



PETER CALDER

Belle of the bay

ANNABELLES RESTAURANT

409-411 Tamaki Drive
St Heliers
Ph: (09) 575 5239
www.annabelles.co.nz
Breakfast, lunch and dinner, seven days



I HAVE RATHER a soft spot for St Heliers, even though I hardly ever go there. It has happy echoes from my childhood when the Calder clan used to undertake the endless journey in the Vanguard from Hamilton to Auckland to visit relatives.

If the weather was good, we went to the beach which, in the days before the Harbour Bridge, meant St Heliers, because it was about as far as you could go on sealed road before you started coming back again.

It still feels a bit like that. St Heliers, named after a bay on the island of Jersey that it reportedly resembles, is where Tamaki Drive ends and it has something of the atmosphere of a seaside resort rather than a suburb because it's a place you go to rather than drive through.

I had kept avoiding Annabelles because the name suggested a place that was pretty and fussy. I could hardly have been more wrong. When a restaurant is as good-looking as this is, you are prepared to overlook the fact



DOUG SHERRING

THE BILL

\$145.50 for two

Soup \$13.50
Sashimi \$17.50
Mains (two) \$65
Vegetables \$7
Dessert \$14.50
Wine (two glasses) \$22
Water (bottle) \$6

that, unless there is such a thing as an annabelle, the name really ought to have an apostrophe in it.

The good looks are, I learn, the work of the architect husband of owner and maitre d' Susan Cho. We wanted to have a natter with her about it but either our waitress forgot to pass on our request for an audience or the request was denied.

It didn't much matter, because seeing is enjoying. The unpromising shopfront gives way to a classy modernist interior with a feature ceiling of

bent ply waves and some nice stacked-stone walls that reference the seafront location. Several of the interesting small paintings on the wall are the work of the same man. It's a rather nice room — well, a couple of rooms actually — with strategically placed dividers that create an inviting sense of intimacy.

The menu here is not going to frighten the horses, which is doubtless a good idea; the folks out east are not precisely adventurous diners if the supply of restaurants there is any reflection of the demand. But it's not to say the food is not thoughtful: the prawns come with panzanella (a bread-and-tomato salad that is a Tuscan classic); the pork belly is topped with scallops and bok choy.

I had to wonder at the midwinter inclusion of asparagus in one entree (what happened to seasonal foods?) and it's a shame that vegetarians are, as in so many places, an afterthought: the waitress listed options such as "kumara mash and chargrilled veges

and so on" — I think the "so on" meant a risotto — and the gnocchi with chorizo without chorizo.

I enjoyed a sashimi platter which was generous for the price and delightfully fresh. My lamb rump, pan-fried, was an equally hearty helping and served atop mash studded with peppercorns and, I think, flecks of roasted garlic. I thought the cloying glob of basil pesto was an error, even if it was made in-house, which I suspect it wasn't.

The Prof, meanwhile, was most happy with a rich pumpkin soup and a serving of john dory, both of which continued the theme of big servings, though the fish was a little overcooked.

In general, Annabelles is a good-value suburban restaurant. I only wish it had an apostrophe.

Ambience: Handsome
Vegetarians: And so on

Watch out for: The bent ply
Bottom line: A good suburban eatery