\$18), immaculately presented on a square of banana leaf, *inset*. It was an exercise in balance and contrast: salt and fire against sweet, the crunch of the anchovies against the softer notes of the nuts, the cellular chew of the onion and the sticky mass of the sauce.

As a pork lover, I didn't get beyond the title of forbidden palace pork (\$25) before it hit the order pad. If I'd read on I would have known that it was merely a fancy title for sweet and sour pork, a dish that rarely graces my repertoire. Still, it was quality sweet and sour; the pork tender and subtle, the sauce nicely balanced rather than overtly sweet and the batter a coating rather than a spongy mass, and nicely devoid of oily residue.

A far more exciting dish was singapore curry lamb shank (\$32): two shanks cooked until that moment when they become glutinous, moist and able to be cut with a butter knife while still holding their shape; draped in a rich, aromatic sauce; surrounded by potato chunks; and garnished with fresh curry leaves and basil.

There is a reasonably eclectic wine list here, backed up by good stemware and some wine-savvy staff. It is an international list, nicely pitched to the cuisine with a good array of champagne, aromatic whites and pinot noir.

The greatest weak spot – and this goes for every restaurant I've visited at South Bank – is the toilet facilities. I'm yet to find a restaurant with its own bathroom and am forced to walk the crooked mile to the nearest (and South Bank has them every block or two) public convenience, which on weekends can become exceedingly popular haunts. For me that's an inconvenience but for the old or infirm it must be torture.

Obsession is more a modern restaurant specialising in Chinese food than it is a Chinese restaurant. Its fare varies from the predictable (not a bad thing given the location) to the exotic, fuelled by top-notch ingredients and obvious talent in the kitchen. But it is the rest of the trappings – decor, linen, staff and so on – that add the real sizzle.