



LINE UP ... Fish and chip heaven. Photograph // Jeremy Veitch

The great Aussie fish and chip shop is under attack. Rising prices, falling fish stocks, cheap imported seafood, and the dominance of the multinational takeaway "restaurants" with their huge marketing budgets, make it hard for local, independent fish and chip shops to survive and thrive.

All of which makes The Fishmonger's Wife even more remarkable. Here, in East Brisbane, the Aussie fish and chip shop lives on - in style.

We called ahead and booked for our Sunday night family supper, and just as well. The Fishmonger's Wife was doing a fine trade, with a steady turnover of customers in the sit-down section, and plenty more at the takeaway counter.

Taking a seat in our comfy booth, we took in the art on the walls, the background music and the well-organised "BYO corner", where filtered water, tumblers and wine glasses can be collected.

Immediately apparent, too, was the absence of the usual chip-shop aroma - its website says that all fish is cooked in cholesterol-free cottonseed oil, which is obviously changed regularly.

The menu at The Fishmonger's Wife will have you taking a second look - how often do the words "pesto", "tahitian lime" and, for that matter, "fragrant jasmine rice" appear on a fish and chip shop menu? I'll stick my neck out and say not often.

Intrigued, we ordered pesto-crumbed barramundi with beer-battered chips (\$14.35), inset, a Chiang Mai NT barramundi with rice (\$17.85) and two kid's packs - one with chips and three calamari, and one with chips and two whiting (\$4.95 each). Plus one large greek salad with herbed pesto dressing (\$8.45).

The barramundi, it was explained, is not a fish curry but a fillet marinated in a green curry-style marinade (the pesto, dressings and marinades are produced on-site). The fish was a large succulent fillet, grilled, with a flavour that was distinctly but subtly Thai. The rice was plentiful and made a nice change,

although I did, of course, sample the beer-battered chips that sat on the other side of the table.

The aforementioned chips deserve a paragraph of their own - they were up there with the best I've tasted. Broadly cut, not too thick, they were ultra-crischy on the outside, fluffy and hot on the inside. Perfection.

We couldn't figure out the pesto-crumbed barramundi at first - it wasn't battered but neither was it in breadcrumbs. Turns out the fish was coated in Japanese cracker crumbs, through which a homemade pesto had been dredged. It made for a crisp,

tasty coating around juicy fish - I liked it, but my husband declared that such superior chips deserved a more traditional choice, so it'll be beer-battered fish for him next time. The children's meals were ample without being excessive, and were well received.

The large salad featured plenty of olives, fetta, good crisp salad vegies, and a delicious dressing, again with the excellent aromatic pesto.

Desserts are a selection from Sydney's Giotto Gelato and, on the day of our visit, a special of sticky date pudding. The Giotto desserts are lovely - I chose the creamy passionfruit gelato encased in a thick dark chocolate shell. The chocolate-mint option was a terrine-style slice of rich chocolate gelato with a minty, chocolate-flecked layer on top. Both made for a sweet but light end to the meal.

In contrast, the sticky date wasn't light at all; instead it was warm and hearty, as it should be. All desserts are \$5.95.

Coffee is supplied by Abrisca, of East Brisbane, and the drinks list includes smoothies, milkshakes and teas ranging from English breakfast to chai latte.

The Fishmonger's Wife was recently named Australia's Best Fish & Chip Shop 2008 in an online competition sponsored by Crisco, and it's easy to see why. Quality seafood, an innovative menu and an evident commitment to good food and service make this one cafe that definitely demands a return visit.



THE FISHMONGER'S WIFE

6/83-93 Lytton Rd, East Brisbane.
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